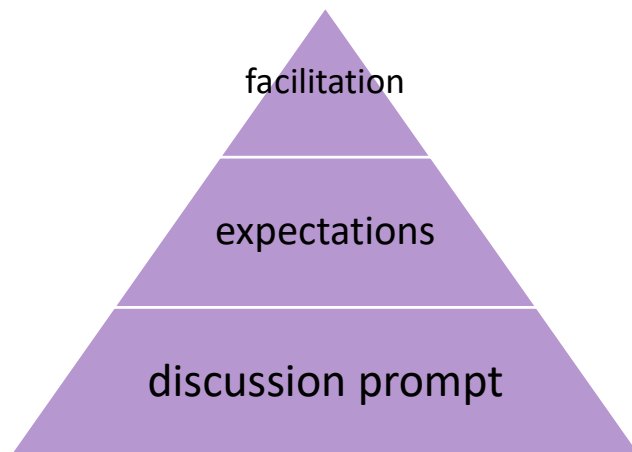


Facilitating Discussions across Time and Space: Designing Effective Asynchronous Online Discussion Questions

Productive interactive online discussions don't just happen; they need to be planned carefully to ensure they target key course objectives and succeed in meeting your intentions for the discussion. It is necessary to provide instructions that include not only a well-designed **discussion prompt**, but also **expectations for participation** and **facilitation**.



Well-designed discussion prompts

lead to rich conversation and debate. Asking a question where there could be debate of several valid approaches (each with pros and cons), or in some way requires decision making that must be justified using course content will produce the best results. Questions that require a summary or a right/wrong response will not generate discussion.

Explicit expectations for participation

help to pace the discussion and ensure

opportunities for turn taking and on-going conversation. Providing multiple due dates for initial posts and response posts spreads the conversation out across time so there are more opportunities to participate. It is important to provide guidance on what you expect to see in good initial posts and reply posts. These differ and expectations should be clear to students. Initial posts provide detailed arguments about the prompt, while reply posts build on each other's ideas, debate differing perspectives, clarify misconceptions, extend critical interrogation of the prompt, and ask probing questions.

Facilitation is a role the instructor plays in the discussion. It is not their participation per se. The instructor might participate by contributing comments and questions to the conversation as if a peer. However, facilitation is the intentional guiding of the discussion to ensure all people are brought in, minority views are examined, and critical constructs are explored and clarified. Students need to understand that you will not be responding to everyone to validate and/or correct them. Encourage them to engage with each other to collaboratively come to deeper comprehension of the content.

Review the example below to see how this instructor designed the discussion prompt, specified the expectations for participation, and indicated her plan for facilitating the discussion.

Related Course Goal	Discussion Prompt	Expectations for Participation	Facilitation Plan
<p>Map the ways in which family literacy practices impact early literacy instruction.</p>	<p>*Choose one of the case study books assigned for this module. Determine the degree of importance family literacy practices held for the literacy learning of the focal children.</p> <p>*Use the two articles provided to map the unique factors of family literacy practices in the case study and how they impacted student learning.</p> <p>*Suggest two recommendations for the teacher.</p> <p>*Support your response with specific examples from the readings.</p>	<p>*Initial post is due on Tuesday by midnight. Be thorough in responding to the prompt, but keep to less than 500 words. Formal citation is not required; just provide the author and page number.</p> <p>*By Thursday at midnight, reply to at least two peers by extending their idea, challenging their thought with evidence, asking a question that digs deeper into the case, or adding additional explanation to help clarify ideas.</p> <p>*Return to the forum to reply to those who responded to you by Monday at midnight.</p>	<p>*While I plan to reply to some posts in the conversation, I view my role as to help keep the conversation going.</p> <p>*Don't be surprised if I do not respond to each of you in the forum because I will provide my feedback in the grading area after the discussion has ended.</p>