



Research-Based Strategies Can Help Instructors Design and Facilitate Effective Asynchronous Online Discussions

What is this Research About?

Online asynchronous discussions are used in both online and in-person courses. Research has shown that asynchronous online discussions can benefit students by providing them time to reflect on their answers and opportunities for writing practice, critical thinking, and peer-peer interactions and learning. The main challenges associated with discussions are a lack of engagement or surface level engagement with discussion questions. In this review article, the authors summarize strategies instructors can use to overcome these challenges and design and facilitate effective discussions.

What did the Researchers Do?

The authors reviewed existing research about online asynchronous discussions and summarized the findings of 70 articles. Many of the research studies included in the review took place in psychology courses; however, the results can be applied to online discussions in different disciplines.

What did the Researchers Find?

Research has shown that asynchronous online discussions can benefit students by providing them time to reflect on their answers and opportunities for writing practice, critical thinking, and peer-peer interactions and learning. The main challenges associated with discussions are a lack of engagement or engagement with discussion questions at a surface level only. To improve student engagement in asynchronous online discussions, the authors summarized strategies instructors can use to 1) clearly communicate expectations and the purpose of discussions, 2) set a structure for discussions, 3) create effective discussion prompts, and 4) facilitate discussions (see How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom section for detailed suggestions).

SoTL

Snapshot

A synopsis of a scholarship of teaching and learning journal article

➔ How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom

The following strategies can help engage students in asynchronous online discussions:

- Communicate expectations for discussions by sharing a rubric and/or sample discussion posts and setting deadlines for initial posts and follow-up posts.
- Divide students into smaller discussion groups to help foster more connections between students and to make discussion board threads easier to follow.
- When writing discussion prompts, ask questions that will lead to many different answers as opposed to one correct answer.
- Add variety to discussion prompts by including videos, structured debates, or asking students to respond from specific points of view.
- As the instructor, avoid posting too little or too much on the discussion board. Posting too often or agreeing/disagreeing with posts can discourage further contributions from students.
- Posts from the instructor should aim to move the discussion forward by highlighting themes and asking further thought-provoking questions.
- Provide guidance to students for how they can respond to posts in a way that will move the discussion forward. This can include providing students with a list of generic questions that they can use. For sample questions, view Table 5 in [Aloni & Harrington \(2018\)](#).

➔ Citation

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➔ Keywords

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