
5

Develop a Dynamic Learning Community Online

Once a teacher has defined his or her own role in the online community, it is important to support students in developing their social presence online. Students must feel confident in their ability to participate in the class dialogue as valued and unique members of the group. This can be achieved if a safe space is created, clear expectations are established, and opportunities for relationship building are provided at the start of the work done online.

Creating and Maintaining a Safe Space Online

Most teachers begin the year by establishing clear guidelines for behavior and creating a safe environment in their physical classrooms to ensure students feel safe, supported, and respected. This necessary work done in the first month of school is critical to lowering students' affective filters and laying a strong foundation on which to build throughout the year.

Just as it is essential to begin the school year by creating a safe space in the physical classroom, establishing an online community must be done with intention if it is to be successful and sustainable. As Garrison (2007) states in “Online Community of Inquiry Review: Social, Cognitive, and Teaching Presence Issues,” a sense of community is “essential to support collaborative learning and discourse associated with higher levels of learning” (p. 61). Creating this sense of community is not a simple task for the facilitator, but it is “significantly associated with perceived learning” (p. 61). When students feel safe in a community, they are able to begin forming “personal and purposeful relationships” (p. 63), which are the foundation of developing one’s social presence. When a social presence is established within an online community, students perceive themselves as individuals who are capable of engaging with their peers in an authentic and meaningful way. This makes prioritizing the development of personal relationships fundamental at the start of any work online.

Many teachers who are “digital immigrants”—“not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most of the new technology” (Prensky, 2001, pp. 1–2)—feel uncertain about their abilities to teach students how to engage online. It can be intimidating to teach using technology when a growing number of students are proficient users.

Mark Prensky (2001) first introduced the terms *digital natives* and *digital immigrants* to define today’s students and, by contrast, their teachers. He argues that “our students today are all ‘native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (p. 1). Despite being technology natives who regularly engage in this medium, students do not necessarily have the skills needed to communicate and collaborate with peers online. They spend hours updating Facebook pages, sending text messages, and e-mailing, but few students know how powerful their words are. They rapid-fire messages to “friends” but rarely see the look on the faces of people receiving those messages. It is critical to developing a social presence and respectful dialogue that they learn concrete strategies to support them in communicating in a supportive and substantive way. The best way to start is creating a clear set of guidelines for their interactions online.

The Dos and Don’ts of Student Communication Online

Establishing clear expectations for online interactions is a critical step in creating an online forum that will be successful in the long

term. A stronger in-class community will form as a result of establishing and maintaining a safe space online.

Resource 5.1 presents the list of dos and don'ts I created for my classes to make my expectations for online communication clear. To be effective, your learning platform or learning management system (LMS) must be a safe space where students feel their voices will be respected, supported, and heard.

Resource 5.1 Dos and Don'ts of Student Communication Online

Name _____ Date _____

Dos and Don'ts of Student Communication Online

Strategies for creating and maintaining a safe space:

- **Use each other's names.** Using a person's name when you respond to his or her postings creates a friendly tone online.
- **Read questions and conversational postings carefully** to avoid unnecessary confusion.
- **Compliment your peers** when they post strong responses or contribute original ideas.
- **Ask questions.** If anything is unclear or you want further information or insight on a topic, just ask. If *you* have a question, there are probably other members of the group who are confused and need further clarification as well. Remember, there is no such thing as a dumb question.
- **Be considerate.** Remember that your peers cannot see your body language or hear your tone of voice, so you need to keep your language direct and respectful.
- **Avoid slang and jargon.** Some slang or jargon may be familiar to you, but not to others.
- **No sarcasm.** Sarcasm is negative and can lead to tensions and hurt feelings online. Keep language clear and concise.
- **Listen to all ideas presented.** Remember, there are no right or wrong answers in a discussion, and a variety of perspectives adds depth.
- **Stay open-minded.** If you expect others to respect and consider your comments and ideas, you must do the same for them.

