

## Quality Online Discussion Messages

Before you begin using discussion or message boards in your classes, become familiar with how a discussion board works. When one posts a topic, others can respond to that topic. In some cases someone may want to respond to a response rather than the original topic. This is how threaded discussions are created. Similar to an index or table of contents, there is a main topic that can include several sub topics.

If you have large classes you may want to separate the class into several groups and have them respond to their group's discussion topics only. In other cases you may want to have a topic discussed by the whole class.

When you first start to use the discussion board, let your students know how often you will participate in or review the discussion topics/responses. Give clear guidelines as to the time frame for responding to topics and whether you will use their postings and responses as a mark for the class.

### Characteristics of a Quality Online Discussion Posting or Message:

1. **SUBSTANTIAL:** Messages should relate to the subject matter and provide information, opinions or questions about that subject matter. The focus should be academic.
2. **CONCISE:** Studies have shown that messages that are several screens long do not get many replies. To write an effective message, attempt to use a single screen if possible. Try to get the point and focus of your message across so that it is clear what you are saying.
3. **PROVOCATIVE:** The bulletin/discussion board is an interactive medium. The more interaction the better. A good message is one that prompts others to reply or object. A focused and pointed message that produces replies from other learners in that class in moving the discussion forward is having an impact on the learning environment.
4. **EXPLANATORY:** The bulletin/discussion board is a place where ideas are interpreted and language is explored. A good message should explore, explain, or expand on a concept or connection. The message should not simply state something, but rather expand upon an idea.
5. **TIMELY:** A good message appears in the context of similar messages in the message log. If you get on irregularly, your message will appear late and out of context with what is currently happening on the board. Get on regularly and reply to messages in a timely fashion.
6. **LOGICAL:** A good message that is not a question should contain a logical argument. This means it should contain a clearly stated conclusion of thesis supported by premises, reason, evidence or grounds of belief.
7. **GRAMMATICAL:** A good, clear, concise message should be well written and free of typos and sentence fragments.