An Ally Center Writing Guide

**DISCUSSION POSTS**

In our digital age, almost all classes require some online coursework. This makes it vital for students to understand how to write effective online discussion posts. This writing guide will help you compose a discussion post that will genuinely benefit your comprehension of the course material and contribute to your classmates’ understanding.

Note: It is wise to draft your discussion post in a document rather than on the forum. This will prevent you from losing your work in case of a computer glitch and from accidentally posting before you are ready to do so. When you are finished, copy and paste your work from the document to the forum, looking over it to make sure that the format is correct.

**THINK**

Before you do anything else, you must determine what work you are required to complete prior to writing your discussion post. There may be a chapter to read or a video to watch in preparation for the assignment. Be sure you have finished these activities before you write. You may want to read the prompt before doing the class activities to know what to look for. Then, after you’ve done the activities break the prompt down and think it through. Write down any initial ideas or observations that come to mind. Remember to familiarize yourself with your professor’s expectations. This may be written in a paragraph below the prompt questions, or they may be laid out in a rubric. Be sure that you know what your professor expects regarding:

- Word count
- Topic (do you need to answer one or all of the questions?)
- Interactions with other students
- What, if any, external resources need to be referenced (i.e. textbook, quotes, Scripture, etc.)
- What expectations are there for integrating research (e.g. MLA, APA, etc.)

**OUTLINE & RESEARCH**

Now that you know what is required for your discussion post, you need to make sure you have a plan. It is easy to get off topic while writing, so a basic outline will help you to keep your information on-task.

First, decide what your claim/argument and its supports are going to be. Then, construct a strong thesis to begin your post. Don’t be afraid to present a unique perspective in your discussion post. Your points do not have to be the same as your peers; if your post takes an unusual position, it will show your professor that you genuinely thought through and understood the prompt, rather than merely rephrasing what your classmates or the textbook said. Just make sure that you have sufficient support to back up your claims. Next, sketch an outline to give you an overall direction of your post. It does not need to be highly detailed. A well prepared outline will give your post clarity and make the remainder of the writing process efficient.
Now that you have charted your course, it is time to begin writing. Following your outline, construct your discussion post. One of the first sentences in your post should be your thesis statement. After you present your thesis, expand on it. Explain your main points, providing external evidence where necessary. If your professor’s prompt includes more than one question, you should write a fully-developed paragraph for each. If the questions are closely related, you may be able to answer them jointly in one paragraph. Also, do not forget a topic sentence for each paragraph.

Most professors expect your discussion posts to reference or reflect on your previously completed homework, even if this is not explicitly mentioned in the instructions. Make connections with readings, lectures, or even related discussions that you have had with other students. Additionally, discussion posts are an ideal way to connect what you are learning in class with real-life experiences. Can you relate your topic to your personal life, something you recently heard on the news, or a Scripture passage? If so, write about it! The more connections you can make, the more evident it is to your professor that you understand the course material.

Keep your discussion relevant to the prompts. Additionally, maintain a scholarly tone in your writing. Discussion posts can often be more introspective and conversational than other types of writing. While you may involve some first person writing you should still avoid slang, poor grammar, and unprofessional tone. Lastly, if you reference outside sources, be sure to cite them. Sometimes professors will specifically tell you that it is unnecessary to provide citations for your textbook, or an official MLA or APA citation. Remember - when in doubt, cite!

Now is the time polish your rough draft. Do not assume that your first attempt is perfect and you are ready to post. Proofreading is a vital step that should not be neglected. First, re-read your post, making initial adjustments as necessary. Next, re-read the assignment requirements and ensure that your post sufficiently fulfills all of them. Finally, proofread for grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes. Also read through more than once to make sure that your content is relevant and flows smoothly. If you have successfully completed all of these steps, you are ready to post.

Most professors require that students interact with their peers by posting agreements, critiques, or questions. Read through your peers’ posts and respond to them substantially, saying more than that you agree. Why do you agree? Is there anything you thought through differently? Can you think of a perspective that your classmate might have overlooked? What new insights do his or her ideas generate in your mind? Your responses should contribute to the conversation. Do not forget to check throughout the week to see if any of your fellow students have replied to you, and answer any questions that they pose.

Sources:
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