- **Respond instead of reacting.** Do not write a response if you are angry or upset. Instead, wait until you have had time to calm down and collect your thoughts before responding.
- **Really read your peers' responses.** Avoid skimming. Respect the time your peers have spent articulating their thoughts by reading carefully and thoughtfully.
- **Reread your messages before sending** them to ensure that your ideas are clearly communicated and supported.
- **Critique the content**, not the person. Focus on what has been said, not the person who said it.
- **Do not present your personal opinions as fact.** Back up your ideas with information (i.e., details, evidence, and examples) to strengthen your statements.
- **Courteously answer all questions** addressed directly to you.
- **Make "I" statements when respectfully disagreeing.** Sharing an opposing opinion or idea is an important part of discussion, but it needs to be presented in a constructive manner that encourages further discussion.
- **Do not use all caps** when writing; it is interpreted as yelling.
- **Avoid emotional punctuation**, like exclamation points, unless you are complimenting an idea shared.

Source: Democrasoft, <http://www.democrasoft.com>

I suggest reviewing this list in class and allowing students to practice example scenarios in small groups. Then post this list as a resource for reference in your online forum. In addition to clearly outlining what you want your students to do and not do online, modeling the actual language supports students in a smooth transition online.

Providing a variety of sentence starters that show students how to build on another student's point, respectfully disagree with an idea, or compliment a peer is helpful prior to work done online. It provides the language "training wheels" that support students in articulating their thoughts in the beginning of their work online. Once they are proficient in respectful online dialogue, they will use these starters automatically and adapt them. Students can practice these skills more effectively if they can refer to a list like the one in Resource 5.2.

Resource 5.2 Strong Sentence Starters

Name _____ Date _____

Strong Sentence Starters

Use the following examples as a guide for your own replies to peers online. Remember to use each other's names and maintain a respectful tone in your conversations.

Rebecca's comment made me think about . . .

Although Rio made a strong point that _____, I think . . .

I respectfully disagree with Zach's assertion that _____, because . . .

I really appreciate Cyrus' insight into . . .

Thank you, Manuel, for sharing . . .

I had not thought about Leigh's point that . . .

Great point, Zahara! Have you considered . . . ?

Even though Dalia's point is valid, I tend to . . .

Building on Lawrence's statement that . . .

In contrast to Michelle's point . . .

Bradley highlighted some key ideas when he said . . .

Lulu, can you clarify your statement that _____?

Carmen, your posting reminded me of . . .

Nadya's observation that _____ reflects . . .

Given what you know about _____, Darius, what are your thoughts on _____?

Marcella, do you agree (or disagree) with . . . ?

Robin, how would you define . . . ?

Like Amaya, I also connected _____ to _____.

Source: Democrasoft, <http://www.democrasoft.com>

I post my "Dos and Don'ts of Student Online Communication" and "Strong Sentence Starters" on our Collaborize Classroom site for

students to reference throughout the year. I suggest that teachers post their expectations to their learning platform so students and parents have access to them at all times.

Creating a Class Code of Conduct

Creating a code of conduct that clearly establishes a list of behaviors for online engagement and communication also makes expectations visible and creates shared agreements within the community. Including students in the process of generating the content for your code of conduct creates buy-in as well. If students feel they had a voice in the process, then they will be more invested in maintaining the safe space in their online discussions.

Resource 5.3 is a template for teachers to adapt in creating their own student code of conduct. If you want students to actively participate in this process, use class time to organize them into small groups to brainstorm behaviors they think will create and maintain a safe space online. Some teachers prefer to identify behaviors they consider nonnegotiable, then allow students to complete the list.

When I designed my own code of conduct agreement, I spent time in class brainstorming expectations. I then used the multi-multiple-choice option on my Collaborize Classroom site to post all of their suggestions. Then students were able to select their top five favorite suggestions, and I published the results to the Results Page, which created a colorful chart clearly identifying their top choices as a class. I included their top five choices in my class code of conduct.

