Questions to Prompt Online Discussions

“Thoughtful questions [posed to students] should do two things:

1. Invite students to show what they have learned and what they understand from texts, lectures, online material and other online discussions
2. Encourage students to explain how new learning might influence their thoughts and actions at home, work, and in the larger community.”

(Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, p. 237)

Sample discussion prompt:

“How convincingly does Spring (2003) demonstrate that American schools from the past were intent on denying and even destroying the home cultures of their students, especially students from minority groups? Tell two brief stories about your own school or a school you know today; one that shows how the history Spring describes still affects us, and one that shows how things have changed.”

(Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, p. 238)

Sources for this handout:


Designing Online Discussions: Key Questions | The Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.). Retrieved February 8, 2016, from https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/sheridan-center/teaching-learning/course-design/learning-technology/designing-online-discussions-key-questions

Questions to Facilitate Online Discussions

Redirecting
- How does your observation relate to the topic?
- What’s the connection between your comment and ____ [ex: the previous comment]?
- Can you explain how your idea is helping us make sense of this topic/subject/idea?
- It seems we’ve wandered from our main topic. What can we do to get back on track?
- Who can share a question or comment that will help us regain our focus?

Fostering evidence-based reasoning and critical thinking
- How do you know this is true?
- What (additional) evidence do you have to support your claim/comment/statement?
- What assumptions may we be making? How could our interpretation be different with another set of assumptions?
- What don’t we know? How might this information help us consider this issue in another way?
- How else might you interpret the topic/previous comment?
- What are the sources of that point of view?
- What have we studied that confirms what you are saying?
- What reasoning process did you use to reach your conclusion?

Summarizing & Synthesizing
- What are the two most important ideas that emerged from this discussion?
- What remains unresolved or contentious about this topic?
- What do you understand better as a result of this discussion?
- How has this discussion changed the way you think about this topic?
- What’s the most memorable thing you’ve read in this thread?
- What other question(s) does this discussion prompt you to ask?
- What do you know now that you didn’t know before you participated in this discussion?
- What assumptions did you have about the topic that this discussion confirmed or questioned?