THE TEACHING CENTER
Tips for Making Canvas Discussions Meaningful

- **Provide clear directions and examples**: Specify length, frequency, timeliness, due dates, and specific criteria to follow. Include due dates for both initial posts and responses. Be sure to communicate to students what your expectations are for what their discussion participation looks like, both in terms of their initial responses and in terms of the communications with peers.
    - **Example:** All students should respond to peer comments using the formula 2C + 1Q (1 compliment (e.g. "I like how"), 1 comment (e.g. "I agree that…because" or "I disagree that…because," and 1 question (e.g. "I wonder why/how/what…").
- **Give examples**: Give students an example of a strong discussion board post or response, explain why it is a strong post. Help students see what it is doing well.
- **Pose good questions that encourage critical thinking:** Craft questions that invite reflection rather than a single factual answer. Think about questions where you might ask students to "generate as many reasons as possible" or "generate counter-arguments" to their peers' posts.
- **Use media as part of your prompt:** If appropriate, ask students to respond to media (video, interview, visual "text," sound clip, etc.) as part of your prompt.
- **Assign actions**: In wording discussion board prompts or questions for discussion, rather than telling students to "discuss" or "what did you think," hinge your questions on action verbs: find, explain, describe, identify, compare, etc.
- **Outline ground rules and enforce them**: If you had a set of community practices for your in-person classes, take the time to work with students to adapt them for this new online learning environment. Make sure that you respond quickly to anyone who becomes uncivil.
    - **Example:** "If you disagree with the views of another student, be constructive and respectful by critiquing the idea and not the person. Further, offer reasons why you think their view is incorrect, and support your position by citing source(s)."
- **Moderate discussion board**: Encourage students to reply to each other, help your students synthesize previous posts by pointing out commonalities and divergences among ideas. Ask students to reflect on those intersections.
- **Reach out to students who've fallen silent:** This is important generally, but even more so in this situation. If students fall silent on the discussion board (stop posting or responding) and that's your primary mode of contact, reach out to them to make sure they are okay.
- **Have an assessment plan:** If discussion posting now makes up a substantial part of class participation, think about how you will assess students' performance on the discussion board. You may want to develop a rubric/grading criteria to make this process less cumbersome for you and more transparent for your students.
- **Think about assessing quality not just quantity:** Just like in in-person discussions, more engagement doesn't necessarily mean best engagement. In your assessment, focus on quality rather than quantality of posting. Ask students to reflect and consider what their most important contribution to class discussion has been so far.
- **Add closure**: Post a summary of the discussion at the end to provide a sense of closure, or as a student to do it.

Online Resources on Developing Effective Discussion Boards

https://slcc.instructure.com/courses/349013/pages/discussion-board-instructions-etiquette-and-netiquette

https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/making-online-discussion-boards-work-for-skills-based-courses/

https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/developing-assignments/blended-learning/online-discussions-tips-students

https://at.doit.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Learn@UW-Guidelines-for-Effective-Online-Discussions.pdf

https://www.uc.edu/cetl/ourwork/online/DiscussionForums.html

https://ctl.wiley.com/three-ways-to-encourage-conversation-in-online-discussion-forums/

https://pierce.instructure.com/courses/1559883/pages/communication-in-discussion-forums

http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/discussion-board-assignments-alternatives-question-answer-format/