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Key principals of on-line tuition and learning for graduate students

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Principles of on-line tuition and learning for undergraduate students

A successful learning experience depends on, and requires, the same commitment and activities from students as in face-to-face learning. It is important to ensure you don't fall behind with your work – the reading and the conference contributions. The forums provide interaction and the interaction is more than just discussion. It means actively taking part, keeping up to date, and collaborating.

As students you must take responsibility for your own reading, for your own interactions, for structuring your time, and so on.

What we aim to do in on-line tuition is start by creating a community of learners which becomes a community of inquiry into the subject. The community of inquiry develops into a community of practice. In other words, our purpose is to introduce you to, and integrate you into, a community of practice.

When you interact with your peers you should also be willing to engage with peer moderation. That is, learn to manage your discussions between yourselves and make them relevant and productive. Steer them towards areas of interest and importance in relation to the relevant industry.

When you have discussions they work best if you use every-day conversational language. Talk to each other as though you are having a conversation. Over time, as you engage with the material – the course reading – you will naturally begin to integrate the language of the discipline into your discussions.

It is important to allow for digression from the topic and for conflict – disagreement – about concepts and theories and their application. You do not need to agree with the theories or with the lecturers. What you need to learn to do, however, is to back up your arguments appropriately with sound logic, valid observations, and a thorough understanding of theory.

It is important to recognise that there is no one single authority who is 'right' and the lecturer may not be the best source of information or knowledge on a topic. As a student your primary learning will come from what you do - how you interact with your peers and the effort you put into producing written work, arguments, discussions, presentations, and collaborations with others.

We strongly encourage you to ask questions of your peers first and to discuss these questions and answers. If you want to ask the lecturer then ask directly in the forum provided for this. The reason for doing this is that your question, and the answer, may well be relevant to other students as well.

If you have a question that is more personal or difficult then you may, of course, approach the lecturer directly. If you have technical questions then these need to be asked in the appropriate place in the institution.

Starters and Finishers

NOTE: If you cannot meet the responsibility of being a Starter or Finisher please let the other students know so that they are not waiting for you.

Starters

The Starter is responsible for opening and has the option of facilitating the discussion. The opening statement should not aim to be a complete answer to the question or topic but should set out the key/core issues involved. You might want to refer briefly to the reading, but you should not just summarise it. The starter should be 300-500 words. Some are longer as you can see from the examples loaded up on some of the modules. There is not 'right' or 'wrong' way to do this.

Finisher

After the topic has been open for two weeks the Finisher should sum up the main points made in the discussion and any conclusions drawn. These should be linked to the question/s set. The finishing statement should be about 300-500 words.

Key points for success (based on an extended review of the literature).

1. Don't get behind. Keep up with the discussion and the exercises.
2. Use good time management. If you are unsure of your time management get some support for this. This applies to: your reading; online searching and access; collaborative exercises and writing up; revision and exam preparation and practice.
3. Be organised, especially with your time and with your workload and revision.

4. Set aside time each week
5. Take part on the online discussions and make use of the different forums
6. Use the opportunities for collaboration and written outputs to develop your necessary writing skills
7. Do the reading (listed in the Handbook, Lectures, and Forums)
8. Read syllabus (The Handbook)
9. Know how to get technical help. If you don't know find out.
10. Ask questions of staff
11. Introduce yourself on the relevant discussion forum. Go to orientation (If there is one.)
12. Make sure you understand the requirements of course and the institutional expectations (in the handbook), and where you can get support
13. Understand how online activity contributes to your learning (in the handbook and in this document)
14. Participate in activities and ask for advice if you feel you need it.
15. Register early and do any preliminary reading

'Rules' for getting the best out of the Discussion Forums (These are not actual rules. They are guidelines and principles we agree on based on an extended review of the literature).

Effective discussion requires conceptual conflict and divergence and a requirement to reach consensus. That is, you should feel able to express your relevant disagreements but also to introduce ideas, comments and thoughts that may seem to diverge from the topic under discussion. The key thing is to come back to the topic question at the end and look for clarity on points of agreement and disagreement.

- This is a place to celebrate our ignorance, imperfection, confusion and struggles.
- Support each other.
- Keep the discussion informal – we will develop the 'language' of the topic and relevant professional practice as we go along. Write like you were having a conversation.

- You are strongly encouraged to try ideas that you are not yet certain of.
- Keep messages short and sweet. Makes sure postings are relevant.
- There are three basic types of post: 1) Starter/Finisher; 2) address the original question; and 3) address another post
- Be constructive! It is always possible to disagree
- Be encouraging and constructive.
- Questions can be powerful contributions. BUT use only one question per post.
- Incorporate your own experience and goals into your posts and arguments. E.g. say, 'In my experience...' or 'We tried an intervention called Motivational Interviewing in our Employee Assistance Program but we had poor results...' etc.
- IF you play the 'devil's advocate' signify your intent in the message. (i.e. if you disagree with someone in order to show them a possible weakness in their argument then say you are doing this before you do it.)
- Do not feel distressed if the lecturer does not comment on your messages. There can be many reasons. For example, the lecturer can be overwhelmed, does not have anything more to add, is waiting for others to try out ideas first, etc.
- The Lecturer is not necessarily 'right' or 'correct' or 'more knowledgeable' than you are. But be sure to support your arguments.
- Minimal number of posts – You need to comment at least twice.
- Support your arguments with evidence (established theories, empirical data, thought experiments, etc.).
- Keep one point per short message
- If no one answers your posting, you can send invitations to three students for responses.
- You are encouraged to build on existing ideas by quoting and paraphrasing other people's messages.
- If you have nothing more to add, wrap it up nicely with a concise summary.