



Facilitating Successful Bulletin Board Assignments

What are bulletin board discussions?

Bulletin board discussions are assignments in which students communicate asynchronously with each other and the instructor. They communicate via an online bulletin board, also referred to as a virtual discussion area. Instructors use bulletin boards to simulate discussions that take place in a traditional classroom. The discussions can be organized around course topics, readings, study questions, etc.

Are bulletin boards used in online courses only?

No. They can be used very successfully as a supplement to traditional classroom instruction. Ever had a great class discussion cut short because the class session ended? Continue the discussion online.

What's the pedagogical value of bulletin boards?

Interactions among students and between students and instructors are powerful factors in learning. In asynchronous environments, students have more time for reflection before they post, and thus, their postings tend to be thoughtful. Other benefits include:

- With increased time, their postings tend to have good spelling and grammar.
- Since people seemingly have a need to present themselves favorably to others, student effort increases with an audience that is not just the instructor.
- Postings can be recorded, which means that students can save them in a file and print them out if they wish.
- Students can't be interrupted like they can in a traditional classroom.
- Shy students seem to be comfortable communicating in this manner.

Give me an example of a bulletin board assignment.

Prior to an assigned reading on gun control, conduct a survey with your class to determine how many are in favor of it and how many are opposed. After the reading assignment is due, go to the bulletin board, and create a topic called "Gun Control". Give the results of the survey, and ask students if they are in favor or opposed to it and why. In the defense of their answers, have them analyze, synthesize, or evaluate the material in the reading. Require each student to post replies under the topic.

You can also have students create their own controversial topics, such as "Abortion", incorporating their opinions and have other students respond to those posts. You can even put them in small groups, and assign a different topic to each group.

What are some tips that will help me lead successful bulletin board discussions?

1. Prepare by writing objectives for your discussion.
2. Let students know the depth of the postings that you expect from them. Maybe show them some quality and non-quality postings.
3. Make sure students follow your rules for [Netiquette](#).

4. Early in the course, establish a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere for the class. Also, let students know how you want them to refer to you. Do you want to be called Professor Wilson, Mr. Wilson, or simply Grady?
5. Ensure that students are prepared for each discussion by assigning activities, such as textbook reading and web assignments, ahead of time.
6. To ensure participation, give credit for posts and replies.
7. Keep students on topic by designing questions meant to elicit on-top discussion and by rewording the original question or comment when student responses are drifting off-topic.
8. Provide discussion summaries on a regular basis.
9. Give prompt and specific feedback to posts that warrant them. Stay away from the "Good job!" response because students might view you as too lazy to write more.
10. If you have negative comments for a student, communicate them privately, not in an open forum. While in the open forum, keep your comments positive.
11. Encourage students to facilitate discussions from time to time. Some have a lot of experience in given topics and would love to share their knowledge with the rest of the class.