

## What Makes a Good Discussion Post?

Adapted from materials by Gail Matthews-DeNatale, Simmons College, Boston, MA.  
© 2003-2004 TERC (Cambridge, MA) and Lesley University (Cambridge, MA).  
Edited by IDD staff.

### Good discussion posts

**are timely:** The best messages in the world won't do your group any good if they're posted after the bulk of the discussion is over.

**are clearly labeled:** They include a meaningful subject line that clearly communicates the overall topic of each message to readers. For replies to existing messages, rather than simply hitting the "Reply" button, it may often be necessary to modify the existing subject line to better represent the response's content.

**are well formatted:** Avoid using all caps. All caps are generally interpreted as "shouting" in online communication and impede reading flow.

-----  
**are "on message":** They indicate that you have carefully read and considered the assignment, the discussion prompt, and your colleagues' postings. Think through your messages in advance—compose them offline if possible—so that they are substantive, well written, and concise.

**are grounded in evidence:** They make explicit connections among course concepts, course readings, your firsthand experience, and the experiences of others in your group.

**encourage others to provide evidence:** They ask colleagues to explain "why," help others clarify their thoughts, and uncover inconsistencies or misconceptions.

-----  
**give the original post a "positive reading":** Positive reading entails i) agreeing/disagreeing with points raised and articulating the reasons for the reaction, ii) enhancing points of agreement by including additional information/clarifications and by fine-tuning their presentation, and iii) following up on points of disagreement by suggesting alternatives.

**stimulate thinking/reasoning:** They pose provocative questions, encourage colleagues to raise questions, help colleagues address questions, raise alternative theories or explanations, and provide creative, breakthrough ideas.

**move the understanding of the group forward:** They create connections between course concepts and the thoughts and ideas of others in the group and bring the group's work into focus (e.g., by summarizing, noting patterns, etc.).

-----  
**are generous and respectful:** They suggest resources/ideas that may help others in their work and learning. When disagreements arise, they allow others the benefit of the doubt, valuing deeper insight and communication over proving oneself "right."

**recognize diversity:** They acknowledge the potential for large diversity in background or opinion, supporting the creation of a respectful and productive environment for intellectual argumentation.