

Online learning and general netiquette

Discussions are used across the modules in your programme as a way of allowing you to explore a range of topics at your own pace and at times convenient to you.

The aim is to learn from your collaborative discussions with other students, with the tutor taking a relatively light touch approach, getting involved only to move the discussion forward or keep it on track. Tutors will not offer the 'right answer' during discussions as often there is not one right answer! Discussions should be supportive, not competitive, and the more effort you put into these discussions, the more you will get out of them. Here are some tips on how to successfully navigate online Discussions.

Discussion board tips

1. Keep your posting brief and clear

- Express your thoughts clearly and concisely. Keep your message short and to the point. Make sure it clearly expresses your thoughts and ideas.
- Use line breaks between paragraphs (white space). This makes the message easier to read (like this document).
- Keep it short but be careful with abbreviations and shortcuts such as np (no problem) or u (you).
- If your message is slightly long use line breaks to break it up.
- Take the time to re-read your post before you send it. Use common sense - is this message something that you want to be sent to you? Will you understand it in 3 days if you were to go back and read it?
- Restrict the number of topics that you cover in each post, preferably to one. Use paragraphs if your post must contain more than one subject, but ideally send separate posts. Whole page emails and/or large attachments are not conducive to good discussions – it's like someone speaking on and on without giving others a turn.

2. Post regularly

- Do participate in the discussion board. Even if you simply post small messages frequently in order to ask further questions or to agree with previous remarks, this helps to generate a good flow on the discussion board and is more educationally beneficial for both students and tutors.
- It is better to contribute a small amount regularly than try to say everything that you want to say on the topic in one day.
- Get used to visiting the discussion board every few days, get into a routine – it should not matter if you prefer to start your day by visiting the discussion board or if you choose to log-on at 01.00 in the morning – whatever works for you.
- Don't feel pressured to respond to a post immediately; if asked for information, it's better to do some homework to make sure you're providing a good answer than to shoot off on something that may be irrelevant.
- Be patient, if you don't receive an immediate response

3. Stick to the topic

- Fill in the subject line or thread name. Keep the characters in the subject line or thread name short and relevant. This makes it easier for users to find and filter discussions.
- Each discussion board will normally have 'threads' of conversation about particular sub-sections of the subject matter – try to respond to the comments in each thread rather than start a new thread to reply – these threads are chosen for a reason, to explore particular issues.
- Be complete. Writing a post is not the same as talking to someone on the phone or in person. Include context and be specific.
- Be professional and careful with what you say in your posting. Never post anything that you wouldn't want to see published somewhere else. Your messages can be forwarded anywhere by anyone who gets them. Don't put confidential, personal or legally sensitive information in messages.

4. Use your own words

- Don't be tempted to write a mini-essay: you want to encourage people to respond to your post and this is more likely if you write simply and clearly in your own words and less formal language.
- If you are in a face-to-face conversation you would not talk only by using the quotations of others, and similarly you should always try to express your online comments in your own words.
- By all means use quotes if they are relevant but give your evidence (or web links) and then explain your own understanding of the topic – this is the only way we will discover if you really do understand the subject or just have a superficial grasp.
- Explain things that you think might be obvious because it might not be obvious to the recipient.
- Don't assume everyone understands your use of abbreviations, acronyms, slang and regionalisms.
- Be careful when using sarcasm and humour. Electronic communications can be very impersonal and others may take your words as criticism. "Emoticons" are a widely accepted way of differentiating humour and sarcasm from serious comments. One person's joke is another person's insult.
- Be careful of jokes – they don't always translate well.

5. Be respectful

- Don't type in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS (unless you REALLY want to emphasise something); it's considered the equivalent of shouting.
- Be considerate of other people's points of view, it is easy to misunderstand in a text only environment.
- Don't type in the heat of the moment; you may regret it later. There's a time and a place for flaming (spouting off angrily at someone), but the module discussion board is not it.
- Be courteous and respectful of other people. If you use abusive or offensive language, you will be blocked from the conference area and potentially removed from your course. If that is the case, you will not receive a refund for your tuition