

INTEGRATING LOW-STAKES WRITING IN LARGE COLLEGE CLASSROOMS SUPPLEMENT 1: CTOOLS FORUM POST GUIDELINES

Throughout the term, study questions will be posted on CTools Forums that you must respond to before the next class. The goal of these posts is to deepen your engagement with the reading material and course concepts. These responses will be graded on the quality of your engagement rather than your prose. The following guidelines offer important considerations to keep in mind when adding your post to CTools Forums.

- Responses must be posted to CTools sometime before the class when the readings are due. Late responses receive no credit.
- You can take a “CTools Pass” once during the term and this will not affect your grade. To take a Pass, simply post a message for that week that says, “I’m taking my pass today.” However, you still must read the readings for the week as well as the week’s question, plus at least three peoples’ responses to it.
- Your responses will not receive individual grades. Instead, I will tell you your cumulative CTools Forums grade at midterm. You may, however, ask me about your grade at any time.
- Your response must include a reference to at least one other classmate’s response for that day’s reading and question (unless you are one of the first three students to respond to the question). Vary the people to whom you respond each day.
- Your response to your classmates should be thoughtful and respectful. Any responses that personally attack or ridicule a classmate will receive no credit. If you disagree with another students’ point, state your position and back it up—do not criticize other students’ points of view.
- You should spend approximately 45 minutes on each response, which includes the time it takes you to log in, read my question, read at least three other peoples’ responses (unless you’re among the first three people to post), and then write your response.

Grading Criteria for CTools Forums

The “A” response: Does everything the “B” or “C” response does but goes beyond: makes connections to broader ideas or issues; makes several keen observations or comments about very specific parts of the text; asks provocative, non-trivial questions about the text and offers provisional answers based on evidence; uses a confident, relaxed, yet highly professional tone; shows some concern for having a central point and a method of organization, but is mostly interested in revealing a mind hard at work.

The “B” response: Does everything the “C” response does but with more depth, interest, and concern for clarity and writing style: makes many more specific references to the readings and to classmates’ ideas; asks good questions and offers “educated guesses” about the answers; uses appropriate semi-formal language and style, writes clearly, and is edited for errors.

The “C” response: Answers the question thoughtfully, with references to the text and to classmates’ ideas; is clear enough to read without effort. The “C” response may show evidence of haste, or otherwise show signs that the writer has not given the assignment significant time or mental energy.

The “D” response: Either does not answer the question or answers it very briefly or superficially. The “D” response shows no “hard” evidence that the writer even did the reading.

Some strategies that can lead to an interesting, in-depth “A” response:

1. Go beyond the question asked and explain what interests/confuses/delights/enrages (etc.) you about the reading.
2. Explain what you think the text is “about” or explore the main argument of the text.
3. Discuss what factors influence your reaction and understanding. These can include personal factors as well as content you’re learning in other classes, or issues in the media/news, etc.
4. Ask engaging questions your classmates can respond to.

How to use the CTools Forums page:

1. Go to CTools Forums page and click on the topic for the day.
2. Read over the question.
3. If you are not one of the first three students to post, read over the conversations already posted by clicking on the header for each one.
4. Click the “Start a New Conversation” to write your own response to the question. To reply to another student’s post, click on the “Reply” button above the message.

Adapted from Jennifer Lutman’s CTools Discussion Post Guidelines