Discussion Forum General Guidelines and Netiquette Rules

General Guidelines for Initial Posts & Replies:

*Note: Not following these guidelines may cause you to have points subtracted from a discussion forum.*

**Use Thesis Statements**

Make sure your initial post begins with a clear, unified, specific thesis statement that refers back to the question by incorporating key words from the question. This way, your writing will have a direct purpose. Also, your thesis statement will serve to unify all your paragraphs around a central topic. Finally, if the discussion post has several questions to choose from, the reader knows which specific question you are answering.

**Use Paragraphing:**

Make sure to divide your initial post into paragraphs. This makes it easier for the reader to follow. Paragraphs also allow you to better organize your writing and unify your thoughts. When possible, every paragraph should have a transitional phrase and a topic sentence. When you change ideas, topics, or subtopics, change paragraphs. Paragraphs usually average around seven sentences.

**Avoid Sexist Language & Pronoun / Antecedent Errors:**

Watch for sexist language and pronoun/antecedent errors. Sexist language is using “he” as a universal pronoun. For example, if you use the word “doctor” and then use the pronoun “he,” that is considered sexist language. It assumes all doctors are men. To avoid this, you can pluralize your nouns, or use “s/he” or “he or she.”

*Note: you cannot use a single noun with a plural pronoun. That results in a pronoun / antecedent (the word that the pronoun refers to) error. For example, if you use “doctor” (singular noun), you cannot use the pronouns “they” or “their” (plural pronouns). This is one of the main mistakes people make in writing papers.*

**Carefully Proofread All Posts**

This is an academic discussion forum. You should use complete sentences and paragraphs. There should be no sentence fragments, grammatical errors, typos, or missing words. Poor proofreading makes your writing harder to read and understand. It also detracts from your
credibility as a writer. In these days of tough economic competition, many job applicants have had their resumes and cover letters put in the reject pile because of poor proofreading.

Make sure to review punctuation rules, especially for commas, semi-colons, colons, and possessive apostrophes.

Also, do not use slang, profanity, abbreviations, or text speak. This is an academic discussion post, so you need to use formal language. That does not mean that you need to use “academese,” big words that sound intelligent. Big words are fine, but you need to use them correctly; otherwise, they detract from your credibility as a writer.

Try to use clear, easy-to-understand language. Don’t try to sound academic. For example, why write “It is obvious that Bill is in the process of kicking Jack,” when you can just write “Bill is kicking Jack”? The other just adds needless padding and filler.

Be Specific

Try not to use overly general sentences, such as “The author brings up several interesting points in his argument.” Such a sentence basically says nothing, and you will have to repeat most of the words in a second sentence. Be specific, “The author’s argument rests on three premises: x, y, and z.”

Please, do not begin anything with “in today’s society.” Such a phrase is totally unnecessary. Unless you are locating your opening paragraph in a specific context, such as “4,000 years ago on Mars,” it will be clear to the reader that your subject pertains to this current age and the planet earth.

Specific Guidelines for Discussion Forum Replies

In your reply to another student’s discussion posting you should not just repeat or summarize what you said in your posting. Also, don’t just agree or disagree with the student without offering any explanation for your agreement or disagreement.

Below are some good examples of what to do in a Discussion Forum Reply to another student:

- Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says
- Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said
- Bring in a resource (Web link) that adds new information / perspectives to our learning
- Make a comment that underscores a link between two people’s contributions and make this link explicit in your comment
- Post a comment that suggests new directions and questions to be explored in the future
- Make a comment indicating that you found another person’s ideas interesting or useful. Be specific as to why this was the case.
• Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person’s thoughts.

Netiquette Rules

Below is a short list of Discussion Forum etiquette rules:

• Stay on subject.
• Be respectful, civil, and play nice.
• No SHOUTING! -- Capitalize words only to highlight a point or for titles.
• Be professional and use care when interacting online; you don’t have the ability to gauge a person’s reaction or feelings as you do in face-to-face conversation.
• Use humor very, very carefully – it is hard to gauge a reaction to your funny comment or aside – and the recipient may misinterpret your attempt to be funny as criticism. Especially avoid ethnic, religious, political, ageist, ableist, sexual, or gender-based jokes.
• Sarcasm, satire, and parody do not work well in discussion posts. Try to avoid them.
• Identify your sources if you use quotes, references, or resources.
• Don’t write overly long messages. If the requirement is 200 words, try not to go longer than 400 words.
• Never share someone’s posting with someone else without getting permission.