

## Academic Skills: Discussion Threads

Discussion threads are often graded, so give them your attention! Here are some tips:

**Know your professor's expectations:** Check the course syllabus for instructions. If expectations are unclear, ask your instructor or TA for details. Here are some things you might want to know:

- **How frequently should I be posting on discussion threads?** In most online courses, it's good to find a balance between posting and responding to your fellow students. Find out how many of each type of post your professor expects.
- **How long should discussion posts be?** Most online posts in academic environments are approximately 200 words, but not all Faculties follow the same guidelines for posts
- **How do you want to receive questions?** You can suggest the professor a create discussion thread for queries so that your emails don't get buried.
- **Can we establish a discussion thread for socializing?** If you would like to connect with your peers informally, ask your professor for a separate space to do this.

### Writing Posts: Showing off your academic writing skills

- Use sentence structure, punctuation and capitalization. Do not use slang or social abbreviations (i.e. LOL) unless necessary for your course content.
- Support your ideas with scholarly sources. Show off that you have done your reading!
- Incorporate additional reading as appropriate. Be curious and explore the course content.
- Cite your sources using the format indicated by your professor (i.e. MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). Use in-text citations and include a mini bibliography at the end of each post.
- Use paragraph structure (1 idea = 1 paragraph)
- Revise for clarity and be concise. Use the word count tool to trim unnecessary details.

### Writing Posts: Sharing ideas and building on your peers' ideas

- Put ideas into perspective by connecting them to personal experiences, current events in society and/or scholarly research.
- Analyze ideas by comparing and contrasting with course content. You can discuss differences of opinion to help everyone better understand the core concepts.
- Highlight the strengths in your peers' arguments. Be respectful when noting weaknesses; use scholarly sources to stress nuances that will help everyone learn.
- Elaborate on ideas by providing sources to bring up a new point or add a new perspective.
- Use discussion to demonstrate critical thinking. Do not engage in back-and-forth disputes that do not include meaningful content.

**Improve your writing and study skills!** Book an appointment with a writing advisor and/or academic coach on OSCARplus. Questions? Email [skills@mcmaster.ca](mailto:skills@mcmaster.ca).

