Mamre Christian Bible College

Discussion Guidelines

You must read this information before or on the first day of class.
(**Note:** *These are general guidelines. Instructors may adjust as appropriate for their class.*)

There are many ways to communicate in an online environment. Please remember that, without physical and verbal cues, written work can easily be misunderstood. Take some time to read through the information below.

Policy for Discussion Forum Postings

Each week you will participate in topic-related conversations with your classmates using discussion forums. Your initial discussion posting is due on Day 3/4 (Thursday/Friday); the required responses to your classmates are due on Day 6 (Sunday).

(**IMPORTANT:** *MCBC's EduTraining online classroom is a closed communication system. This means that you can receive emails from the system (discussion forums), but you **cannot** reply back through your email. Any communication generated from the classroom must be replied to from logging onto the classroom site, and using the discussion forum.*)

Netiquette Rules

Written communication in an online community is an extremely important factor in all our online educational programs. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively is crucial to the success of all online learning programs. Special steps are made to maintain this type of online etiquette (Netiquette). Below you will find a list of rules to follow as you proceed through your online educational courses with Mamre Christian Bible College (MCBC).

Instructors and Students in an Online Community Should Be:

- **Considerate**: Treat each other with respect. Take time to read and respond to each other in such a way that a learning environment can continue to develop. Format your post so that everyone can learn from your knowledge, skills and abilities.
- **Encouraging**: Not everyone has had previous online experience. Some may spend more time observing (reading other students' postings, remaining invisible for some time) than others. Notice the habits of your students and classmates. Provide encouragement for creative and critical conversation.
- **Helpful**: Even a well-presented course can create some confusion. It is very easy to lose your place or miss reading information on certain links or pages. When other students are lost, offer a helping hand by pointing them in the right online direction so they can regain their confidence in online learning.
- **Aware**: We all have had different life experiences. Be aware that your written word is the only form of communication in an asynchronous learning environment. Use your words carefully. Ask yourself if your comment could possibly be interpreted as

insulting, disrespectful, discriminating, mocking, or rude. How would you feel if this comment was directed toward you?

The following behaviors should be avoided:

- **Shouting**: Using all capital letters when communicating in an online environment is known as shouting. This usage is considered a rude method of communicating. Avoid using all capital letters in your online communications.
- **Impatience**: Once you have posted a question or concern to your instructor, please wait patiently for a reply. There is no reason to bully your instructor or make judgment calls about his or her performance. In an online community, patience is a virtue.

The following behaviors are disruptive to the learning environment and will not be tolerated at MCBC.

- **Flaming**: Flaming is the term used for behaving disrespectfully toward others online. This behavior includes, but is not limited to, mocking, shouting, cursing, humiliating and discriminating against someone in the online environment.
- **Disrespect**: Impolite and impertinent behavior, such as putting down or cursing your instructor or any student in an online classroom, will not be tolerated. Tone and presentation of your thoughts are very important. If you disagree with a posting or find one to be personally insulting, please find a way to respond politely or contact the Online Instructional Specialist for a review of the content.
- **Offensiveness**: An online classroom is not the place for graphic terminology, sexual discussions, swearing, or any pornographic resources. Inappropriate language and materials of this nature are inexcusable and constitutes unacceptable behavior.
- **Discrimination**: Derogatory statements about race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, and veterans will not be tolerated.

Tips on Creating Discussion Posts

Creating an Excellent Discussion Post

The Discussion Board provides a space to explore the concepts we are studying. Full participation will make the discussion forums successful, as the comments made on the board bring the course material to life.

When developing substantive discussion board responses, consider the three phases, below:

Phase 1 — Read Before You Write

- Consider the prompt(s) thoroughly.
- Recognize and underline the question(s) you are being asked.

- Connect the questions to the week's readings, class discussions, or your notes, as appropriate to the discussion.
- Reflect and list all the possible responses.
- Isolate the strongest responses, or arguments that fit the discussion prompt(s).

Phase 2 — Write a Draft Before You Post

- Open a new Word document for each Discussion Forum post. (**Note**: You will copy and paste the final draft into the Forum.)
- Cut and paste the prompt(s) at the top of the Word doc to keep you on task.
- Begin each paragraph with the strongest response or argument that you isolated in Phase 1.
- Develop your response(s) by providing **scriptures**, examples, quotes, or personal experiences— as appropriate to the discussion—to **support** your response(s).
- Review the length and content of your response(s). Having only 1-2 sentences is not substantive.

Phase 3 — Review Your Post Before You Submit

- Did you completely answer each of the questions?
- If necessary or required, did you use examples from personal experience to illustrate your point?
- If necessary or required, did you refer to class readings or discussions to demonstrate an understanding of the concepts?
- Did you **proofread** your post for typos and misspellings? Are the grammar and punctuation, correct?
- Did you cite any references to the text or other sources used in your discussion posts?
- Did you read your post out loud to yourself to make sure it "sounds" clear?

Tips on Responding to a Peer's Post

Effectively Responding to a Peer's Post

Another component that enriches and enlivens the Discussion Board experience is responding to fellow classmates' posts. In the same way that your own posts should be substantive, response posts should be meaningful and advance the discussion of the issues, ideas, questions that were raised in the initial posts. While you can be supportive of your peers by saying, "I agree" or "Wow, I never thought of that", these statements alone are not sufficient. (***Note:*** *You must respond to at least two of your fellow classmates in order to get 50% of your points.)*

To guide you in drafting acceptable response posts, refer to the options below:

- **Validate** the post by sharing your experience and stating how it relates to the course material or to the initial post.
- **Agree or disagree** with the post and explain why you agree or disagree.

