

Writing a Discussion Board post

While most Unit Blackboard sites will have Discussion Boards where students are encouraged to engage, this Quick Guide will focus on common characteristics of those posts which are part of an assessment task.

Why am I asked to write a Discussion Board post?

The primary purpose of this type of assessment is to provide the opportunity to demonstrate **engagement with the unit content**, practice **communication skills**, sharpen **critical thinking** abilities and understand how to use appropriate **sources as evidence** to support academic arguments.

How do I start?

Firstly, if you are new to Blackboard you may want to first familiarise yourself with how Blackboard works. You can do that by jumping onto the Technology Services webpage, or view this brief clip explaining **how Discussion Boards work**:

<https://youtu.be/vNMO-4I7uBI>

Assessments involving Discussion Board posts vary quite considerably across schools and units, so the advice presented here is general advice only. If you need more detailed assistance, please first check the information and instructions in the assessment details or ask your tutor. You may also consider **making an appointment with a Learning Coach** to discuss your particular task.

Make sure you know exactly what is asked of you. **Look at assessment details** such as word count, number of references required, referencing and formatting style, and what you are being assessed on. These details are usually found in the marking rubric and may include things such as the *structure and flow* of your posts *and evidence of critical thinking*. A good way to ensure that you are addressing the criteria is to identify and highlight all the **key terms** and **instruction words** in the task description, so you understand clearly what you are required to do.

The first (and most important) aspect of crafting a good Discussion Board post is to **read widely** across appropriate materials in your subject area. There may be assigned (or required) readings but most often you will need to source your own literature or information in order to form an argument. When you read, consider whether you agree with the main points, or not, why or why not? If your task involves arguing a particular stance in a debate, drawing from a range of relevant literature will help you develop a more **solid argument** that you can defend. Once you have decided on a "position" (if you are required to take one), consider how YOUR position fits into the different theories or models or research outlined in your readings. Sometimes, the assessment will also require you to include relevant personal or professional experience. However, make sure your **statements and arguments are evidence-based**. The most important aspect of your preparation is to be clear on what your argument is and it is a great idea to first make a plan of how you want to **structure your argument** to make sure that you create a post that flows well.

General features of a Discussion Board post

While Discussion Board posts can have the appearance of informal communication, they are assessments, so you need to remember that the same rules apply as in other types of academic writing;

- Avoid colloquial language
- Make sure your writing is evidence-based by incorporating references
- Be succinct, clear and write in short paragraphs with one main idea presented in each paragraph.
- Confirm what voice you are required to adopt (e.g., are you required to write in third person?)

Keep in mind that you are writing a piece to stimulate thoughts, and **invite healthy discussion and debate**, so posing questions about the topic and inviting comments from your peers are often appropriate to include in Discussion Board posts. You may even wish to play the Devil's Advocate¹ and take a stance that you do not personally agree with.

¹ someone who pretends, in an argument or discussion, to be against an idea or plan that a lot of people support, in order to make people discuss and consider it in more detail

Commenting on other students' posts

Often, a Discussion Board post assessment requires commenting on the work of others. Some things which are important to remember when being part of a discussion are:

- Being polite – even if you do not agree with someone, be respectful in your writing, such as *“I strongly believe that...”*
- Supporting your claims with evidence, such as *“More recent research has found that xxx (author, year). How does that fit with your argument?”*
- Inviting discussion – you can further the conversation with peers by including in your comment something that prompts a further response, such as *“Does that argument apply in the situation where...”,* or *“It is not quite clear to me what the basis for your comment relating to ... was, could you please clarify?”*

A final check of your work before posting

It is always a good idea to write your post in Word rather than straight into a thread on the Blackboard Discussion Board ... and **before you post, do a last editing check:**

- Does your post have a good title? (make your title count – make it informative, succinct and inviting; ideally including a key idea from your argument)
- Does your post cover all the points that have been asked for?
- Does the post demonstrate your understanding of the unit content?
- Does the post demonstrate that you have engaged in critical thinking and additional research to present your point of view?
- Have you drawn from your previous professional experience (if it has been asked for)?
- Does your post have fully-developed paragraphs, which address each of the points in the assessment task and/or key words from the rubric?
- Have you included appropriate theoretical concepts, ideas, or models from the course readings/study guide/text book in your post?
- Have you correctly cited and referenced your work in the required referencing style?
- Does your post meet the word count requirements?
- Have you reviewed your writing for correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

Check the [SCU Learning Zone](#) for more related Quick Guides.