

Guidelines for Discussions

ENG-L 202 (Summer 2017)

Dr. Paul Cook

The conversations we have via **discussions** make up a major part of the work in this course.¹ In most cases, I will pose a question, issue, or writing prompt to you in class or via Canvas announcement, and then you will respond to me and to your colleagues with a thoughtful, carefully-written response. The responses will form a useful conversation about the issues and concepts we are tackling. Please read the material below carefully for more information:

1. Rules for primary posts—these posts should be:

- **Essay-like.** Responses should not be one simple paragraph, and I expect them to reflect some reasoned thought on your part, beyond what you might put into a normal email or chat response. Think of them as **mini-essays** that help you make a clear, focused point. Remember that you're trying to develop your writing and analytical skills; these posts are great practice.
- **Detailed.** Each of your primary or “official” posts must be *at least 200 words* (unless instructed otherwise). (Note: I’m not as interested in the actual word count as I am in the depth of your ideas. Obviously, a post like “Me, too!!!” doesn’t qualify as an “official” post.)
- **Semiformal.** Your posts should contain some degree of formality: spell-checked, organized, edited and proofread, etc. However, they will also be part of a dialogue, so in that regard, they will differ from an essay that you turn in for a class. It is inevitable that we will take some time to reach a mutual understanding of the appropriate level of formality. (**Note: It is perfectly fine to use first-person (“I” or “we”) in your responses.*)
- **References.** While you won’t always need citations in your posts, you should look for opportunities to build your argument by referencing our readings, other sources, or your colleague’s comments. See below for more information.
- **Courteous.** We don’t always have to agree, but no one should resort to flaming or USING ALL CAPS (yelling).

2. Grading—I will grade your “official” or primary posts in accordance with these rules. In total, you’ll be responsible for around 5 to 7 discussion posts. I will evaluate each one on a 10-point scale:

¹ This sheet was developed using Warnock, Scott. *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2009. Print.

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- If you complete them *adequately*, you will receive 8s.
- If you go above and beyond the basic requirements of the assignments, you will receive 9s.
- Exceptional—completed with a great deal of effort and thought—posts will receive 10s.

A message board post will receive a 7 or below if it

- Is too short.
- Shows little thought or has clearly been “mailed-in.”²
- Is excessively sloppy in terms of grammar, spelling, and mechanics, especially to the point that it is difficult to understand.
- Engages in personal attacks or other breaches of common online etiquette.
- *Is late.*

3. **Reading—You are responsible for reading all of the posts in the class, although you can obviously focus your attention on the threads with which you are directly engaged.**
4. **Shorter posts—Feel free to post as many shorter, informal comments in the discussions as you like; for instance, a couple of lines to clarify a point or to state your agreement with another author’s point of view. But remember the rules for “official” (graded) posts.**
5. **Staying current—One of your responsibilities in taking this course is that you will make it a daily habit to check the Discussions tab in Canvas and stay current on the conversations taking place there.**
6. **Extra credit —Those of you who are diligent and become active members of these conversations will find that you will receive a high grade for the Discussions component of the course. If you post more than the required primary or “official” posts (this doesn’t include *secondary* posts), you will be eligible for extra credit in the course. (Some of you may naturally find that you have more to say on some of our topics this term, so I want to reward you if you put in extra work on some of the message boards.)**

² If I determine that you’ve “mailed in” a draft, I will not provide any feedback, other than to write “MI” in the comment field below your grade (for “mailed in”). This isn’t personal, and I’m not angry at you. It simply reflects my stance that I will not spend more time responding to a post than you did writing or thinking about it.

Remember: if you’re stuck or confused, just reach out!

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A final note...

We will learn all about **MLA (Modern Language Association)** documentation and formatting this semester, so have no fear. However, we won't really get into the "nitty-gritty" of MLA until later on, so for now I'd like to lay out some simple guidelines for posting in discussions, blogging, and even to use in your early drafts of WPs:

When you cite outside information, whether paraphrase, a summary, a direct quotation, or even just one or two key words or phrases, you must show your reader from where you've taken this information. In other words, what is the original source from which this information comes?

To show your reader, MLA uses an ***author/page system*** of **in-text citations**, like this:

(Humphrey 12).

This signals to the reader that the information has been taken from a source in the Works Cited page that is written by Humphrey (the author's last name) and that can be found on page 12.

For discussions and blogs, I would like for you to use in-text citations and a Works Cited page (though this won't be a separate page). So, for instance, if you decide to use a quote or paraphrase to support one of your claims or observations, be sure to end each sentence in which you have borrowed information from another source with the appropriate in-text citation. Then include the citation in the **Works Cited**, like this:

Works Cited

Humphrey, David. *Posting in Discussions: A Brief Introduction*. New York: Norton, 2005. Print.

This is the MLA citation for a book by a single author. [Check out the Purdue OWL](#) for full MLA formatting and documentation guidelines.