

Discussion Techniques

These techniques have been drawn from the Teaching Clinic for Online Instructors delivered through Humber Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning. The list provides many examples of creative ways to design online discussion activities that encourage student-student and student-teacher interaction and can also be used as assignments.

If you have others that you would like to add please send them to jmiller@ontariolearn.com

Technique	Description	Example of Activity
Lounge	A social area where students can interact on a more personal level	
Building a Community of Practice	An area where students can contribute additional resources relating to the course content	A student may post a link to a web site or book or article that has contributed to their understanding of the topic. Especially good activity when you are working with a topic that is a current event.
Role-Play	A student is assigned a role with specific characteristics and is expected to maintain this persona while participating in the discussion	A student takes on the role of a difficult customer and the other participants are expected to respond to the "customer" by applying the appropriate methods for dealing with difficult people.
Critique	Students are asked to point out the strengths and weaknesses of a proposal and then suggest improvements. Students are asked to restrict their comments so that the critique is not exhausted before all students have contributed.	Post a link to a relevant web site and ask the students to identify one strength and weakness of the site.

<p>Group Report</p>	<p>A group of students work in a private discussion area (like a Wiki) where they collaborate on an assigned project. They would then post their completed work in a public discussion for their classmates to review.</p>	<p>Case Studies are an example of an activity that may be conducive to group work.</p> <p>If each group is working on a different case study it is helpful to the learning process for the other students to be able to review each other's results.</p>
<p>Timed Disclosure</p>	<p>Students are asked to review an article and comment on an issue and post their comments to the teacher by private e-mail before a deadline. At a certain point in time, the teacher shares all the comments in the discussion area. This way a student can make a contribution without too much influence from dominant peers.</p>	<p>When the summary comments are posted, the teacher can pose a follow-up question such as "Has your view changed as a result of the collective response"? Explain what swayed your opinion, or why your response has stayed the same.</p>
<p>Free Association</p>	<p>Students are asked to express their thoughts and ideas on a subject without too much structure being imposed upon the discussion procedure.</p>	<p>Allow your students to freely engage in conversation as per the topic for the week. You may want to start them off with a question referencing material in the module and then let the conversation progress.</p>
<p>Hot Seat</p>	<p>Someone sits in the "Hot Seat" and the other students pose questions to him/her on a specific topic.</p>	<p>You may find some students willing to take the hot seat if they are comfortable with the topic, however, this discussion approach would work really well with a Guest Expert for a particular week.</p>

<p>Socratic Dialogue</p>	<p>First the teachers asks a question. Then one student answers it. Then the teacher responds. The teacher then poses the next question for another student to answer. This way every other comment is from the teacher and each student is responsible for answering one question.</p>	<p>Students need to be prepared in advance. Provide them with a list of questions that will be posed, but do not identify which question they will be asked to answer. This is a great way to help student reinforce content and prepare for final exams.</p> <p>An interactive way to deliver a quiz.</p>
<p>The Shotgun</p>	<p>The teacher posts a number of related questions all at the same time. Then, the student has to answer whichever question appeals to him or her.</p>	<p>Take a current event related to your course and pose at least three questions on the topic. Ask students to respond to one of the questions.</p>
<p>Go Round The Circle</p>	<p>Each student is asked to respond to the same question and when all the students have contributed the topic is closed.</p>	<p>It is a good idea to create a new thread for each question. This way you can easily track who posted the comments and responded.</p>
<p>Blind Man's Bluff</p>	<p>The teacher poses a purposefully misleading statement and lets the students discover the false premise through discussion.</p>	<p>This is very helpful when used as an introductory exercise in which you identify common misconceptions and present the lesson to refute them.</p>
<p>Study Buddy</p>	<p>In a private discussion area, two students can review the other's work and provide feedback.</p>	<p>This approach encourages interaction and builds some accountability amongst students to help each other and also to keep up with their own course work. A good approach to encourage student retention.</p>

<p>Moderation/Summary</p>	<p>A student or a group of students are assigned a topic in which they are responsible for moderating or encouraging the discussion on the topic. Another group or individual can then be assigned the responsibility to summarize the discussion at the end of the module.</p>	<p>Depending upon the size of the class, assign a moderator for a module in advance. Ask that s/he create questions that will encourage discussion around the content of the module. The moderator will be responsible for encouraging the discussion for the duration of the module.</p> <p>Assign someone else in the class the task of summarizing the discussion. This person is also expected to participate in the discussion.</p>
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