



What is a Good Response?

Using the discussion forums effectively without becoming overwhelmed by reading and responding to every student posting can be a challenge. So how do we move from sage on the stage to guide on the side in an online environment? The simple answer is to gradually move the discussion forums from instructor-led discussions to student-led discussions. However, first, it is necessary to determine what exactly constitutes a good response. For example, here are two student postings on a guest speaker:

- 1) "I agree with you completely. . . . I walked away from the presentation feeling like I will really make a difference as a teacher and that was a good feeling."
- 2) "Dr. Hansen's list of 'What we know about teaching' gave me a strong sense of what it means to be an artist in the classroom. . . . I am convinced that we—in this cohort—are people who want to create masterpieces in our classrooms, connecting with students in unique and potent ways."

Which response is the better response? Why? More importantly, how can we provide criteria that students could use to self-assess their online discussion responses to achieve higher-level thinking and more critical, insightful responses? The rubric on the following pages establishes a proficiency level to evaluate responses.

Response Assessment Criteria
<p>Highest Level of Proficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response reflects a clear awareness of the students' personal thinking. Explains in detail the sequence of thought they used when facing a task or problem. Provides a detailed analysis of how an awareness of their own thinking has enhanced their performance. • Response reflects an openness to adopting alternative perspectives. Identifies and articulates differing points of views. Demonstrates flexibility and objectivity. • Response reflects the ability to analyze differing perspectives. Explains the reasoning behind differing points of view. Considers and discusses alternative views rationally and impartially. • Response reflects the ability to construct support. Determines when it is appropriate to take a position on an issue and is able to justify the position by providing "careful and reasoned qualifications or restrictions." • Response reflects an effective interpretation of information. Interprets information in an accurate and insightful way. Cites readings and prior experiences and explains how these references extend and refine insights. • Response reflects an effective synthesis of information. Clearly identifies and explains the social, political, and/or professional implications of the information and insight.
<p>Medium Level of Proficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response somewhat reflects an awareness of the students' personal thinking. Provides a vague or incomplete description of how they might think through a task or problem. Provides on a few ideas about how new information could influence their performance. • Response reflects difficulty with adopting alternative perspectives. Identifies and articulates differing points of views as points of opposition. Demonstrates a somewhat inflexible position and an unexplained bias in discussing alternative points of view. • Response reflects development toward analyzing differing perspectives. Identifies and articulates issues that are not points of disagreement as important issues of disagreement.



- **Response reflects development toward constructing support.** Takes a strong position on an issue that does not necessarily warrant defense. Articulates a position but omits a clear line of reasoning to advance that perspective.
- **Response reflects an interpretation of information.** Refers to other readings or experiences, but references and explanations about how the information provides insight are underdeveloped or awkward.
- **Response reflects a synthesis of information.** Inconsistent or incomplete explanations of how the information will affect their own thought and the thought of others.

Lowest Level of Proficiency

- **Response reflects an emerging awareness of the students' personal thinking.** Provides confusing, little, or no report of the thinking an individual might use to solve a problem or complete a task. Falters in the explanation of how the new information will influence the current thought.
- **Response reflects difficulty with adopting alternative perspectives.** Demonstrates an inability to understand or discuss alternative points of view objectively. Often disagrees without defining the opposing viewpoint.
- **Response reflects an emerging ability to analyze differing perspectives.** Defends personal dominant and privileged beliefs, expectations, and values without sufficiently considering alternative points of view. Ignores explicit and implicit points of disagreement.
- **Response reflects an emerging ability to construct support.** Identifies and defends information that does not require support. Fails to identify a claim that necessitates support.
- **Response reflects an emerging ability to interpret information.** Reflections and statements are descriptive or reiterate what happened or what was said previously. Serious misinterpretations or no interpretation of the information evident. Comments are generally shallow and egocentric.

Using the Rubric

A simple way to use the rubric is to grade responses based on the proficiency levels. A more resourceful way is to have students evaluate their own responses using the rubric. For example, after several discussion forums, you might ask students to identify their three best responses and write a justification for their choices based on the rubric. You may then use this assignment to evaluate their work in online discussions.

The most significant element of this activity is that students are practicing self-assessment and self-directed learning. At the same time, the instructor does not have to respond to every single post that a student makes. The result is better learning without an inordinate amount of extra work for the instructor.

After explaining the rubric to students, an online discussion strategy might include the following:

1. Students read an article and respond to the article by posing a question.
2. Each student replies to a question posted by another student and closes the response with another question.
3. Students are divided into teams of two or three and each team is asked to respond to an unanswered question or create a new question to post in a discussion forum. The team is responsible for monitoring and facilitating the new forum.
4. Each group is evaluated on the quality of the ensuing discussion.
5. After these activities are completed, the instructor asks students to choose their three best responses and draft a written justification for their choices according to the rubric.
6. The instructor then evaluates individual participation based on the material the students submit.



Stated Objective or Purpose	Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting				Score
	...a beginning level of performance	...development and movement toward mastery of performance	...mastery of performance	...the highest level of performance	
Beginning 1	...development and movement toward mastery of performance	...mastery of performance	...the highest level of performance	Exemplary 4	
Developing 2	...a beginning level of performance	...development and movement toward mastery of performance	...mastery of performance	Accomplished 3	
Beginning 1	Single response posted late in the discussion	Two or more responses not evenly distributed or posted late in the discussion	Three or more responses generally posted early in the discussion but not regularly	Three or more responses posted at regular interval throughout the discussion	
IBWAT extend and enhance the Discussion	Expresses agreement or reiterates previous information that does not further the discussion	Responds to original post or previous responses, but offers little or no other information or questions to further the discussion	Builds upon responses from others and introduces limited examples, information, or questions to further the discussion	Builds upon responses from others and provides examples, additional statements, information, or questions to further the discussion	
IBWAT distinguish personal thinking and opinion	Expresses little or no awareness of their own thinking in relationship to other information and cannot find the relevance to their actions	Expresses an emerging awareness of their own thinking providing little explanation of how outside information will influence their actions	Expresses an awareness of their own thinking and relates it to other information that has influenced or could influence their actions	Expresses full awareness of their own thinking and how other information has enhanced their actions or influenced the action of others	
IBWAT interpret information	Provides descriptions or reiterations of previous information often resulting in misinterpretation and egocentric expression of ideas	Provides information with awkward references to readings, prior experiences, or other information resulting in undeveloped ideas	Provides information with limited references to readings, prior experiences, or other information to clarify and refine ideas	Provides information in accurate and insightful ways citing readings, prior experiences, and information from others to clarify and refine ideas	
IBWAT analyze differing perspectives	Ignores explicit and implicit points of disagreement and without sufficiently considering alternative ideas or points of view	Defends personal, dominant, or general ideas or beliefs with some consideration for alternative ideas or points of view	Demonstrates an openness and willingness to consider alternative ideas and points of view	Explains reasoning behind differing points of view or alternate ideas objectively, impartially, and a willingness to further develop new ideas	
IBWAT construct support or refer to other information to support convictions	Maintains a personal reference or information from the past to express and defend ideas	Expresses or defends information requiring little or no support or refers to insufficient sources to support and defend ideas	Expresses and defends position articulating reasoning behind that position with limited support	Expresses and defends an appropriate position justifying that position with careful and reasoned qualification and support	