

Quick Tips to Improve Forum Post Quality

Forum posts are a go-to activity in many courses but often generate disappointing results. Here is a list of the most common problems with quick tips provided:

- 1. Problem:** Students wait for peers to respond to the forum before writing their posts.
Quick Tip: Change the settings of the forum post to a Q and A format. A Q and A forum requires students to post once before viewing other students' postings. This prevents students from reading other posts before preparing their initial post.
- 2. Problem:** Students wait until a few minutes before the deadline to post their initial response and some students have trouble finding a peer to reply to before the forum closes.
Quick Tip: Create separate due dates for the initial response and the reply to a peer. For instance, make the initial response due on Thursday and the reply to a peer due on Sunday. This gives students time to thoughtfully reply to a peer instead of rushing to finish before the deadline.
- 3. Problem:** The first few students to post receive most of the peer responses. Many students receive no peer responses.
Quick Tip: Require students to respond to a peer that has not yet received feedback. This prevents an overload of responses on the first few posts.
- 4. Problem:** Forum post quality is low.
Quick Tip: Create a simple rubric highlighting 2-3 things you value most. For instance, 50% of the points could be assigned to the application of course content and 50% of the points could be assigned to depth of discussion.
- 5. Problem:** The reply to a peer's post is mostly an "I agree" or "Great job" response.
Quick Tip: Give students specific instructions to guide them in their reply to a peer. Without more direction, the result is generally a list of generic comments. Here are a few examples:
 - Take the opposing view of a peer's post. You do not have to agree with this opposing view. Which points would you dispute in the peer's post? Why?
 - Respond to a peer's post in one of the following roles: a politician, and environmentalist, a senior citizen, or a farmer. What would their chosen role agree/disagree with in the peer's post?
 - Using two resources provided from the course and one resource that you find outside of the course, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your peer's post.
- 6. Problem:** My class is too large to have an effective forum post.
Quick Tip: Divide large classes into smaller groups so that students only see a small subset of posts from the class.
- 7. Problem:** I don't have time to grade forum posts.

Quick Tip: Make the forum post a low stakes activity that you grade pass/fail. After you read student responses, record a video debriefing the forum.

Alternatively, grade the forum posts on completion only but in the context of a scaffolding assignment that builds into a larger writing assignment.

8. **Problem:** I want my students to be able to easily decide whether to use text or video to communicate with their peers.

Quick Tip: Use VoiceThread instead of a forum. VoiceThread is a collaborative tool that allows students to post comments through text or video at the exact time that an idea is being presented.

Enhancing student engagement with both their peers and the course is a challenge. Fortunately, you can make forum posts more effective by adjusting forum settings, making forum prompts more specific, or changing the forum platform to VoiceThread.

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