

Strategies for a successful online discussion:

- **Sign your postings** to the discussion. This helps because it lets classmates get to know who you are, it lets readers know who wrote a particular contribution, and it supports and enhances your overall conversation online. Keep your signature short and descriptive.
- **Do not use fancy formatting or bullets.** Remember that online discussions are text-based. It's better to stick to the basics. For instance, use single-space within a paragraph and use double-space between paragraphs, and keep your paragraphs short.
- **Use the subject line effectively.** Composing a good subject line is important and helps you and others sort, manage, and filter messages in the discussion board.
 - Be clear, precise, and concise.
 - Edit the subject line to reflect your contribution to a discussion thread.
- **Use "reply" and "new message" functions correctly.** Use the "reply" function to respond or reply to a posting. This helps keep the thoughts and threads of a discussion grouped together in order. Use the "new message" function for new thoughts or ideas.
- **Take a chance.** Electronic discussions afford the opportunity to brainstorm and think online. The nature of an online discussion is more relaxed than other forms of written communication. Test ideas. See how others can help you look at and stretch your thinking.
- **Be specific in your writing.** For example, include names and examples that explain or make known who you agree/disagree with, why you agree/disagree, and what you want to add to the conversation. This helps other readers follow your ideas and tie them back to the discussion.
- **Invite interaction and collaboration from others.** Consider using phrases like "What do you think about my idea?" and "Do you agree with this?" Let readers know you want to hear their opinions.
- **Respect others' thoughts and ideas.** Be constructive in challenging different views and explain where you disagree and why within the rules of "netiquette."
- **Proofread and check the spelling.** While online communication is more relaxed, it is not careless communication. Doing a quick proof of your work before you send it may alleviate the need to clarify your posting and save you some time and potential embarrassment.
- **Allow time for sending, thinking about, and responding to e-mail.** Know when your instructor is available and intends to check and respond to e-mail. Inquire as to what a reasonable turnaround time might be if it is not stated on the syllabus. For example, do not anticipate a reply by 8 a.m. to your 1 a.m. question the morning of your midterm.

Source: Bill Pelz, "(My) Three Principles of Effective Online Pedagogy," *JALN*, Volume 8, Issue 3 (June 2004).
Pennsylvania State University, "Student Guidelines for Electronic Communication: Examples."