

Quality Contributions to Our Discussions

Use these suggestions and models to help formulate your response to another person's project, or their comments to your project. Be sure that everyone in class has gotten at least some response from others. First respond to those who have gotten no assistance, then join in the discussion of other projects. No one likes feeling left out of the discussion. Be a friend by making sure that everyone is a part of interaction.

General principles

1. Use the sandwich approach in responding to others. Start with what you like about the project; give some true, hearty approval. Next ask your leading questions, or give your input. It must always be gracious. This is a good place to use passive voice sentences. Finally, end with some short word of praise and encouragement. Sandwich you questions and helpful suggestion between these two complements.
2. **Any questions that you ask should be open ended.** (They must not call for a binary [yes/no] answer.)
3. **It must evidence additional thought and/or additional research on your part.**
4. **It must to invite continuing thought and/or research by the others unless it is a summary statement posted to conclude a long discussion.**
5. Point out apparent flaws in others' arguments by asking them to explain what they mean, or by pointing out some possible contradiction.
6. All contributions must gracious and not hostile, even if you strongly disagree.

Call for a display of thinking or feeling:

1. To what extent would you agree that ...?
2. What are some ways ...?
3. What evidence do you have for ...?
4. What are your reasons for ...?
5. How would you answer the objection that ...?
6. What examples would you cite to support your statement that ...?
7. What sources would you cite to support your statement that ...?
8. How do you see your idea about ... working out in the following situation? [Use to show a weakness in the application or author's statements.]
9. How do you feel that ... relates to our discussion here? [Name something in the readings, current events, or the class postings.]
10. What are your reasons for saying ...?
11. Why do you agree (or disagree) on that point?
12. How are you defining the term "..."?
13. What do you mean by that expression "..."?
14. It seems to me that the argument is inconsistent. Could you explain...?
15. Please clarify what you mean by "...".
16. What are you implying when you say "..."?
17. It appears that you and ... are contradicting each other. Please expand your remarks to show how you do agree, or explain the basis of you disagreement.

18. It seems to me like you are contradicting yourself on the issue of Please explain how you are able to resolve the tension between ... and

Extending and summarizing statements:

1. I would summarize our discussion here by saying
2. Another issue that we should probably discuss here is [Now make an opening statement on that issue.]
3. Another resource I found helpful on this topic is [Now go on to explain why and how it is helpful.]
4. What we are discussing here seems to apply to [name some current event in your church/area/country/world]. [Now state how you see it applying.]
5. I am wondering if the converse of this is also true/valid. It seems that
6. Another position that might be valid is

Calls for clarification:

1. Will someone please help me understand the distinction between ... and ...?
2. I don't understand what you mean by Will you please explain?

Assisting others

Make sure you have ASSISTED at least two others. Telling someone they did either a good or bad job is NOT assisting. Rather, it is a blessing or a curse. Assisting means making constructive suggestions, or extending what they have written by suggesting additions. One of the best ways to assist is asking questions that will help the other person think through what they have written. (These are great! They are harder to write, and they make the other person do more good hard thinking, but are a much better way to be helpful.) Just make sure that your question reflects your own deep thinking on this topic. Trivial or surface level questions waste everyone's time. Your questions should help everyone in the class learn more about the topic.

Also make sure that you have responded to everyone who asked you a question or comment your work. Failing to do that is not just impolite; it means that you are rejecting someone's attempt to lovingly help you grow in wisdom and understanding.