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Discussion Board Tips for Online Group Leaders
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- Collective intelligence: the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal; and
- Negotiation: the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives and grasping and following alternative norms.

As the online group leader for the week what is my role?

- **Follow the requirements of the assignment and respond to the question in your own words, using evidence from the readings.** Refrain from posting pure opinion (unless instructed otherwise).

- **Bring together students with an understanding that they all pass on different experiences, backgrounds, cultures, ideas and expertise to the group.**

- **See to it that students follow through and post their comments online ON TIME**

- **Manage the process for that week's group discussion and have students post their responses in the correct place.**

- **Report to the class on your group's findings by posting to the corresponding online CLASS discussion board question.** (Questions will be labeled- all students have access to the answers to all questions).

- _**Leaders summarize both similarities and differences that have surfaced,**_ letting all participants know that they are being represented. First summarize the differences and follow with the common ground or similarities. It is important as groups become polarized to keep the points of agreement in front of them as the foundation for working toward mutual agreement.

- **For the week you are group leader you must also post the final reflection paragraph in the CLASS DISCUSSION BOARD which is the comments from your group that best summarizes your group's findings.**

DISCUSSION BOARD FORMAT

Students need (and deserve) to feel safe in class discussion and this is even more challenging in the online environment, where typed messages are easily misinterpreted. The quickest way to shut down discussion is for someone to feel attacked. Student-led discussions are in effect a conversation, designed to provide a free and relaxed atmosphere for discussion, which makes us all feel uninhibited in asking questions and challenging the statements of others. We all have a need for an honest and respectful environment so please do honor this in our time together.

Each group member *including* **the leaders** should
1. Submit his/her own responses to their respective Blackboard groups ON THE DAY THEY ARE DUE. Subsequent comments can continue on through the week but this is an extremely short course so **late postings** will be accepted but **not given credit.**
2. As mentioned above there is a different group leader for each day and he or she is responsible for labeling each DB Question IN THE GROUP DB and for choosing the best responses and posting them in our CLASS DB space. (See group leadership doc under course information in Bb.

 (Did you know that more than half of undergraduates feel that the barrier to online discussions is that there's too much text on discussion boards? So choosing highlights that will be placed in our general class discussion board that **capture the best responses** works to *all of our* advantage.) This is a coherent way of finding and reading the best work of each group so there can be a more free form discussion within your own groups. (See below on Labeling DB questions).

NOTES ON LABELING QUESTIONS and POSTING IN DISCUSSION BOARD:

LEADERS:
 For this and all other group Discussion Board assignments you, as leader, are to create and number a 'new thread' for each question in the discussion board within your specific group with **the following as subject line**.
1. **The question number**
2. **the date**
3. **and the question**

   That means Monday January 3's group DB will have two threads that look like this :
   Example:
   Q1: Monday 1/3 "Fill in Topic question here"
   Q2: Monday 1/3 "Fill in Topic Question here"

MEMBERS:
Group members will click on 'reply' to respond the question. Posts that follow will be responses either to a specific individual or to the original question.

What is an effective discussion facilitator?

○ A facilitator is a person responsible for structuring groups and group activities in a way that supports and encourages the participation of all members and allows the group to attain its goals and objectives

What makes an effective team leader?

○ Creates a positive online environment

○ Solicits participation from all members

○ Values contributions of each member and conveys it to them

○ Varies techniques for group decision-making

○ Skilled in asking questions

What are the characteristics in an effective facilitator?

○ Captures equal contributions from each member

○ Skilled in synthesizing the thoughts of the group into a coherent message

○ Manages structure to help the flow of content from the group members

○ Helps groups work through conflict

Application Notes

SOME OF THE FOLLOWING TIPS ARE USED FOR IN-PERSON GROUP SHARES, HOW CAN YOU ADAPT THESE STRATEGIES TO YOUR ONLINE GROUPS?

- Practice the art of asking non-threatening questions when you are in a group involved in a discussion. Even as a member of the group (if you are not the leader) you can ask people to rephrase, reframe questions to address one question at a time, acknowledge those who contribute and encourage those who haven't responded. Reflect on the quality of the discussion and the variety of contributions that result from effective questioning.
- As a group, try to use the active listening techniques to encourage participation in group discussions. Make a list of the techniques you observed used by the group and at the end of the meeting share with each other. Discuss the general tone of the discussion and the value of using the variety of techniques.
- Share the responsibility of recording ideas and practice how the ideas will be shared with the larger class.

Summary of Skills for Effective Discussion Leaders

- *Effective discussion leaders all constantly work to improve the ways they involve all group members.*

- *They think through discussions and formulate questions which encourage everyone to respond.*

- *They send body language and pick up on non-verbal clues from the group when they are working together in-person.*

- *In addition, they are aware of various strategies to encourage open discussion.*

- *They are skilled in creating productive, open and inclusive dialogue.*

- *They are also skilled in recording the group's contributions so that no idea is lost.*

Progress and Leadership Development Rubric

	4	3	2	1	0
Progress and Leadership Development	Significant growth or personal development. Evidence of synthesis of experience into goals or plan of action, with implications for the future.	Increased sensitivity, change of attitude, and awareness of connections.	Steady course. Incremental progress	No progress. Repetitious experience and reflection	Losing ground. Bored or frustrated. Negative attitude in reflections.

Adapted from: http://srpln.msstate.edu/seal/03curriculum/organizing/group/lesson.htm