Writing Effective
Discussion Prompts

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## Overview

Discussion prompts are open questions used to encourage learner engagement with key topics, facilitate reflection on personal experiences or points of view, and promote rich discussion between learners. The principles of discussion prompts can be used on all learning platforms (as appropriate).

## Recommendations

* Link content to your module’s learning outcomes. Discussion prompts should enrich the learning experience by allowing learners to further explore or reflect on the step content.
* Avoid unnecessary and trivial questions. All discussion prompts should be for the purpose of learning or reflection. They should be relevant to the topic in question.
* Focus on a specific issue/problem and provide clear guidance on what is being asked of learners when writing their responses.
* Allow learners to offer different perspectives without feeling guided towards a typical (or expected) response.
* Consider including questions that prompt learners to reflect and provide surprising or unexpected responses (which remain persuasive or plausible).
* Provide consistent instructional text when guiding learners in how and where they should post their responses.
* Encourage learners to comment on other learners’ posts. This can help them to feel part of your module’s learning community.

## Types

Each of the classification types on the next page (based on content from courses developed by the Digital Education Service) can be used within a single course (as pedagogically appropriate). Their use is not limited to the course level shown in each of the examples on the following pages.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Type** | **Description** | **Definition** |
| 1 | **Learner initiation** | Simple introductory prompt which enables learners to initiate themselves with the social learning aspect of the course in an unintimidating way. |
| 2 | **Step content-related personal reflection** | Requires learners to reflect on their own experiences in relation to the step content. This discussion type should include an introductory question and further prompts to aid the learners’ thought processes before they respond. |
| 3 | **Step content-related exercise feedback** | Learners provide responses after undertaking an exercise within the step. For example, a case study could prompt learners to consider key lessons to be learned or provide their own solutions to a given problem. |
| 4 | **External content-related research** | Requires learners to use related external resources to conduct research when responding to question prompt(s). Clear instructions on how to access the external resource(s) must be provided (or how to approach finding external resources – worded appropriately for the level of course). |

## Examples

### Type 1 – Learner initiation

Example 1: From Innovation: The Food Industry (Schools course)

**Have your say:**

What are your reasons for joining this course? Please also let us know where you are from – this course is open to learners worldwide. Share and discuss your responses with other learners in the Comments section.

Example 2: From Exploring Cancer Medicines (Schools course)

**Have your say:**

If you wanted to find out about cancer medicines, where would you start and what sources would you use? Spend some time considering this. Share and discuss your responses with other learners in the Comments section.

### Type 2 – Step content-related personal reflection

From Critical Thinking at University (Skills course – Year 1 UG/School leavers)

**Have your say:**

How did the ideas presented in this video compare with your understanding of critical thinking? Share your own discoveries, developments or events from your lifetime or personal experience that are important to you. Would these have happened without critical thinkers?

● How would you add criticality to your personal experiences or observations in daily life?

● How would you go about adding criticality to your personal experiences and observations?

Share and discuss your responses with other learners in the Comments section.

### Type 3 – Step content-related exercise feedback

From Transport Systems: Global Issues and Future Innovations (Transition-to-masters course)

**Have your say:**

Thinking about the Brazilian case study, consider your responses to the following questions:

● What key lessons can be learned?

● Do you have any wider recommendations for how vulnerable road users should feature in transport planning?

Share and discuss your responses with other learners in the Comments section.

### Type 4 – External content-related research

From Causes of Human Disease: Nutrition and Environment (Credit-bearing course)

**Have your say:**

Take the opportunity to research the occurrence of BPA and its potential toxicity. To begin, access the links in the See Also section. You should address the following questions in your research:

● What are the main sources of BPA in the environment?

● How frequent is human exposure to BPA?

● What are the possible effects of chronic exposure to BPA?

Share and discuss your responses with other learners in the Comments section.