

Winter Boot Camp  
CETL  
January 18 ,2006

### Points to Remember in Threaded Discussion Boards

- Lead the first discussion (or more) in order to model effective discussion posting for your students and to set the tone of discussion for the class.
- Keep the discussion focused. Create questions that foster on-target topic-focused discussion .
  - If you really want students to take the discussion board seriously you should include it in your grading schema.
  - Post some general rules, expectations and/or models to let your students know what is expected in the discussion board and what is not acceptable.
  - Let students know that you are reading and valuing their discussion board comments by remarking on them in class. For example, in a lecture or class discussion you might mention: “Mary made a great point about this issue on the discussion board when she said...”

### How to enforce Rules In A Threaded Discussion Area

- If discussion does get off topic modify it immediately. Send an email to all students via blackboard informing them that you’ve posted a new question to clarify or redirect the discussion.
- Offer consistent summaries of discussions. After the discussion has ended send a detailed message to all students highlighting major points.
- In your summary, put a response in to the conclusions/questions raised in the discussion.
- Start off your course by setting up an informal discussion area where students can bounce ideas off each other outside of the class parameters.
- Set out clear grading expectations of what is considered a “good” discussion thread
- Privately reprimand and give constructive feedback to students with off-topic conversations.
- Make sure to email students who are getting a bad grade on the threaded discussions as early as possible.
- Tell students ahead of time that they will be expelled from the discussion area if they are submitting off-topic or disruptive postings
- Ensure that all necessary material is addressed and that the different parts of each discussion follow a sequence that is conducive to learning a particular topic.
- Manage discussion etiquette.
- Be careful not to dominate the discussion.
- Give all participants an opportunity to share.
- Allow for students to disagree and take a position without interfering

- Place one question in an individual message rather than numerous questions in one message. When questions are presented separately they tend to be easier to follow.
- Select individual questions for individual students.
- Questions can be tailored to personal experiences or topic preferences.
- Keeping all questions on one long message creates a "brainstorming" effect.
- All of the messages in one thread can be written using "reply with quote" option, in which previous messages are included in the new reply. If nothing is deleted, and new comments are added, a running document of all comments will be created. It is good to delete unnecessary parts of quoted text.
- It is a good idea to vary the managing strategies. For example, participants could be required to end their comments with a reflective question. They could request that groups of participants respond to certain topics, or they could assign roles to discussion participants and request that they respond to questions/topics according to their specific role.

#### General Rules To Establish With Your Class About Threaded Discussions

- Stay on the topic and be focused.
- Allow for honest and open discussions from classmates.
- Critically reflect on the discussion.
- Encourage self-directed and self-regulated learning.
- Be respectful to classmates and reflect on the experience of leading/managing the discussion

#### References

(2001) Lange, D., Gary S. and Winograd, K. *You can teach online: building a creative learning environment*. New York: Mc Graw-Hill Higher Education.  
<http://www.edb.utexas.edu/teachnet/discussions.php> (Threaded Discussion Quick Tips)