Then I had each student sign the Student Code of Conduct Agreement. Because they participated in developing the code, they had a vested interest in it. As a result they were more willing to agree to and follow the dictates of the code—more so than if I had generated it and presented it to them as a done deal.

Resource 5.3 Example Online Student Code of Conduct Agreement

Ms. Tucker's Student Code of Conduct

You will regularly engage in discussions and collaborative group work with your peers. To maintain a safe space online, we need to agree to uphold specific behaviors to ensure our online space stays respectful and supportive.

I, _____, agree to:
[Neatly print your first and last name]

- Actively engage in the conversations taking place online.
- Read and think deeply about my peers' ideas, questions, suggestions, and comments.
- Address my classmates by name when responding to their ideas.
- Maintain an appropriate tone and stay on topic.
- Respectfully disagree with ideas. I will not criticize my peers because their ideas are different from or contrary to my own.
- Be open-minded. I believe I can learn from the diversity of perspectives in this class.
- Attempt to think "outside of the box" to present new ideas and perspectives.
- Respect the privacy of my peers. I will not republish (i.e., cut and paste content from our discussions to other social networking forums) or discuss conversations that take place in our class portal.
- Support my classmates in their learning process. I will not tease or make fun of my peers or their ideas.
- Encourage discussion by asking interesting, thought-provoking questions.
- Seek help from my peers and/or teacher if I have concerns or questions.
- Only attach information and media that is appropriate to the educational setting.
- Submit work that is reflective of my intellect. I will follow the appropriate conventions of English (i.e., spelling, grammar, sentence structure, word choice, etc.) to ensure that my postings clearly communicate my ideas.

My signature verifies that I have read, understand, and agree to comply with the above code of conduct. I understand that I must play an active role in establishing and maintaining a safe online space to ensure that all students feel comfortable actively participating.

If I violate any of the above expectations for my conduct in our online portal, I am aware that I will be held accountable for jeopardizing our safe space online.

Student Signature _____

Parent Signature _____

Source: Democrasoft, <http://www.democrasoft.com>

Resource 5.4 Example Safe Space Reflection Form

Safe Space Violation Reflection

- How did your behavior jeopardize the safe space expectations established for our online discussions?
- How might your behavior have made your classmates feel?
- Do you believe that your behavior was an accurate reflection of who you are as a person?
- How can you ensure that this type of violation does not happen again in our online discussions?

[illegible]

When you complete your reflection, please bring it to me so we can have a conversation about it.

Thank you.

[Name]

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Each teacher must develop a system of consequences that works for him or her. I have only had to use my safe space reflection form once in two years, when a student made a sarcastic comment that did not translate online and led to hurt feelings. In addition to speaking with the student and asking her to complete a reflection, I used it as a teachable moment in class to discuss why slang and sarcasm should be avoided online. The conversation was extremely positive and culminated in the student in question apologizing. It was heartfelt and genuine. She had not considered how her words might impact the other student she was addressing. Given how much of their discourse takes place via electronic mediums, it is critical that students have opportunities to practice these communication skills with guidance and support from teachers.

Visually Display Your Expectations for Participation on Your Site

In addition to the guidelines you set for behavior, it is important to define participation requirements. Students need to have a place online to reference your participation expectations for a given unit. For example, I use a “Welcome” banner on my Collaborize Classroom site to clearly outline the number of postings and replies required each night during a given unit.

Example

Welcome to our Collaborize Classroom site! You are required to post *two* substantive postings each night in response to discussion questions and post a minimum of *two* comments to your peers. Your postings should reflect time, energy, and effort. Remember, this is a digital extension of our classroom. Please be open-minded and respectful in your interactions with your peers.

Thank you.

