



TEACHING TIPS FROM THE WTI: SITUATED DISCUSSION POST

Good writing assignments evoke a high level of critical thinking, help students wrestle productively with a course's big questions, and teach disciplinary ways of seeing, knowing, and doing. (Bean and Melzer 2)

What is a Situated Discussion Post?

Discussion Boards are a common assignment in both online and face-to-face classes. Typically, professors post a prompt, and students write a short, informal reply. Students may also be asked to read and respond to their peers' posts. Discussion Boards have many purposes, but the most common are for building community, exploring ideas, applying core concepts, or gathering evidence of understanding. Discussion Boards are where students can engage with course content from their own perspective and in their own language.

"Situating," the discussion board prompt, means that, with the assignment, students are positioned within a rhetorical context where they assume a role and communicate to an audience for a particular purpose (often fictional). The rhetorical/situational context not only engages students actively but also, when they communicate as experts, they must draw on course content to assume that role, helping them to learn more deeply.



How Dr. Lisa Ramos Uses Discussion Boards in HIST 2327

I assign regular discussion board posts in my HIST2327 Mexican American History I class in order for students to respond to and engage with readings and other course content. I require students to write 250-word minimum responses, use proper documentation, and proofread their posts.

In the example discussion post provided, I want students to think deeply about what they have learned about the concepts of *dominant* and *counter narratives* as they apply to the most famous historical site in Texas: the Alamo.

The SAC Writing & Thinking Institute, a project of the SAC Teaching & Learning Center, promotes the use of writing as an instructional tool for learning and critical thinking across the curriculum at San Antonio College.

Discussion Board Writing Assignment

- Post your ~250-word response.
- You should have watched 1) the *Remember the Alamo* film and viewed or 2) the Varela/Weiland public art installation, the Servin painting, and the Rodríguez-Díaz painting.

After completing the above work, please respond to the below prompt:

Throughout this semester, we have been studying counter-narratives that challenge dominant (master) narratives of various historical events in order to gain a deeper understanding of the past.

Now that you have viewed the dominant and counter-narratives of the Alamo, think about how we, as a society, can tell better stories about the past.

Imagine it is 2036, the 200th anniversary of the Battle of the Alamo, and you are a history teacher, museum curator, or tour guide about to teach about the Alamo's history.

- How would you tell an inclusive story of the Alamo that includes counter-narratives? (Which videos or paintings in this module or points of view I wrote about in this module would you use, and why?)
- What exactly would you emphasize, and why?
- What, if any, dominant narratives would you leave out, and why?

Please write a post with a separate and clear introduction, body, and conclusion, and please proofread.

Uses and Benefits of Situated Discussion Board Posts

As the above example illustrates, positioning the student as an expert whose job is to educate someone not knowledgeable about the subject is an intriguing challenge for student writers. To answer the question, students must think critically, apply what they are learning, and justify their thinking in their responses. In this way, they become engaged in deep learning through writing.