If you’re taking an online course, you know that an online discussion forum replaces a discussion within the classroom. The purpose of the forum is to not only establish and build on a sense of a classroom community but to also share knowledge and make others think and respond to your ideas and thoughts as happens in the classroom.

Your instructors expect your posts to be in APA format, but what does this mean? It means that you need to include in text citations for information that is not your own and a complete reference for the source cited in your text citation.

Here is an example of a discussion forum post using APA format:

Social contracts are created by humans for cooperative reasons, but also for individual benefit (Waller, 2011). One example of this is the regulation of using a car. If we had not made rules which tell us how to drive on public roads, we would probably have a lot more accidents, and I would probably not get to class on time. So obeying those rules benefits society, but I also obey them because the results benefit me.

We also trust that others will abide by the social contract as well. We trust that others will obey traffic laws (the social contract), and that benefits us all in the long run. “Thus, a system of morality in which we honor agreements and cooperate with others is beneficial for each of us, and it is in my long term self interest to honor it.” (Waller, 2011 p. 136).


NOTE: The in text citations SHOULD NOT be bolded in your post.

This example shows the proper format for in text citations and references. For more information about in text citations and references, please go to the Writing and APA tab in the online library.

Discussion Forum Netiquette

“Netiquette” is network etiquette, the do’s and don’ts of online communication. Netiquette covers both common courtesy online and the informal “rules of the road” of cyberspace” (Shea, 1997).

When posting to a discussion forum, you need to consider how you come across in a forum post, because for those that don’t know you already, this will be their first impression of you.

There are many sources with information on this topic, and some common themes can be found in them. When communicating in a discussion forum, just as you would in face-to-face discussions, you should consider the following things:
Pay Attention to Tone and Courtesy

Your "tone" is a very important part of electronic communication. You should read your message out loud to make sure it sounds the way you would speak to another student or an instructor in the classroom. The University of Wisconsin-Stout (2014) recommends you consider these points:

- It is easy for messages to be misinterpreted since there are no nonverbal clues, like facial expressions and body language, nor voice inflections that accompany the text. Humor can be difficult to express in written text, so make sure everyone realizes when you are trying to be funny.
- Be sure to think through and re-read your comments before posting them.
- Be nice. DO NOT use inappropriate, offensive or insulting language and refrain from personal attacks. Everyone has the right to their own opinion, and you need to respect this.
- If you disagree with someone's ideas, challenge the idea, not the person.
- Do not demean, harass or embarrass others. Avoid challenges that may be interpreted as a personal attack.
- Be open to being challenged or confronted on your own ideas or prejudices.

Check Previous Postings Before You Post

Some additional things to remember according to the University of Wisconsin-Stout (2014) are:

- Read previous posts made by others to avoid repeating comments.
- Make sure you are posting under the appropriate heading or thread.
- Stick to the topic. If you have personal or unrelated comments or ideas communicate them via email. DO NOT include personal, inflammatory comments in a post.
- Acknowledge the points made with which you agree and suggest alternatives for those with which you don’t (Connor, n.d.).

Give Credit Where Credit is Due

Cite your sources. Use in text citations and provide a reference for your source at the end of your post if your contribution to the conversation includes the intellectual property of others, whether found online or in print.

Proper Writing Style: Grammar, Spelling, and Fonts

Social networking and text messaging have created linguistic shortcuts that should not be a part of academic dialogue. Since the discussion forum is part of a college course, your writing should conform to the rules of standard English and include correct spelling, grammatical construction, and sentence structure. This is expected in every other writing activity associated with scholarship and academic engagement, and online discussions are no different (Connor, n.d.). Here are some guidelines:

- Don’t use profanity. Not only is it unprofessional and inappropriate, it’s offensive to some of your classmates. Bad language is always unacceptable.
- Use standard spelling—you (not u); are (not r); to or too (not 2); you’re (not ure); and I (not i).
- Do NOT use emoticons and texting shortcuts like :-) faces and c u l8r.
- Avoid using slang (e.g., "Wassup?", "Yo,", “Hey” and so forth).
- Use the spell check! Mistakes in spelling and grammar reflect poorly on you, and they’re not acceptable.
- Stick to standard fonts (Times New Roman, Arial, 12 or 14 pt.) and colors (black or blue.)
- No YELLING! DON’T WRITE THE ENTIRE POSTING WITH YOUR CAPS LOCK ON. IT’S REALLY ANNOYING.

