Drop-In Resources

Here you will find various resources developed by COLI that can be installed in various courses. Feel free to use them, in whole or modified, in your course.

- Asynchronous Discussions
- Netiquette
- Instructions for Productive Communication
- A Learning Contract

Asynchronous Discussions

Netiquette

If you have students communicating with each other via the internet, such as in asynchronous discussions, you should have some basic guidelines for behavior that help promote productive interaction, and community-building. Below is an example of Netiquette guidelines that you can adopt or adapt to your course.

Here are guidelines for communicating online:

1. Basically, consider what you wrote before posting. All that's below follows from this principle.
2. 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? In discussion, stay on topic and make contributions relevant, concise, and appropriate for the class to see.
3. 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, constructive, and likely to inform or persuade? Does it contribute?
4. Be courteous on the web (too). Online correspondence or conversation, like traditional varieties, benefits from courteousness and basic mutual respect. For example, learn and check spelling of others’ names.
5. Remember that tone can be difficult for a reader to judge. So keep your language direct and explicit. Be very careful with sarcasm or irony and consider whether such comments really contribute much to your post.
6. Be brief but not too brief. Message board posts are ideally between (around) 200-300 words. Write more than simply “getting it done.”
7. Mind your font. 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 dramatic. Save them for when you really need them.
8. Obey copyright laws. Do not steal original work by reposting it without investigating the terms of use established or requested by the author.
9. Remember that everyone is a newbie at some point, and deserves patience from more experienced or skilled participants. So if others don’t post with 100% adherence to the above, give them a little slack. Model the behavior you would like to see from others.
10. Be mindful of sensitive information. Consider carefully what you are sharing about yourself or others on the web. There are obviously dangerous examples of inappropriate posting, but other information can be inadvertent, or seem trivial at the moment. (For example, be careful what you include in a screenshot image.)
11. At Canisius College, we are “committed to providing an environment that values diversity and emphasizes the dignity and worth of every individual.” We must treat each other with respect and empathy, and we do not tolerate bigotry, intimidation, rudeness, or cruelty. This is outlined in our Community Standards and Policies, and our course syllabus, but more importantly is a core part of our Ignatian ethics. As in our classrooms, we will commit to these values in this online course space.

* Adjust post length in your instructions to your course plan.

Instructions for Productive Communication

Beyond community standards, you may wish to have a set of instructions that stipulate what constitutes productive contributions in your course discussions. Here is a sample set of guidelines you may adopt or adapt:

The best discussion posts or replies (that consistently get the highest grade) adhere to the following:

- Stay on topic.
- Be original. Simple yes, no, or verbatim agreement with a previous post, are insufficient answers.
- Go beyond “cut-and-paste” recitation. Consider the question and compose a thoughtful answer, beyond simply retelling what the source said.
- Avoid speculation or unsupported arguments, and incorporate evidence from course content or other reputable sources.
- Make heretofore unnoticed or unstated connections between course concepts, or between course concepts and media outside the course.
- Bringing in outside material, including things you’ve read or engaged with in another class, is fine. But make it relevant to the topic or concepts at hand.
- Perhaps pose an intelligent question, rather than a statement, based on a critical reading of course content. If you can describe how close analysis of our subject leaves you with a good question (that we may not be able to answer in the context of our course), that’s a potentially good “answer,” too.

Remember, D2L has a rubric engine (see the Self-Paced Training Set) which makes it easy to grade with a push-button rubric, once you’ve entered the rubric criteria and levels into D2L’s rubric’s tool. Here’s a basic example of a rubric from a history course. For your own class, you will likely make more specific descriptions relevant to the course subject, content, and procedures.
One last tip: Create a sample post so students can see what a quality contribution, in accordance with your expectations, will look like.

A Learning Contract

A Learning Contract can help inspire students by politely reminding them why they are taking the course, and what they will get out of it. This can be built using a quiz engine, such as in D2L (like this one) or perhaps a Google Form survey. Obviously there is no guarantee that this will improve every student's level of effort, but when students encounter it in your class, many will get the sense that this course is an investment, and that the professor is sincerely interested in their academic success.

Start with some preliminary instructions, that explain how they should complete the contract. For example:

By checking the boxes and clicking "save," you indicate that you have read and understand this course's requirements for students.

Then, you can use multiple choice questions that allow multiple (all) answer options to be chosen. (In D2L, these are called multi-select questions.) These can include, for example, questions that begin:

I understand that in this course I will be learning about web-based pedagogy. I agree to work toward and attempt to achieve the following learning goals:

Within this course, I agree to do the following:

After this course is over, I will strive to:

Here's an example:

Within this course, I agree to do the following:

- take responsibility for my own learning.
- visit the D2L course space four or more times each week.
- read and interact with the weekly content.
- post and reply in the weekly discussions with original and constructive input.
- complete all of the weekly activities.
- be an active participant in the community.

Lastly, create a short-answer text question where students can "sign" the contract:

To sign, type in your name.

Tip: Learning Contracts work best if also accompanied by a professor's pledge, in the syllabus or elsewhere, to teach according to the best principles, ethics, and methods of their discipline, and the learning goals and objectives outlined in the syllabus.