Making the Most of Discussion Forums

At some point in your education, whether you are in an online or on ground program, you will probably need to participate in online discussion forums. In an online program the discussion forum may replicate what you would experience in a classroom. A discussion forum with an on ground class can act as a means to enhance discussions, make a point that you did not get to in class, or act as an informal way for the students to further connect and communicate with each other. Whether you are new to discussion forums or a seasoned poster, it can be difficult to know what is expected of you.

The requirements of a discussion forum will be dictated and vary depending on the instructor. Typically the requirements and expectations can be found in the syllabus. On average you can expect to write a response to the discussion prompt and reply to other students. Some instructors will require your initial post to be submitted by a certain day of the week. If not, it can help to make a goal to submit your initial post by the middle of the week so others can respond to your post, and complete your replies by the end of the week.

Grand Canyon University states that the successful learner "engages faculty and colleagues in substantive conversations, reflecting on other's perspectives while articulating their own views." When writing discussion posts try to write in a way that is thought provoking, factual, and knowledgeable. Go beyond what the textbook or your sources say by expanding on them, putting the message into your own words, reflecting on the reading, and relating it to your experiences. Rasmussen recommends telling stories when relating to a source. They say that "people love to read stories, because it helps them feel an emotional connection to the content". This can serve as a way to promote questions,
comments, and on-going discussion. Feel free to pull in content from another course when it applies. It may represent another view point or add information that your classmates would not have otherwise been exposed to. The goal of a discussion forum is to get you thinking critically.

Now that you have an idea of what to put into your post, it is important to know how to format it. Even though a discussion forum can seem informal, it is still an academic setting. Unless your instructor states otherwise you will want to stick to academic writing: using proper sentence structure, avoiding spelling and grammar errors, left aligning your text, using black font, a readable but not over sized text, utilizing paragraphs, and proper sentence structure.

In order to facilitate a discussion there needs to be responses, just as there would be if you spoke it in class. Over time try to respond to everyone at least once. Read through your class mates' posts and identify posts that you find thought provoking or that add value to the discussion. You can expand on a point they made, offer insight, ask follow up questions, provide a different view point, or offer constructive criticism. With that said constructive criticism is welcome, but be careful, sometimes things put into text read differently than if it were spoken out loud. Keep an eye on the wording you use and the tone you are trying to convey so that your message comes across clear.

As with anything new it can take time to adjust to writing in an online discussion board. The more you do it, the more comfortable you will get, it just takes practice.

For more information and tips check out:

http://teaching.colostate.edu/tips/tip.cfm?tipid=128

http://www.rasmussen.edu/student-life/blogs/college-life/creating-the-perfect-discussion-post-for-online-classes/

The Write Idea:
Strengthen Your Academic Writing

With regards to academic writing you have probably been told not to use the first person perspective, this means avoiding "I, we, me, us, mine, ours, etc.". Did you know that the first person can weaken the credibility of your argument? When you use the word "I" or other first person pronouns, it makes a paper sound like it is based on your opinion. It can be difficult not use the first person, for many of us it comes naturally because we write the way we speak. While the first person is appropriate in verbal communication, blog writing, or storytelling it is best to avoid it in academic writing. So how do you do that?

The alternative to the first person perspective is to use the third person perspective. The third person is commonly used in academic writing and can be used when referring to an author, or a resource. Some third person pronoun include "she, he, it, they, them and their". An example of this would be "It was discovered that it is easy to write without using the word "I", as opposed to "I discovered that it is easy to write without using "I". The first sentence sounds more definitive, where the second sentence sounds more like an opinion.

While your opinion is valuable, there needs to be research and proven facts to back it up. "Academic writing is formal in tone and meant to be

Did you know?

The city of Utica boasts the fourth highest refugee population in the United States, and in 2009 USA Today claimed that Utica, NY was among the top ten places with international flair. A population this diverse provides great opportunities for things to do and places to eat. If you are planning a trip to Utica for residencies or commencement, be sure to check out the City of Utica webpage for a list of attractions and restaurants. Utica, NY has many hidden gems, so get out there, find them, and enjoy! For more information about the gems that Utica has to offer check out this blog post here.

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objective, using cited sources to support an argument or position. This assumes the focus is not the author, but rather the writing. If you find yourself using the word "I", you might simply remove it and examine the remaining sentence. An example is "I am writing this to discuss how climate change is a major problem" a more appropriate way of saying this is "Climate change is a major problem which needs to be discussed". While, we had to re-arrange some of the words, by removing "I am writing", it puts the main focus on the topic of the paper and makes a stronger statement.

One more way to avoid "I" is to use a piece of your research that supports your viewpoint. Instead of saying "I think that the sky is blue", you can find a resource that proves this. From there you can start with "The research", "The author", or "Insert the author's name" and continue with "states that the sky is blue because molecules in the air reflect blue light". This moves the statement from an observation to one that has been proven scientifically.

No one wants to diminish the quality of their writing but sometimes they are un-aware it is happening. One way to avoid this is to eliminate the use of the first person in your writing. Try out a few of these tips and find out what works for you.

For more information check out:

http://blogs.ubc.ca/writingcentre/files/2013/01/Tutor-project-Avoid-First-Person-POV.pdf
http://elearning.homestead.com/first_person_writing.htm