

Assessment Tools Center for Effective Teaching and Learning

Writing a prompt for discussion postings. This is a classic discussion model where a student posts to a discussion forum, blog or wiki based upon an instructor's prompt. Consider what you are asking students to do when they respond to your guiding questions. When writing a prompt:

1. **Review course goals.** All question prompts should encourage the types of knowledge students need to know and practice in the class. What is the purpose of your prompt? What do you hope to achieve by asking the question?
2. **Consult Bloom's Taxonomy.** Reflect on whether students are being asked a question to which they must respond in order to show knowledge, evaluation, synthesis or creation. Some questions have no answer. Some questions require only factual answers.
3. **Consider the following types of questions:**
 - a. Problem-solving questions where students tackle a challenge or current issue;
 - b. Reflection questions where students may bring prior knowledge to bear on a topic;
 - c. Seminar-style questions that use the Socratic method where students pose a question for others to summarize or clarify based upon course materials;
 - d. Evaluative questions where students must judge an issue;
 - e. Point-of-view questions where students take a defensible position from opposite or competing points of view;
 - f. Developmental questions where students progressively tackle a course topic.
4. **Frame the question carefully:** Frame the question within the structure of the course, or course materials, such as a reading, so students have a 'hook' or way of structuring their answer. Structure the question appropriately so you get the best possible answer. Use guiding verbs if you expect deep answers to a prompt (See Bloom's list of verbs). Tell students when and if you expect them to make an argument—or to use examples to ground their argument.
5. **State the format:** What form of writing will it require? How do you want students to structure their responses? How long should a response be? Will students be graded on grammar? Organization?
6. **Practice writing questions.** Practice a prompt with students in the classroom: Show them what a good answer looks like. They may not know.
7. **Create a scoring guide (rubric) for your prompt.** Determine specific criteria or standards you will use to measure the quality of student work. Writing a rubric is a good way of identifying whether you are capturing the intended learning based upon your prompt.

Consider other venues. Discussion prompts should evoke thoughtful responses. If your question can be answered simply then you may want to consider polling software or student response system such as clickers.