Ms. Tucker

This visual reminder answers the ever-present question: “What are we supposed to do?” Despite your best efforts to be clear, some students will forget what they have been asked to do and/or what the expectations are. Let your site do the work for you in addressing these questions.

Once you have covered your expectations for student communication online, agreed on a class code of conduct, and set up a visual reminder on your site, you are ready to facilitate online icebreakers so students can practice these new skills, form relationships, and develop their social presence online.

Building an Online Community

Every teacher has experienced the sinking feeling that accompanies a moment in the second half of the school year when a student does not know the name of another student in the class, despite sharing a room for months. Teachers internalize this as their failure to create opportunities for students to get to know one another at the start of the school year. Most teachers value icebreakers and love the idea of encouraging relationships between students. Unfortunately, the time it takes to facilitate these fun activities is usually sacrificed due to time constraints. Teachers feel immense pressure to get started on their curriculum at the beginning of the year to ensure they get through it all.

Another reason some teachers, including me, hesitate to start the year off with a variety of unstructured fun activities is that they are attempting to establish a *tone* for the class in the first few weeks of school. Icebreakers invite informal, loud, chaotic conversations that can be challenging to manage when a teacher is just

getting to know students and establishing acceptable behaviors in class.

Break the Ice Online

Online discussions can free teachers from the time constraints and classroom management concerns that tend to curb these social “get to know each other” activities. They also provide a space for students to engage in these conversations without creating chaos in the physical classroom.

Plus, these nonacademic conversations are a great opportunity to practice the “Dos and Don’ts of Student Online Communication.” Teachers can pull examples of strong responses and share them with students as examples of what they should strive toward. Missteps online can also be gently highlighted and corrected to ensure they do not continue.

Five Student Icebreakers Adapted for an Online Community

Here are five student icebreakers that are compatible with an online discussion forum. My Collaborize Classroom site allows me to create different question types, so teachers using other sites will need to tailor these icebreakers to fit their individual learning platform.

1. *Time Machine*

If you could travel in time to one of the following periods in American history, which would you choose and why? After selecting the time period you would visit, explain your choice in two to four sentences.

- 1960s Hippie Generation/Anti-War Movement/Civil Rights Movement
- 1830s Wild West Era
- 2025 Future
- 1980s Wild Fashion/Brat Pack/Punk Rock
- 1950s Rock n’ Roll/Suburbia
- 1920s Roaring 20s
- 1970s Disco Fever

Once you have posted your response, reply thoughtfully to *at least three* of your peers.

2. *Two Truths and a Lie*

Write three statements about yourself. Two of your statements should be true, and one should be made up. In your response list three statements, so your peers can guess which statement is the “lie” in their reply to you. Be creative!

Once you have posted your three statements for the group, read the statements posted by your peers and reply thoughtfully to *at least three* of your peers. In each reply, identify the statement you believe is false and explain your choice.

3. *Super Power*

If you could have any super power, which would you choose and why?

- Read minds
- Stop time
- Fly
- Become invisible
- Heal people

Once you have posted your response, reply thoughtfully to *at least three* of your peers.

4. *Famous Person*

If you could meet one famous person (dead or alive), who would you choose and why? State the person’s name and occupation (i.e., politician, comedian, musician, author, etc.), explain why you want to meet this person, and list *three* questions you would like to ask him or her.

Once you have posted your response, reply thoughtfully to *at least three* of your peers. If one of your peers wants to meet someone you also admire, feel free to post suggestions for questions he or she might ask this person.

5. *Desert Island Dilemma*

If you knew you would be stranded on a desert island for one year, which *three* objects would you bring with you? Keep in mind that there is *no* electricity on the island! Choose your objects carefully, then explain your choices in a short paragraph.

Once you have completed your selections and posted your explanation, read and respond to *at least three* peers.

