**Learning Through Online Discussions**

*Why are online discussions important? How are they a powerful way to learn?*

*Online discussions, just like face-to-face discussions in the classroom, are a powerful way to learn. They are an opportunity to share and exchange ideas, ask questions, collaborate with others, deepen understanding, develop independent, critical, creative and reflective thinking skills and effective communications skills. Online discussions also open up a world that is so much bigger than the physical space of the classroom; they give you the opportunity to engage with people from around the world with different opinions, perspectives, and worldviews that give you the opportunity to hear, see, experience and understand the world as others do.*

*The rules of face-to face and online communication are virtually the same; you have to be prepared, and be an active and respectful participant. However, with online discussions there are no visual and auditory clues that we depend on for understanding the meaning and intent of the communication. To ensure and enhance your online line learning experience, outlined below are some guidelines for you to keep in mind when participating in an online discussion.*

*Live online discussions:*

1. *Be respectful and contribute*
2. *Mute your mic until you are ready to speak.*
3. *Allow the speaker to complete their thought before responding or asking a question.*
4. *Consider holding your question in the chat feature*

*Online Chats*

1. *Participate: This is shared online learning environment. Be prepared and contribute.*
2. *Do not use all caps: If you use caps, it looks like you are screaming.*
3. *Stay on topic: Only post comments, links, ideas that are connected to the topic.*
4. *Respect others’ opinions: Respect the opinions of your classmates. If you disagree, acknowledge the valid points they made, and then disagree respectfully.*
5. *Be patient. Read everything in the discussion thread before replying. This will help you avoid repeating information or ideas others have already contributed.*
6. *Determine purpose: Make sure you know the purpose of the discussion and use agreed-upon communication style. For example, proper writing style, abbreviations shortcuts, emojis, etc.*
7. *Before posting your question, check if anyone has already asked it and received a response.*
8. *Be brief. Be direct. Stay on point.*
9. *Check the most recent comments before replying to an older comment or question. The question may have already been answered or opinions may have changed.*
10. *If you refer to something your classmate said earlier, quote a few key lines so everyone knows which comment you are referring to.*
11. *Be forgiving: Be forgiving if a classmate makes a mistake. It happens to everyone.*
12. *Respect privacy: don't share others’ personal information. Ask permission before recording or taking a screenshot of others or their work.*
13. *Respect diversity. We live in an ethnically rich and diverse world. Use language that is not offensive towards others. “Racist, sexist, and heterosexist comments and jokes are unacceptable, as are derogatory and/or sarcastic comments and jokes directed at religious beliefs, disabilities, and age.” (Nettiquette: Rules and Guidelines for Online Discussions)*
14. *Language matters. Language is the only tool you have in an online environment. Be mindful of what you say and how you say it. Once you have hit send, you can’t take it back.*