

**Geoffrey B. Elliott**  
**ENGL 135: Advanced Composition Discussion Assignment Sheet**  
**July 2016 Session**

The current section of the course is a blended one, meaning instruction occurs both in person and online. To ensure that each component of the course matters, both in person and online discussion will be assessed. How they will be assessed throughout the term is outlined below.

The materials below are also hosted at [www.elliotttwi.com](http://www.elliotttwi.com). Any necessary updates will be posted there first; please check back often.

### **The Overall Breakdown**

The standard syllabus for ENGL 135 at DeVry stipulates that 300 of the 1,000 points available in the course will come from discussions. Within that 300-point chunk, 40 are given to the graded discussions in each of weeks one through six; the remaining 60 are given to graded discussions in the seventh week.

For the current section, specifically, half of the discussion points will be dedicated to attendance and ample, appropriate participation during the on-site portion of the course. That is, 20 points will come from attendance and active participation during class time in each of the first six weeks; another 30 will come from the discussion conducted during class time on the seventh week.

### **Handling Online Discussions**

The regular policies for online discussions at DeVry will apply, of course. An atmosphere of civility and professionalism is necessary to ensure cross-comprehension and to permit the kind of free inquiry from which intellectual and academic advancement proceed. Practice with the conventions of academic American English and of appropriate crediting of outside information, as articulated in the current style guide of the American Psychological Association, is also advisable.

Additionally, a distribution of online discussion posts is desirable; a student's contributions ought not to all come on the same day, and they ought not all to be in the same thread. Responding to and engaging with a number of voices and opinions is to the benefit of all, as is having response and engagement from such a plurality of voices. As such, online discussions will need to occur across multiple days; **at least one post from each student should occur before Wednesday of each week, and at least one should occur after the class meets in person during each week.**

Posting during scheduled class time is inadvisable, as it argues against being engaged appropriately with what is going on in the classroom while it is going on.

Further, both the offering of new material and response to the materials of others is desirable; students benefit from practice in both advancing ideas and helping others refine ideas. As such, **each student should start at least one new discussion thread, and each should respond to at least one already in progress.**

Finally, online discussion posts each need to have a certain amount of material to be able to promote engagement by others or to offer usefully detailed responses to others. Although it is the

case that firm word counts are arbitrary, and circumstances may admit of case-by-case adjustments, a useful guideline will ask for a **minimum of 100 words for a graded post**. More will not necessarily be better, as padded prose is generally annoying, but fewer will not typically have enough heft to be useful.

Discussion posts of exceptional quality may be rewarded at a higher rate.

### Handling On-site Discussions

Discussion in a face-to-face environment is necessarily less structured than online discussion; the immediacy of it can tend towards disorder, although such disorder is often remarkably productive and generative of new ideas. Even so, it should be conducted in an atmosphere of professional civility so as to promote free and open intellectual inquiry. And **it is necessary for participation that students be present in the classroom during the scheduled class time**. While circumstances such as those for which DeVry allows lapses in online discussion will be considered for on-site discussion, as well, and similar forms of accommodation will be made available, regular, ample, appropriate participation in the events of the class does much to ensure effective learning.

The dynamic fluidity of face-to-face interaction means that assessment of student participation on-site will be more holistic than in the online environment. Even so, students should work from the beginning of the course to respond substantively and appropriately to current discussions in the classroom, particularly to the contributions made by their classmates (i.e., attending to what other students say and not replicating questions being answered—although asking for further clarification is fine). Synthesizing what is said with what is done elsewhere in the class, as well as with outside perspectives that may not have had a chance to emerge online, is key. **Simply sitting and passively absorbing materials will not suffice; contribution to the ongoing project of developing new knowledge is vital.**

On-site discussions will generally open with a question about how work in the class proceeds. It will also typically ask after student questions, comments, and concerns about assigned readings. Discussion along any such thread, whether simply responding to the initial questions or following up on other students' such responses will be appreciated. As a sense of the individual student's presence and engagement with the class that day emerges, so will the overall score.

About assigned readings: It is not necessary to approve of or agree with what is in the assigned readings. Indeed, some of the best discussions come from interrogating the readings, critiquing them and looking for how they might have been better than they are. What is written is written by people. People err. Writing can always be improved. Working to account for error and improvement helps.

That said, agreement with the readings is fine, too. The important thing in either case is to be able to discuss why, preferably with specific reference to the text in question.

Note, though, that while ample participation is expected, participation that drowns out the voices of others will not be taken as appropriate. All have an equal obligation to contribute to the class, which means all have an obligation to offer space for the contributions of others.

Contributions of exceptional quality may be rewarded at a higher rate.

### How the Numbers Play Out

The table below lays out how discussion grades will be calculated for each of the first six weeks and the seventh.

| Criterion                                                             | Points Available for |             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|
|                                                                       | Weeks 1-6            | Week 7      |
| <b>Online</b>                                                         |                      |             |
| At least three quality posts, minimum 100 words each                  | 12 (4 each)          | 18 (6 each) |
| At least one quality post before Wednesday                            | 2                    | 3           |
| At least one quality post after the on-site meeting                   | 2                    | 3           |
| At least one new discussion thread begun                              | 2                    | 3           |
| At least one response to a thread in progress                         | 2                    | 3           |
| <b>On-site</b>                                                        |                      |             |
| Holistic assessment of ample, adequate, and appropriate participation | 20                   | 30          |
| <b>Total</b>                                                          | <b>40</b>            | <b>60</b>   |