

Discussion Facilitation Project

Establishing Instructor Presence through Online Discussions

My team's Discussion Facilitation Project – *Establishing Instructor Presence through Online Discussions* – involved a role play where learners were asked to engage with each other on a topic as both the student and the instructor. Learners were given practice in responding to 'students' as their 'instructors' by applying instructor interaction strategies with thoughtful reply posts that stimulated critical thinking and further next-level discussion.

Big Take-Away: Online discussion development takes time and intentionality. It isn't as simple as posting a discussion question with the instructions to "answer the question and respond to one other student." While creating our Discussion Facilitation, I believe each of us as team members were surprised by the additional time we needed to invest. It takes planning and revisions and rewordings to make an online discussion into a vibrant, interactive conversation, with clear and concise instructions, and with both initial post prompts and reply post prompts. We also spent extra time on the design and look-and-feel of the discussion page in order to add interest and appeal to what would otherwise be dull descriptions and instructions. The added effort and energy paid off, as we received positive responses and enthusiasm. Going forward, as an instructional designer helping faculty build online courses, I have some additional strategies that I can share in how to develop effective and engaging online discussions.

Screenshots below:



Discussion: ***Establishing Instructor Presence through Online Discussions***

This discussion forum is about practice – practice – practice!

Learning Objective: Students will identify best practices for how to use online discussions to establish instructor presence.

Think back to our [Week 1 lesson: Short Lesson #3 Instructor Presence](#). As instructors we understand the importance of creating our presence in online courses. In this discussion we will be putting our instructor presence to the test as it relates to being active in the discussion forums whether text-based threaded discussions, audio/video-based discussions (VoiceThread, Flipgrid), or synchronous discussions (Zoom).

This will be a two-part discussion exercise:

- **Part One:** In order to practice instructor presence, we need students. First, you will take on the **role of a student** responding to a discussion prompt posted by your instructor.
- **Part Two:** This is the focus of our discussion exercise. Next you will assume the **role of the instructor**. You will respond to individuals and/or student groups by applying one or more of the best practices suggested in the resource materials provided below.

Discussion Facilitators: Our role as your discussion facilitators will be to give you feedback on your “instructor” role responses to your “students.” We will offer further tips and tools for enhancing your instructor presence and provide additional resources.

Review the following resources prior to participating, paying close attention to the tips and best practices for instructor presence in discussions (You will use these later):

- **Video:** [Best Practices for Instructor Interaction in Online Discussions \(6 min\)](#) – Aaron Johnson, Assoc. Dean of Ed Tech, Denver Seminary, and author of: [Excellent Online Teaching](#) and [Online Teaching with Zoom](#) (recently #1 in Amazon’s Best Sellers in College and University Education).
 - **Resource PDF:** [Best Practices & Go-To Prompts–Online Discussions](#)
- **Video:** [Plan & Facilitate Effective Online Discussions \(3 min\)](#) – Flower Darby, Faculty Contributor to ACUE’s Community of Professional Practice.
- **Article:** [Instructor Presence: Discussion Forum Responses](#) – Granite State College, NM, Top 100 of U.S. News Best Online Programs, 2020.
- **Article:** [Understanding the Instructor’s Role in Facilitating Online Discussions](#) – *Faculty Focus*, Michelle Everson, PhD.

LET'S BEGIN!

STEP 1: Be the Student

Please post a brief response to the following discussion prompt. Feel free to extend your student role by replying to other "students" as well.

PROMPT: ***Briefly (2-3 sentences) describe a recent challenge you've experienced due to the COVID-19 crisis. (This can be real or fictional.)***

NOTE: Identify yourself in the student role. For example: **Student Soister**

Please complete Step 1 by mid-week in order to give your colleagues time to respond to your posts as instructors.

STEP 2: Be the Instructor

Now test out your instructor presence skills. After selecting a few of the "best practices" from the videos and articles, reply to at least two "students" or "student" groups

NOTE: Identify yourself in the instructor role. For example: **Instructor Cooper**

Please complete Step 2 by Saturday, October 3 or earlier in order to give your Discussion Facilitators time to respond to your Instructor posts.