Beginning with fun, informal questions hooks those reluctant students who may not be enthusiastic or do homework consistently. If conversations take place in class about fun discussions that happened online, it may pique the interest of those students on the sidelines who have not yet participated online. Online icebreakers encourage students to connect on a personal level while using each other's names, developing thoughtful replies, and practicing questioning skills. My students enjoyed icebreakers so much that they are still requesting them well into second semester.

Five Parent-Student Icebreakers Adapted for an Online Community

If you are working with younger students, it is a good idea to start with student-parent icebreakers. This inspires a dialogue between the students and their parents. It also helps introduce the parents to the online space so they feel comfortable about the work being done online.

1. What Was Your Mom or Dad's Favorite Subject Growing Up?

Talk to one or both of your parents. Find out what subject they enjoyed most in school and why. Select the subject they chose, then post a response describing their answer. Compare their choice to your favorite subject now.

- English
- History
- Science
- Math
- Health
- Foreign Language

After you have posted your answer, read your classmates' postings and reply thoughtfully to *at least two* people.

2. Who Influenced Your Parents the Most?

Ask your parent about the *one* person who influenced him or her most growing up. In your response identify the person

who impacted your parent, and explain why this person affected you mom or dad so greatly. Then reflect on this. Did you know this person?

After you have posted your answer, read your classmates' postings and reply thoughtfully to *at least two* people.

3. *One Piece of Life Advice*

Ask your parents what *one* piece of advice they would give you about life based on their own experiences.

Post their piece of advice for the class. Then read the advice of other parents, and vote for your favorite. Post a reply to the student who posted the life advice you found most helpful or interesting. Explain why you liked the advice.

4. *Family Fun—Is This a Vacation You Want to Go On?*

Ask your parents where they would want to go if they could plan a family trip without worrying about money.

- Where would you go? Why?
- How long would you stay?
- What would you see?
- How would you travel—plane, train, boat, car, RV?
- Who would you invite?

After you have posted your answer, read your classmates' postings and reply thoughtfully to *at least two* people.

5. *Parent Playlist*

Ask your parents what three songs (title and artist) they would include on a soundtrack of their lives. Explain why they chose each song.

- What does it remind them of?
- What deeper significance does it have for them?

After you have posted your answer, read your classmates' postings and reply thoughtfully to *at least two* people.

Note: There are additional online icebreakers at www.corwin.com/blendedlearning4-12.



Start Simply to Cement Routines and Correct First Missteps

As with any new routine or skill set, there are bound to be small setbacks. I am always asked how I handle missteps online. Quite simply, I embrace those moments as opportunities to revisit expectations for online behavior, interactions, and communication.

In the first few weeks of school, when our online work and discussions are new to students, I regularly highlight examples of strong work online and work that needs development. I do this using student samples (no names). Since I have no technology in my actual classroom, I copy and paste examples from our online discussions into a Word document, then make a transparency to show students. Teachers with the luxury of projectors can easily project the examples onto a screen or white board to make this process simpler.

It can be even more effective to allow students to discover what strong participation looks like or identify missteps online for themselves. I have done this by creating a handout with a selection of online postings, then I put students in groups and ask them to identify what was done well in each posting and what could be improved. This requires students to evaluate and think critically about what they are reading. Students never fail to impress me with their astute observations of the strong elements present in writing as well as their detailed suggestions for improvement.

Using in-class time to facilitate this work also communicates to students that the work done online is not separate from the work completed in class. It reinforces the reality that online work is a digital extension of the work done in class.

As an English teacher, I also stress the importance of maintaining the conventions of English while working online. I do not want my students using text message language or failing to use paragraph breaks just because work is done online. Even though they communicate digitally all the time, many students lapse into a quasi-English that does not resemble the writing I hope to see in my English class.

I created the document “Avoid Mechanical Missteps in Online Communication” to combat some of this quasi-English (Resource 5.5). It is the individual teacher’s choice to establish the expectations and norms that best fit his or her class. For some, the formal nature of this document may not be necessary.

