Interaction Online

Asynchronous Discussion

In most online courses at Canisius, you will participate in discussions via a message board structure. The technical term for this is Asynchronous Discussion, because participants post and reply to posts at different times, for example, throughout a week. It is similar to message board and commenting systems throughout the web, although it is limited to the members of any particular class. Primarily you will compose text - writing - but you might also be asked to upload images or even create a video response.

A Typical Asynchronous Discussion Scenario

This short video clip shows a typical way that Asynchronous Discussions might be used in a course at Canisius College.

A Different Kind of Conversation

Asynchronous Discussion is in some ways similar to face-to-face conversations in classrooms. But there are important, and in some respects less-obvious ways that it is different.

- If in classroom discussions (or conversations about serious political, social, or economic topics) you tend to be quick to join in, and you enjoy making reasoned arguments "on the fly," you'll find that asynchronous discussions are an opportunity to be more reflective. Often, in conversation, we don't spend as much time considering other participants' comments, because we are too busy thinking of how to word our own response while we await our turn. In classroom discussions, particularly, we also consciously or unconsciously seek to persuade our teacher or professor, rather than our fellow students. In an asynchronous discussion, practice critical reading; carefully read and consider your classmates' input before composing your own posts and replies. Reflect upon your own posts before and while you write them. Consider drafting posts, and then allowing a few hours or even a day or two to revise them before actually posting. Writing is thinking, so if you spend more time clarifying your language, you're likely clarifying your ideas or arguments.

- If in classroom conversation you are less likely to join in, and usually prefer taking time to compose a thoughtful reply, asynchronous discussions are an ideal place for your strengths. Unlike classroom discussion, the conversation is not dominated by a few extroverted participants; everyone's posts and replies are granted equal weight in the discussion structure. Plus, you have more time to carefully consider what you wish to say, and to revise it before saying it. Capitalize on this; if you were reluctant to participate in the classroom, here's a chance for you to make contributions that help other students acquire perspective and make more meaning out of information presented in the class textbook, or videos. You may find that you are better at reasoned discussion and debate than you imagined, so here's a chance to build self-confidence in this sphere.

Netiquette

In many online and hybrid courses there is a lot of communication between students. Much of it is in asynchronous discussions, but you might also speak with students through (for example) video or audio posts, or web conferencing. On the web it can sometimes be difficult to gauge each other's tone. Here are guidelines for communicating online:

1. Consider what you wrote before posting. Is your post off topic? Is it in the appropriate space for that topic? Is it really meant for the entire class, or just the instructor? Discussions, like meetings, should be kept solely on-topic, to keep workloads manageable for everyone.

2. If you are upset about an issue, type it into a document, and save it to your drive. Come back to it after some time and re-read it. Is it insightful, and likely to inform or persuade? Will it really contribute to discussion?

3. Be brief but not too brief. Be an efficient writer, but write more than the bare minimum just to "get it done."

4. Mind your font. Internet conventions have developed where text formatting signals tone, volume, and emphasis. Writing in all caps represents SHOUTING or severe emphasis. Bold and italics can too, although perhaps less "loudly." Red dictates anger! Extra punctuation (???? or !!!!) can do likewise. In all cases these are overused, distracting, and needlessly dramatic. Save them for when you really need them.

5. Obey copyright laws. Do not steal original work by reposting it without investigating the terms of use established or requested by the author. Be mindful of sensitive information. Consider carefully what you are sharing about yourself or others on the web. Remember that the web rarely, if ever, "forgets" anything. There are obviously dangerous examples of inappropriate posting, but other information can be inadvertent, or seem trivial at the moment. In general, review everything you are about to post, before you post.
Last Step: Additional Resources