

Writing Good Discussion Comments: Tips for Students

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From: Gina Maria Funaro and Frances Montell, "Pedagogical Roles and Implementation Guidelines for Online Communication Tools"
www.aln.org/alnweb/magazine/Vol3_issue2/funaro.htm

- Think of the assignment in terms of a dialogue not a writing exercise. You want to engage yourself in a discussion about the texts and issues of the course.
- This means: elaborate one single idea and keep your message to one paragraph (150-200 words). Texts longer than 150-200 words are harder to follow on screen. Of course, better-formulated and clear posts attract more attention.
- Before you read others' responses, think about the assignment and the discussion question. Develop a thesis and decide how you can support your thesis. Only then read other posts.
- Respond to a post that contradicts, or supports, your own thoughts; or one that is lacking evidence or seems to fall short on an aspect that is important to you.
- In your response, you can also turn your own thoughts into questions, offer your argument (remember, an opinion is not an argument). Play the devil's advocate; ask challenging questions.
- Avoid responses that offer only right and wrong perspectives and ignore other possible answers.
- If you are the first to post: post with a careful analysis and strong (bold) argument (thesis) and open-ended questions that invite dialogue.
- It helps for the readers of your post if you include a specific quotation from the message you respond to (xx said: " "): this way we know which comment you are referring to.
- Choose a title for your comment carefully. Titles such as "Question 1" or "Re: My thoughts" are far less compelling than content related titles.
- Once you have posted, check back frequently to see if anybody has responded to you.

(adapted from Mariatte C. Denman)