



Designing Authentic Online Discussions



Don't Do This

- ✗ Grade discussions based on quantity of posts rather than quality of learning.
- ✗ Ask a question that has one right answer or one correct way to respond.
- ✗ Police language choice and grammar.
- ✗ Take over. Students will focus on responding to you rather than peers.
- ✗ Punish silence without seeking understanding.

Do This!

- ✓ **EVALUATE LEARNING INSTEAD OF PARTICIPATION.** Ask students to self-grade their discussion forum engagement based on what they learned from others and how much they influenced others' thinking and learning.
- ✓ **CONNECT TO STUDENT INTERESTS.** Ask questions that encourage students to draw connections to their own lives, cultures, communities, and current events (see [UDL multiple means of engagement](#)).
- ✓ **DESIGN SOCIAL NORMS WITH STUDENTS.** Discuss and identify online discussion norms that encourage risk taking, free-flowing idea building, resource sharing, and collaborative learning as part of a community (Learn more: [The Art of Hosting Good Conversations Online](#)).

Make it Multimodal

Teens spend, on average, nearly **7.5 hours engaging with entertainment-related social media every day** ([Common Sense Media](#)). These individuals are intrinsically motivated by captivating visuals (memes, viral videos, catchy headlines) and interesting conversations.

Encourage students to make their discussion forum posts as captivating as social media through the use of **multimedia and the [Made to Stick principles](#)**.



Support Knowledge Construction

Check out Dr. Harasim's [Online Collaborative Learning Theory](#) three phases of knowledge construction through discourse in a group:

1. Idea generating
2. Idea organizing
3. Intellectual convergence

Be Transparent

Why are students participating in the discussion:

- To make their thinking or learning visible to others?
- To co-construct knowledge with, or learn from, peers?
- To feel part of a learning community?
- To engage in metacognitive/reflective thinking?
- To practice civil discourse?

Provide students with the **purpose of the activity** upfront to inspire more authentic engagement. Learn more: [Transparency in Teaching & Learning \(TILT\) Framework](#).