- **Expand** on your classmate's post to demonstrate that you understand the topic.
- **Reply to a question** posed by one of your classmates or by the instructor and support your statements with sources from the text.
- **Critically evaluate** the post and suggest or respectfully point out an area of the assignment that was not addressed.
- **Ask a probing question** or ask your classmate for a clarification or an explanation of a point made in the post.
- **Share** an insight or something you learned from reading your peer's posting or from your other reading.
- **Explain** how someone's post helped you understand the material or made you rethink your own views.
- **Offer an opinion** and support it with examples from the text.
- **Relate** the information in the post to your course assignments and/or research projects.
- **Challenge** a statement in the post. If you would not let a statement, go unchallenged in a classroom discussion, do not let it go unchallenged on the discussion board.
- **Tie ideas together**: Discuss how comments other students made relate to your peer's post.
- Make sure you **cite your sources** for all references to the textbook and for any other ideas that are not your own.

Discussion Board Do's and Don'ts

Do...

- Break up long postings into smaller, easier-to-read paragraphs.
- Demonstrate the same professionalism and courtesy you would at work on the discussion boards.
- Answer any follow up questions your instructor may have asked. If you are off topic or did not fully answer the post, your instructor may ask you a follow up question designed to help you answer the questions more fully.
- Stay on topic. You can ensure this by reading all the posts in a threaded message before responding or by rereading the discussion forum topic or prompt(s).
- Always find one positive aspect of another's classmate's post before launching into a critique.
- Acknowledge another classmate's point-of-view whether you agree.

Do not...

- Write as if you were texting, chatting, or instant messaging. Avoid slang and acronyms ("btw" for "by the way").
- Use ALL CAPS in your response. Using ALL CAPS is considered yelling.
- Refer to yourself as "i"; address yourself as "I". Use proper capitalization.
- Respond to another classmate's posting only saying "I agree" or "I disagree." This does not contribute to learning. Provide examples to support your position.

- Take comments personally. We interpret text messages based on our experiences. Because you have no cues other than the written word, you may make assumptions that were not intended.
- Make personal attacks on another classmate's posting. If you disagree, do so objectively and respectfully. Always provide substantive evidence to support your position.
- "Say" anything that you would not tell someone face to face or anything that you do not want discussed in class.
- Post too late. Remember that your active participation is part of your grade. Simply "showing up" to class is not enough; you must create and establish an online presence in the discussion forums. Besides, you want your instructor and classmates to read and comment on your insightful observations!

The Do's and Don'ts of Online Discussion

1. The most important thing to keep in mind is that our discussion board simulates the classroom discussion. It is an opportunity to explore the concepts we are studying.
2. Full participation will make the discussion forums successful, as the comments in the forum will bring the classroom material to life. It will be real-world discussion.
3. An "I agree" or "I disagree" does not contribute to learning. You will agree and disagree with the comments from other students; however, when that happens, provide examples to support your position.
4. Compare statements from other students. With you acting as a third party, you will often be able to provide an objective analysis.
5. Bring in a third-party resource to support your position. Perhaps you have found a website that adds to the learning.
6. Don't take comments personally. We interpret text messages based on our experiences. Because you have no cues other than the written word, you may make assumptions that were not intended.
7. Above all, have fun and learn from each other.

Student Responsibilities and Policies

Attendance Policy

Students taking online courses are expected to attend each week of the course. Attendance is defined as participating in an academic activity within the online classroom which includes posting in a graded discussion forum, submitting a written assignment, or submitting a quiz or an exam. Postings not related to graded discussion forums or written assignments not related to the actual assignment may be reviewed and disqualified for attendance purposes.

Each instructional week begins on a Tuesday and concludes on the following Monday. A student is recorded either absent or present each day based on participation in an academic activity. All recorded time stamps for assignment submissions, discussion board posts, and attendance records will reflect Mountain Time Zone.

Academic Participation

In addition to meeting attendance requirements, students attending online courses are expected to participate in their courses by actively engaging in weekly discussion forums with substantial posts and completing the required assignments for each week.

Failure to meet academic participation requirements may negatively impact an assignment and/or course grade. All recorded time stamps for assignment submissions, discussion board posts, and attendance records will reflect Mountain Time Zone. Acceptance of late work is at the discretion of the instructor and does not waive attendance requirements.

Writing Standards and Resources

Additional information and student writing resources can be found under the **Course Materials** link. Students should familiarize themselves with this information and these resources.

- All papers must be prepared primarily in Microsoft Word, **not** in Microsoft Works, WordPerfect, or another word processing program. *(However, Google Docs or OpenOffice may be used if they can provide the formatting that's required for all papers.)*
- All papers must be **double-spaced**, in **Times New Roman 12-point regular font**, and formatted according to **APA style** as shown in the approved style guide.

Note: All ideas that are not your own, whether quoted or paraphrased, must be documented in your paper in APA style, unless the idea is common knowledge. They must also be documented in an APA-formatted reference list at the end of the paper.