Be Polite and Assume Good Intentions

The discussion board is a learning forum. The topic may be difficult or controversial, and people may disagree. It’s best to assume that no one is trying to be argumentative or upsetting, but are honestly expressing their ideas. Even if you disagree, answer seriously and politely. People learn from respectful dialogue more than from sarcasm or name calling. If a post produces a passionate response from you, take a few minutes to slow down and decide whether posting it will be helpful and illuminate the topic (Kessler, 2014).

Consider Saying This to the Person's Face

Shea (1997) suggests that before you post or email ask yourself, "Would I say this to the person’s face?” If the answer is no, reconsider and rewrite what you have to say. Repeat the process till you feel sure that you'd feel as comfortable saying these words to the actual person as you do sending them through cyberspace. Shea (1997) also points out that when you communicate via discussion forums or email your words are written. Any message you send could be saved or forwarded by its recipient and can come back to haunt you. You have no control over where it goes once you post or send it.
Participate
Discussion forums are a shared learning environment. It’s not enough to login and read the discussion thread of others. For the maximum benefit to all and to get the best grade possible, everyone must contribute (Connor, n.d.). In order to keep the discussion going, consider using one of the following response starters:

1. Judy, I like the way you....
2. Sam, I agree with you.....
3. I wonder why.....
4. Mia, Do you think....
5. Alyssa, I appreciate how you...
6. I thought...
7. Mary, it is interesting the way you . .
8. Jeff, what made you think . .

Report Glitches
If for any reason you experience difficulty participating, please call, email, or otherwise inform your instructor of the issue. Chances are others are having problems as well (Connor, n.d.).

Help Others
If you’ve written online posts before and have more experience with online discussion forums than the person next to you, give them a hand. Be the first to post and show others it’s not so hard (Connor, n.d.).

Respect Diversity
We live in an ethnically diverse, multi-cultural world, so DO NOT use language that is—or that could be taken to be—offensive toward others. Racists, sexist, and heterosexist comments and jokes are unacceptable, as are derogatory and sarcastic comments and jokes directed at religious beliefs, disabilities, and age (Connor, n.d.).

No Ranting or Tantrums
Criticism must be constructive, well-meaning, and well-articulated. Rage directed at any other student or instructor is simply unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The same goes for profanity (Connor, n.d.).

Once You’ve Hit Send You Can’t Take It Back
Language is your only tool in an online environment, so be mindful. How others perceive you will be largely—as always—up to you. Once you’ve hit the send button, you can’t take back what’s been said. Review your written posts and responses to ensure that you’ve conveyed exactly what you intended. Use this as an opportunity to practice your proofreading, revision, and rewriting skills—valuable assets in the professional world for which you are now preparing (Connor, n.d.).

According to Connor (n.d.), “unregulated, an online discussion can quickly disintegrate into a tangled web of extraneous verbiage, rude language, and inconsiderate behavior guaranteed to derail the conversation.” The basic premise is that the etiquette expected of you in an online discussion is the same as that which is expected in the classroom. “The absence of visual and auditory clues, which contribute a lot of nonverbal nuances of meaning carrying an intangible amount of weight, used in face-to-face discussions are impossible to replicate in an online environment” (Connor, n.d.).

When communicating online, keep in mind the points discussed above. You should be particularly careful not to write and spell the way you do when you text or email a friend, and you should always read what you’ve written before you post it to make sure it says what you want it to say. Remember that what you say may not be heard the way you thought you said it. Using proper netiquette shows that you are a professional and care about how you present yourself to others.

References:
University of Wisconsin-Stout. (2014, May 2). Discussion board etiquette. Retrieved from https://www2.uwstout.edu/content/profdev/rubrics/discuss_etiquette.html