COM4425 Gender, Race and Media
Online Participation Guidelines & Tips

Everyone who teaches online or hybrid classes has a different theory about how to best approach the discussion component of any course. Here, I will explain what I expect from you in terms of quality, content and professionalism. Remember: there will be at least one discussion component to every module.

Goals of Discussion Postings

Why do I devote so much time to discussions in this class? There are more than a few good reasons, such as:

- Discussions facilitate **student-to-student interaction**. I want y'all to get to know each other. One of the best things about college is collaborating with (and arguing with) your comrades!
- Discussions facilitate **instructor-to-student interaction**. I want to get to know y'all. I may not respond to every single post, but I will always read your discussions.
- Discussion posts allow you to **practice writing skills**. Like most things in life - the more you practice it, the better you get at it.
- Discussion posts allow you to **practice critical thinking skills**. Thinking is good. We should do more of it! The articles I've chosen for inclusion in this course should, at the very least, make you think about our course content.
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Do our online discussions count for a grade?

Yes. Discussions count for 50% of your final grade at the end of the semester. Take them seriously!

When do I need to post responses to prompts?

Your discussions will almost always be due on ***Sundays at 11:59:00 p.m. each week.*** However, many times, discussion prompts require you to do a good bit of reading or research before answering the question. Plan your time accordingly and make sure you are allowing yourself enough time to write thoughtful responses. I highly recommend posting your responses over the weekend or, better yet, *on the Friday before they are due*.

Quality, Professionalism and Tone of Posts

Your posts should be conversational, yet professional, in tone. You aren't writing an academic article in your discussion postings. You're having a discussion with your peers and professor. A good sense of humor is important in this class, but sometimes *using* humor isn't the best way to get your point across. Be mindful of how your humor may be misinterpreted by your audience--especially given the sensitive nature of many of the concepts and issues we discuss in

this course. Remember, an online environment makes nonverbal cues tricky (if not impossible) to decode, even with the wide range of emoticons and other clever codes we have at our disposal. You may disagree with each other in the discussions, but be tactful and professional in your disagreements. Telling someone you disagree with their interpretation of a scholarly article is fine; telling someone he smells funny is generally not.

Adhere to standard conventions of grammar, style and spelling. *Dont write posts like u wud a txt, kthx.* Spelling and grammar count in the grading of your posts.

(*Sorry, I need a minute to recover from writing that last sentence. I'm "that person" who makes sure my text messages, Facebook posts, and email responses are grammatically correct. **shudders***)

Aside from the basics - good spelling, good grammar, professionally conversational tone, no insults, no text-speak - I expect your posts to be **substantive.**

What do I mean by substantive?
I expect you to use the discussion posts to say something important and meaningful. Single-word or single-phrase posts are not substantive. One-sentence posts that are basically saying "I agree with what Sam said" are not substantive. For some discussions, you will need to write a paragraph. For some, you'll need two. And some may even require three or more. Regardless of the length, I expect that the posts say something relevant and insightful. Prove to me that you've thought about my question, prompt, or reading and can come up with something cool to say about it.
You should also make every effort to say something *original*. This is why it's to your advantage to *pop in the forums as early as possible*. Essentially saying what everyone else has said will likely result in a deduction of points.

Think about it this way: In an in-person course, you might nod your head to show your agreement with a comment a student said out loud or shake your head "no" to show you disagree with the comment. Unfortunately, those sorts of nonverbal reactions don't translate the exact same way into the online environment. It's absolutely fine to, on occasion, just post a "yes!" or "you're right!" or "I don't see it that way" or "if we were on Facebook, I'd 'like' this comment." You certainly won't be docked points for having a few of those posts thrown into the discussion for the good of the order (although if that's *all* you post, you will be docked points!). What's more helpful is if you can say "*yes and...*" or "*that reminds me of...*" or "*I had a different experience one time...*" or "*my interpretation of that was this instead of that...*"

How are we evaluated?

As your instructor, I will be jumping in to your discussions frequently with comments or to answer questions that arise. However, I will not directly respond to every student in the discussion forum. Instead, ***the direction of the discussion is up to you***. Substantive discussions will happen only if everyone contributes, well, *substantially*. Even though I'm looking for an original post from everyone in most discussion forums, I want you to focus on saying something that will give others a chance to respond. Ask a question. Offer an example (or link!) that ties into something you read. Tell me your opinion about the prompt/reading/case study. Treat the discussions like a real-life face-to-face conversation with your peers - which is what they are, essentially.

Let's start with what will earn you **zero credit**, which is ***no response at all.***

Moving on up... you'll receive **partial credit** for the following:

- Your post(s) contain numerous grammatical/typographic errors (**pro tip**: if you're uber prone to those pesky types of mistakes, I suggest you compose your responses in Word, which has excellent auto-correct, grammar check and spell check features. Cut & paste the version of the response you know is correct, and you should be good to go!).
- Your posts lack depth of critical thinking (you can parrot back what I asked or what was in the reading, but your post didn't demonstrate that you thought about the reading very much).
- Your posts don't *really* make sense in the context of the discussion (I ask about the effectiveness of Nike's "swoosh" logo and you *only* talk about your last 5K which you ran in Mizunos because Nikes just aren't any good as running shoes).

Now, what I hope (and expect!) of all of you is detailed here in the **full credit** category:
- Your original post was free from grammatical and typographical errors.
- At least one of your posts furthered the discussion in some way.
- Your post was interesting and insightful.
- Your post made sense in the context of the discussion (in the previous example, you tie your story about your last 5K back into Nike's swoosh campaign in some way).
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Still confused? [Let me know](.) I am always here to clarify concerns or answer questions.