Resource 5.5 Avoid Mechanical Missteps in Online Communication

Name _____ Date _____

Avoid Mechanical Missteps in Online Communication

Remember that our online discussion platform is an extension of our physical classroom. Your writing should reflect time, energy, and editing. Please review the following.

Capitalization

- Always capitalize "I" when speaking in first person.
- Capitalize the first letter of sentences, the first letter of your peers' names, titles (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), and all proper nouns (i.e., specific names of people, places, and events).

Punctuation Problems

- Remember to use a question mark when you ask a question.
- Do not overuse exclamation marks. They should be used sparingly for emphasis.
- Apostrophes are needed to indicate possession (e.g., Christine's comment made me consider an alternative perspective.).
- When quoting, periods and commas go inside quotation marks.

Commonly Confused Words

- *Then vs. Than.* "Then" indicates a sequence of time, and "than" is used for comparison (e.g., We went to the museum and then had lunch. I like action movies better than romance movies.).
- *Accept vs. Except.* "Accept" is a verb that means "to receive, admit, regard as true, or say yes." "Except" is a preposition that means "to exclude" (e.g., I accept the truth in your statement. I ate everything except my peas.).
- *Loose vs. Lose.* "Loose" is an adjective, the opposite of "tight." "Lose" is a verb meaning to no longer have possession of or to misplace (e.g., If your pants are too loose, you might lose your pants.).

- *Lay vs. Lie.* Use "lay" when there is a direct object, and use "lie" when there is no direct object (e.g., I lay my books on the table. I lie down when I am tired.).
- *Raise vs. Rise.* Use "raise" when there is a direct object, and use "rise" when there is no direct object (e.g., I raise my hand in class. The sun will rise each morning.).
- *Who vs. Whom.* "Who" is a pronoun used in the place of a subject, and "whom" is a pronoun used in place of an object (e.g., Who is coming for dinner? Whom did you invite for dinner?).

Homophone Errors

- *Who's vs. Whose.* "Who's" is the contraction for "who is," and "whose" is the possessive of "who" (e.g., Who's coming to the party? Whose purse is this?).
- *Weather vs. Whether.* "Weather" is a noun referring to the atmospheric conditions in a specific place, and "whether" is a conjunction that introduces possibilities or alternatives (e.g., The weather outside will determine whether we go swimming or not.).
- *Your vs. You're.* "Your" is a possessive pronoun (e.g., your house), and "you're" is the contraction meaning "you are."
- *There vs. They're vs. Their.* "There" is used as a pronoun or to refer to a place, "they're" is the contraction for "they are," while "their" is a possessive pronoun (e.g., I put it over there. They're coming to the party. I read their blog.).
- *It's vs. Its.* "Its" is a possessive pronoun, and "it's" is the contraction for "it is" (e.g., It's a beautiful day for a walk. The dog pulled its leash.).
- *To vs. Too.* "To" is a preposition. "Too" means "also" or "to an excessive extent or degree" (e.g., I want help, too. It is too hot to eat.).

Spelling Errors

- Always spellcheck your work prior to posting. Spelling errors distract your reader from the quality of your content.
- "A lot" is always two words.

Using Italics vs. Quotes

- When referring to a book title, large publication (such as a book, magazine, or newspaper), or movie title, *italicize* it.
- When referring to a poem, short story, or article, use quotation marks.

Sentence Structure

- Keep sentences clear and concise.
- Avoid sentence fragments that fail to communicate a complete thought.
- Break up long sentences to avoid unnecessarily lengthy and confusing sentences.

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Each subject has norms for communication, so I encourage teachers to articulate those subject-specific norms for students in the “Avoid Mechanical Missteps in Online Communication” document.

Teach Students to Say Something Substantial

One of the biggest challenges teachers face across disciplines is getting students to develop their explanations, ideas, and reasoning. In English I am constantly trying to motivate students to develop their writing and analysis. Too often the writing I receive is shallow and underdeveloped. When I introduced online discussions and group work, I faced similar challenges getting my students to respond to questions and to each other in substantive and meaningful ways.

