

## Strengthening Peer-to-Peer Connections

Engaging discussion forums support students in processing and analyzing content and in making connections between what they already know and what they are learning. They require students to reflect on the ideas being presented in the course as well as the ideas shared by their classmates. It is this cycle of reading, reflecting, considering, and making connections that actually changes the knowledge structure inside the learner's brain. Often it is only when students are responding to a question or to another student's ideas that they begin to know what they think they know—or sometimes, more importantly, what they do not know (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Although responses to a peer are typically required in discussion forums, to ensure students actively and meaningful engage, it is helpful for instructors to step in and help students make connections with one another, especially early in the course. Consider using these strategies in asynchronous discussion forums to strengthen those important peer-to-peer connections.

- **Build relationships over common interests.**
  - *Sarah, I noticed that you are referencing the impact of global warming on the ski industry. Did you notice that Damon is from Vermont and worked at a ski resort? He might have some insights to share with you.*
- **Point out ways peers can support one another.**
  - *Robert, in your post, you mentioned being frustrated with posting a graphic in the discussion forum. Did you notice that Chie was able to share a picture? You might want to check in with her to see how she did it.*
- **Respond to individual students with suggestions to connect with other peers on points of agreement or disagreement.**
  - *Brad and Maria, I noticed that you have different opinions on the appropriate age for students to be involved in social media. Why don't you discuss your reasons and share your evidence with each other?*
  - *Jamie, did you see that Jacques has a similar viewpoint on the role of government in education, but he used some different resources? Why don't you check in with him to discuss and share your resources?*
- **Encourage responses to someone who has not received a response post.**
  - *Hi everyone! Great job on the discussion forum this week! The back-and-forth is excellent and you're sharing some great resources. As you share your final response post, I would encourage you to identify a classmate who has not yet received a comment and comment on his or her post.*
- **Point out quality engagement to the whole class and highlight why this is important.**
  - *As we wrap up our discussion forum for this week, I would like to point out that 85% of you went above and beyond the minimum requirement of responding to at least two of your classmates. Nice work! The more we engage with others, the more likely we are to be able to clarify our own thinking and gain deeper understanding of course content. You are also gaining access to a lot of resources that will help you with your final project!*

### Source

Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.