# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITH STUDENTS ONLINE: DISCUSSIONS IN SELF-PACED COURSES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
**extended**
campus

## INTRODUCTION

Because students in self-paced courses are all in different lessons of the course, discussions need to be used selectively. Topic-related group discussions that semester-based courses commonly use are impractical, if not impossible, but you can still offer your students a way to practice their discussion skills, benefit from social learning, and overcome the feeling of isolation that oftentimes comes with online learning and asynchronous online learning in particular.

A caveat: Since discussion forums are public and accessible to everyone in your class, encouraging posts from students increases the possibility of exchanges that could compromise academic honesty and the integrity of assignments and exams. You may need to monitor posts closely and intervene as necessary.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Student-Instructor Communication: "Ask the Instructor"

Consider using the discussion area for one-on-one student-instructor communication and invite your students to leave questions or comments for you. If this feature is used, keep in mind that it is important to manage student expectations by letting them know when they can expect an answer from you. Check in regularly to monitor submissions and post responses to manage your own workload. You may also consider poting virtual office hours during which you will be available to answer questions in real time.

Tips:
• Manage expectations
• Check in regularly
• Offer virtual office hours

### Student-Student Communication: Bulletin Boards

Encourage student-student interaction and provide your students a place to engage with the course topics in a looser and more social format. Consider using topic-specific bulletin boards for students to talk about the following:
• Real-world applications of course content
• Personal experiences or hobbies related to course content
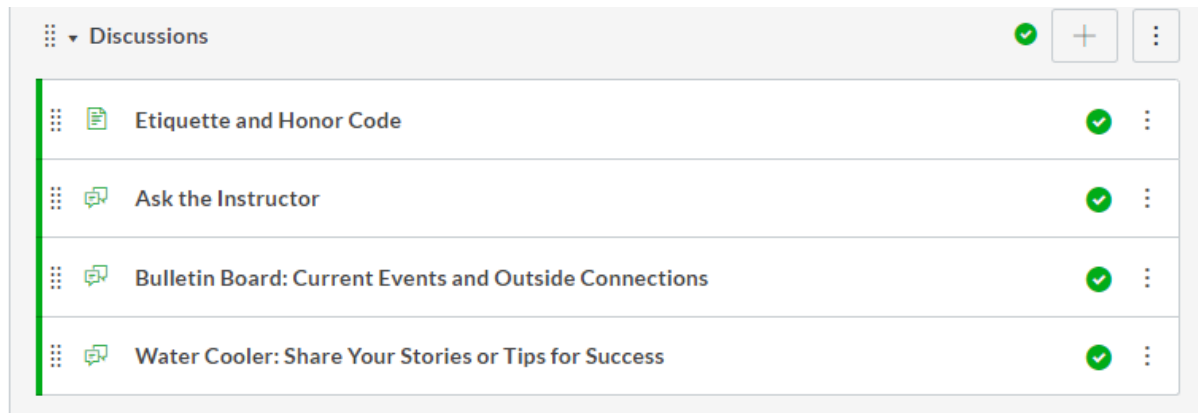• Current events related to course content

### Real-World Discussions and Role Plays

Another way to incorporate a discussion component in self-paced courses is to have students conduct a discussion or role play outside of class and post a reflection as a graded assignment. Possible conversation partners could be friends, coworkers, classmates, or community members. Although students might not interact with their fellow online classmates, this type of assignment would still give them the benefits associated with group work. Provide discussion guidelines and parameters.
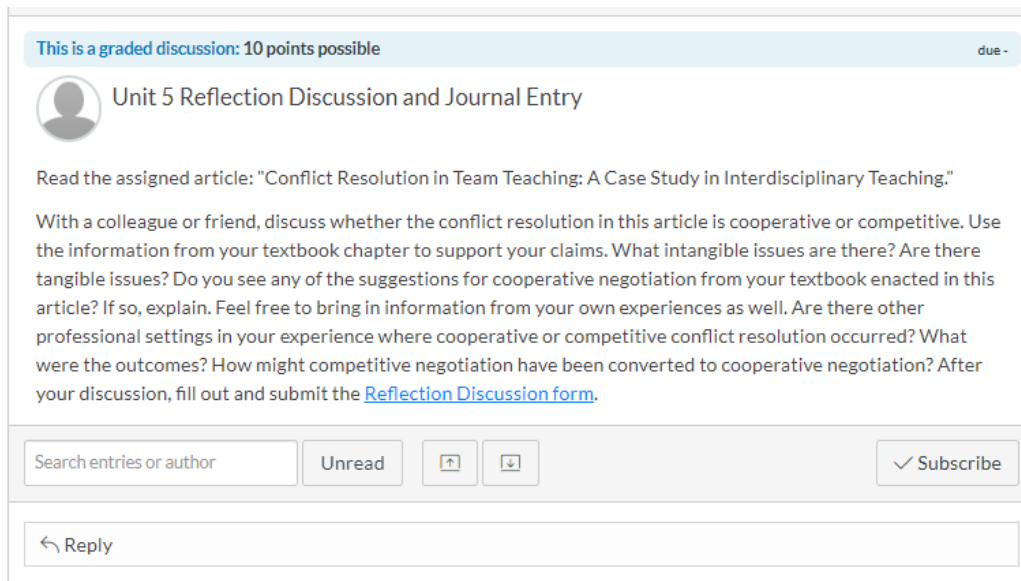
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## EXAMPLES



And here's an example of the Real-World and Role Plays type of discussion:

In a course on conflict management, the lesson on negotiation uses the following assignment. (Detailed instructions for completing reflection assignments are given in the course syllabus, and the form mentioned at the end of the assignment provides a framework for focusing the discussion.)



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

How to Write Engaging Questions for Online Forums: https://facdevblog.niu.edu/how-to-write-engaging-questions-for-online-forums

Designing Online Discussion Activites: https://distance.fsu.edu/instructors/designing-online-discussion-activities

You're Asking the Wrong Question: https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/youre-asking-the-wrong-question/