I began by emphasizing that each posting should effectively drive conversation and motivate the other members of the group to think more deeply about the topic being discussed. To effectively support students in accomplishing this goal, it is essential that teachers make their expectations for student responses clear before initiating online conversations or activities.

If students understand *why* they are being asked to do something, they are more likely to do it. Explain that your learning platform or LMS is a place for them to engage in conversations, activities, and collaboration. If they actively participate in the online forum, it will support and strengthen their understanding of the curriculum.

Students must feel that the online forum is their space; as such, it is crucial that each member of the class/group take an active role in ensuring a high quality of discussion. Providing concrete strategies

gives students confidence in their ability to participate in a meaningful and substantive way. Review the strategies in Resource 5.6 with your students in the early stages of their work online.

Resource 5.6 Say Something Substantial

Name _____ Date _____

Say Something Substantial

This is a list of strategies you can use when responding to questions and/or replying to your peers online to ensure that your contributions will drive discussions forward.

A substantial posting will do the following:

- Present a new question for discussion to broaden, refine, or redirect the conversation.
- Discuss a personal experience (i.e., memory, interaction, class, book, etc.) that has influenced your perception of a given topic. Provide specific details about where your ideas, beliefs, and/or opinions come from to support your statements.
- Think outside the box or play devil's advocate (respectfully, of course). Providing another point of view on a topic can spark further discussion.
- Ask your peers for clarification if ideas are presented that you do not clearly understand. Your peers are valuable resources.
- Make connections between the discussions taking place and information learned in other classes and subject areas. Connecting what you are learning to past knowledge or experiences will strengthen your retention of that information.
- Share a resource that has been helpful to you. Use the attachment feature to share images, documents, and videos that will add to the conversation.
- Summarize the main ideas being discussed in your own words to ensure you have a strong grasp of the central concepts. This will support your peers' learning as well.
- Comment thoughtfully and respectfully on the ideas, experiences, and questions presented by your peers. The more you engage with your peers, the more meaningful the conversations will be for everyone involved.

Source: Democrasoft, <http://www.democrasoft.com>

Defining what constitutes a substantial posting and then providing concrete strategies to support students in composing substantive responses will benefit the students' writing and discourse across disciplines.

Once you have provided strategies for students to use in responding substantively and modeled what a strong response looks like, the next step is teaching students how to end their postings in a way that invites further conversation. I provide "Eight Intriguing Exit Strategies that Continue the Conversation" (Resource 5.7) to guide students in this process.

Resource 5.7 Eight Intriguing Exit Strategies That Continue the Conversation

Name _____ Date _____

Eight Intriguing Exit Strategies That Continue the Conversation

Use the strategies below to practice ending your postings to invite peer responses. Each strategy is followed by an example. These exit strategies can be used in your original responses to the questions or in your replies to your peers. The goal is to make it easier for your classmates to build on the ideas you have presented.

- Propose a new idea for feedback.

"Did anyone else reach a different conclusion based on the reading?"

- Ask for clarification or further explanation about an aspect of the question you had trouble answering.

"I am confused about _____. Does anyone have any ideas or insights that might help me understand?"

- Ask your peers to make a connection between the topic and another piece of literature, a movie, or something they have personally experienced.

"I was able to relate this to _____. Did anyone else make an interesting connection to the topic?"

- Invite your peers to draw a different conclusion or share another perspective.

"Did anyone else reach a different conclusion or have a different perspective on this topic?"

- If you presented an opinion or idea about the given topic that was not addressed in the question, ask your peers to respond to it.

"This topic was not presented in the question, but does anyone have an opinion about _____?"

- Pose a follow-up question to the group to expand the conversation or shift it in a new direction.

"Answering this question made me wonder _____?"

