



Please **open up the two rubrics for reference** in our discussion:

<https://services4.lowercolumbia.edu/info/webresources/Institutional-Research/InterpersonalSkillsRubric.pdf>

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RPwqyQcHc7ms2GGpZBLqI\\_6hy99Qu0vv/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RPwqyQcHc7ms2GGpZBLqI_6hy99Qu0vv/edit)

### **Why talk about discussion boards?**

It's helpful to evaluate IR and Teamwork via group projects and other creative interactions (like in-person seminar discussions), but most of us, most regularly, use discussion boards.

Therefore, it would be wise to spend some time *discussing* how we might improve these boards for student learning and to create better assessment artifacts.

### **What's wrong with discussion boards?**

- Because they are asynchronous, most students post only on the due dates (Thursdays and Sundays, for example), and many post 30 minutes before the deadline.
- This lack of time invested *and* the fact that discussion post assignment might feel expected/stale to many students, leads to not putting much thought into posts.
- Even if the original posts are compelling, student replies are often empty (ex: "I like what you said").
- Another issue is that a small group gets ahead of everyone else, so there ends up being a lot of repetition of ideas.
- Overall, students don't seem to be engaging in rich *interaction*. They often don't return to see what others have written in response. There's not a lot of threading going on. It doesn't feel like they're learning from one another.
- As well, there's often CONTENT in the discussion, and they are not encouraged to go back to it.
- One question we can ask as instructors is: does this assignment need to be a discussion, or would it work best as an assignment between the instructor and student?

**Two noteworthy examples of positive asynchronous discussions:** First, history reveals that science, especially, was advanced through the practice of writing letters back and forth in an asynchronous manner. While face-to-face discussions have their advantages, there are many benefits to learning how to converse well in an asynchronous environment. In more recent history, we find that many lively, rich discussions take place on social media platforms, such as Facebook. While there are also wretched examples to be found in those forums, it is worth asking how we might design discussions to be as engaging as what we've witnessed there.

### **Possible innovations to improve online discussions:**

- Set a total number of required responses; of those, set a smaller number of required responses that must be written in reply to comments made on the student's original post (this will force some back-and-forth dialogue).
- Break the large group into smaller groups (4, 5, or even 8 depending on the assignment type). Use Canvas functions to do this efficiently.
- Scatter due dates: 3 days per week instead of 2. Combine discussion boards that are related so that there's more content in one discussion and to be able to "store" related remarks in a single place (two weeks of a discussion can be found in one board, for example).
- For replies, require them to ask questions of each other.
- For replies, require them to research and share new resources with each other (to help further the work that the original poster is creating and sharing... they get invested in each other's projects).
- Create reflective assignments. For instance, ask students to go back into the discussion (once it's finished) to find a "best post" or "best idea" and write about it; this can be submitted directly to the instructor or posted in a new discussion forum where new layers of the discussion can be added. One suggestion was to make the discussion more "low stakes" (less points) but a reflective write up in response to the discussion worth more.
- Have the group create a final product as a result of the discussion; you don't need to monitor every interaction (you don't do this in the classroom when they break out into smaller discussions).
- USE CREATIVITY to engage students: role playing, visuals ("draw a concept"), allow them to post a video or audio instead of typing a response, etc.
- Use the jigsaw concept in a discussion board to encourage them to teach each other unique concepts; also, this gives them more motivation to read others' posts.