

Let's discuss...

DISCUSSION FORUMS

Who, what, when, why, how

The following prompts are for instructors to reflect on while designing discussion spaces. Questions can then be shared with students to introduce discussion purpose and expectations.

WHY DISCUSS?

- Create community
- Provide evidence of learning
- Apply concepts
- Think critically

Discussions serve many purpose(s). Identify primary and secondary goals and build from there.

DISCUSS WHAT? HOW?

Identify objectives - specific, measurable actions to achieve goals.

- Goal: Increase peer-to-peer interaction
- Objective: Provide a low-stakes weekly debate for students to earn points from ("Which animal cracker cookie is the leader and why?")

WHO & WHEN?

Students have many identities. In discussion, are they researchers? Debaters? Listeners? Storytellers? etc. For teams, provide roles: Facilitator, fact-finder, summarizer, etc. (feel free to use other names)

BE SMART

Goals and objectives are:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant,
Time-bound

BE UNIVERSAL

Accessible spaces please!

- Bullets or short paragraphs
- Font size 12 or 14
- Dyslexia-friendly font type
- Mobile device-friendly layout
- Model responses

THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING!

Turn to page 2 for specific ideas

IDEAS AHEAD!

TIPS FOR INCREASING PARTICIPATION

QUESTIONS

- Nuanced, even controversial!
 - Instead of "Share something about X" use:
 - "How do you think X was perceived 50 years ago? How has societal change affected its interpretation?"
 - "What is controversial about X? Do textbooks present an accurate, objective representation?"
- Choices! Provide multiple prompts so students have agency
- Involve students in prompt creation - you don't have to do it all!

EXPECTATIONS

- Explain why students should participate - what are the goals?
- Launch a discussion about discussions - what expectations do students have for discussion spaces in general? For this course?
- Let students have agency in how discussion is structured.
- Record and post a video about expectations
- Show students where to find discussion spaces and how to post (don't assume they know!)
- Use a consistent schedule, including when reminders are sent
- Students tend to engage more if a professor participates as well. Refrain from babysitting, but don't be a ghost!

EVALUATION

- Launch a quiz to check student understanding of expectations
- Clarify how participation is evaluated
- Provide a rubric
- Model full, partial, and no credit responses, with rationale
- Have students score a sample post using the rubric
- Have students self-evaluate their posts or participation

AVOID "BUSY WORK"

Online learners are more likely to engage if they find personal meaning and rationale.

- Create prompts that allow students to draw connections to their lives or goals.
- Include a discussion's purpose and connect to course outcomes in the instructions.

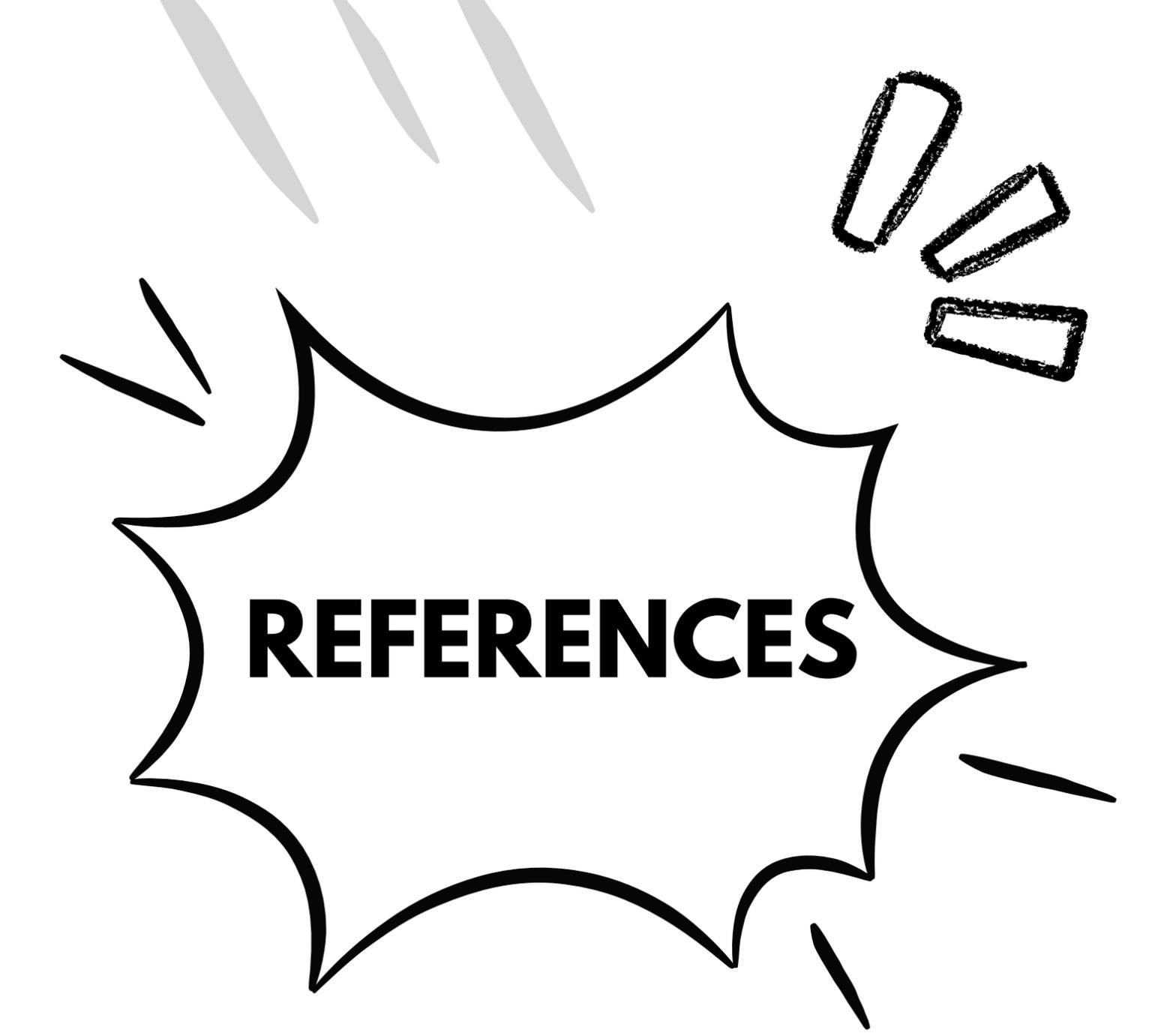
"...AND REPLY TO TWO PEERS"

Too vague!

- Encourage call and response replies that build on each other and the original post.
- Provide specific reply prompts and structures.
- Model sample replies

TEAMWORK!

DISCUSSION GROUPS PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY, BUT NOT WHEN STUDENTS ARE OVERWHELMED BY THE NUMBER OF POSTS. KEEP GROUP SIZE BETWEEN 5-10 FOR ASYNCHRONOUS TEAMS.



REFERENCES

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