- Present a controversial idea or statement, and ask your peers if they agree or disagree with the statement.

"It seems like most of the class believes _____. Has anyone considered _____?"

- Encourage your peers to ask questions about the points you made if anything was confusing or unclear.

"I had a hard time articulating my ideas. Does anyone have a question about my posting or the ideas I communicated in my posting?"

Source: Democrasoft, <http://www.democrasoft.com>

Just as I suggested you provide students with sentence starters to begin their conversations, I also think it is important to provide students with example sentences to teach them how to end a posting in a way that it invites responses. Ending a posting or reply in this way lets students know that it is okay to question or even contradict what was said by offering a different perspective. With time these become automatic habits, but students need a place to begin. They appreciate

the opening to respond when participating in discussions, which reinforces their willingness to also end their own postings with these strategies that drive deeper, richer, more meaningful exchanges.

This critical work done at the beginning of the year helps your students establish their social presence online and creates a foundation of mutual respect and support that will result in the long-term success of your blended instruction model. This strong foundation created when you establish clear expectations, model language, and provide clear strategies for success will enable you to eventually expand your work online to include collaborative group work and student-driven projects.

Chapter Summary

To create a community of inquiry that successfully engages students in meaningful discourse, a teacher must first support students in developing their social presence. Social presence is the students' awareness both of themselves as unique contributors to a dialogue and of their peers. Beginning work online by clearly establishing expectations for behavior is an important first step to guiding students in this process. Provide a list of dos and don'ts for behavior and sentence starters that demonstrate respectful, supportive, and substantive communication online. Identify your shared agreements in a class code of conduct agreement to ensure a safe space online will be maintained by all members of the community. Once expectations for behavior and participation online have been clearly stated, reviewed, and discussed, actively build an online community using icebreakers to form relationships and practice this new skill set. Provide strategies for responding substantively in discussions, then use examples from the work online to model strong responses.

Following these steps at the beginning of work online will provide the necessary foundation for students to ensure they are successful in developing the social presence needed to create a community of inquiry.

Book Study Questions

1. How can developing a social presence online help students be successful in their interactions with their peers? In what ways can developing a social presence improve a student's self-esteem and self-confidence? How might developing a social presence in a community with students you know combat cyberbullying?

2. What strategies do you use to create a safe space in your physical classroom? Can you adapt any of these practices for the online space? If so, which ones? If not, why not?
3. How can you ensure students maintain a safe space online? Will you develop a clear set of consequences for misbehavior online? What types of consequences will you use to deal with safe space violations? How will you make this visible for students? When will you address missteps as a group, and when will you address them individually?
4. Will you engage your students in the process of identifying the behaviors you want to list in your “Dos and Don’ts of Student Communication Online” and “Class Code of Conduct”? Why or why not? What are the benefits of involving students in this process? What might be challenging about allowing students a voice in this process?
5. How will you make your expectations for daily/weekly participation visible on your site? How often do you plan to engage your students online? How might consistent expectations be helpful for students? Would regular engagement online add to or diminish the students’ perceived value of work done? Explain.
6. How do you support relationship building in your physical classroom? Do you use icebreakers that you can adapt for the online space? If so, which icebreakers do you use that might work in an online environment?
7. How can you use the work done during online icebreakers to correct missteps and model strong responses in class? Brainstorm in-class activities that will effectively correct common missteps and help students improve the quality of their responses.
8. How might building a strong online community positively impact your students’ interactions in class? What behaviors would you expect to transfer from the work online into your classroom? How can you support the transfer of positive behaviors from the online space into the classroom and vice versa?
9. How will teaching students strategies for contributing substantively positively impact the quality of their online dialogue? How will it positively impact their overall academic

performance? What challenges do you anticipate in teaching students how to engage substantively?

10. Are there subject-specific norms you plan to enforce in your online discussions and interactions? If so, what are they and how will you make them visible to students?

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