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Optimizing the use of Virtual Sabana Discussion Forums

In both, blended and online environments, discussion forums are the most powerful means of communication, discussion and learning. For that reason, I would like to invite you to look at the following tips as ways to optimize your use of the forums as well as your time.

1. **Follow instructions.** Sometimes it is easy to ignore this tip because you want to do more. Don't. If the instruction says: "Post your comment regarding..." try to do as suggested. If the instruction asks you to post an attachment, do, if it doesn't, don't. There are different kinds of tasks for the forums, so try to stick to the one being asked from you at the moment.
2. **Discuss!** Do you remember those classes where no one is paying attention to your contributions because they are too busy thinking about their own answer to the question? Beware! Sometimes, it can happen in discussion forums as well. The wealth of discussions lays in everybody's interventions and dialogue. Don't lose it!
3. **Comment effectively!** The intention of commenting people's posts in discussion forums is not to make your partner feel good about him/herself but to discuss academic topics in an academic way. If you find there is something that needs to be challenged, challenge it! Your partner will have to think about your comment and then learning may happen!
4. **Forums should be student centered.** In a regular class the teacher is supposed to do the least talking possible to open room for students' opinions and contributions. The situation shouldn't be any different in online forums. The teacher is not anymore the possessor of all knowledge; that's why now we are called instructors.
5. **Keep it friendly.** Even though we are invited to challenge other people's views and to be assertive in our comments, it doesn't mean we can violate netiquette rules in the process. Keep it friendly and remember that there is a human being on the other side of the computer.



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6. ***Don't repeat.*** In the urge of posting your task, don't fall in a common mistake: Posting exactly the same idea as someone else. For this reason, it is recommended to read previous posts and to elaborate on what others say. If you want your contribution to be groundbreaking, post first.

7. ***Don't post for the sake of posting.*** Be respectful of everybody's time.

8. ***Watch your language.*** Before posting, look at the language you use. You need to use academic but still comprehensible language. Also, there is a level of formality to observe. Try not to be too formal, not too informal; try to use the appropriate register for the level.

If you follow these tips, you might be more successful in your use of the Virtual Sabana discussion forums. Happy posting!