

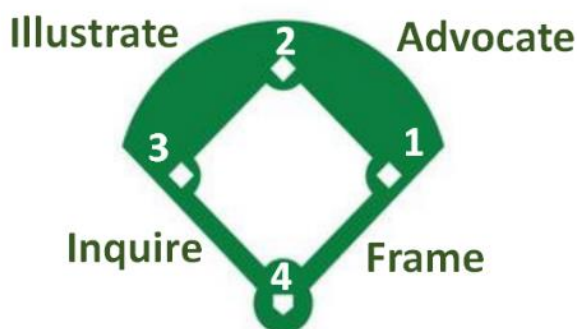
Forum Participation Made Easy

by Olgy Gary

One of the first things I had to learn as an online student was how to participate in online forums successfully. When taking online classes, a significant amount of your coursework will be devoted to classroom discussion, which takes place in the Forums or Dialogue section of your online courses. Whether they specifically spell it out or not, professors are looking for students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the assigned readings and materials. Professors will often ask for substantive and scholarly posts, and this implies the use of critical thinking skills in your writing.

Learning how to write thoroughly and concisely is a valuable skill to have, especially when participating in online forums where a word limit is often specified, so you need to focus on the quality of each post you write. To simplify this task, it helps to have a structure in mind. Exemplary posts have four functions, or parts of speech: frame, advocate, illustrate, and inquire.

Structure of a Post*



1. **Frame:** Framing states how your post relates to the topic at hand or your colleague's post. When you frame an issue or question, explicitly state the perspective you are taking. Don't let others guess at the frame from which you are addressing an issue.
2. **Advocate:** Advocating refers to explicitly asserting a position, option, or strategy of action. A post should make a point, take a stand, and make a claim. As online students, you should not advocate your opinion, but rather the arguments of the research literature.
3. **Illustrate:** Illustrating means relating your point to a concrete example, which can be from your experience or vicariously from that of others. Illustrating helps others see your point in action.
4. **Inquire:** Finally, you inquire. You close your post by asking a question of your colleagues. You question others to learn from them. A good post leaves the conversation open.

Forum participation will be a time for you to reflect on what you're learning from both assigned materials and other students' perspectives. Keeping a structure in mind as you write your posts will help you bring your point across as well as extend the conversation with others in the class.

*Written in 2016, adapted from Torbert, W. R. (2004). *Action inquiry: The secret of timely and transforming leadership*. Berrett-Koehler, pp. 28-29.



Ms. Olgy Gary is the Lead Instructional Designer at Oral Roberts University's Online and Lifelong Learning department. She's a Cuban-American and a PhD Candidate in Higher Education.

[See the following as an example of a well-crafted forum post]

Tragic Heroes

The ethical failures of prominent Pentecostal leaders are well known. Shrewdly, Ma (2017) asks whether this failure of prominent Spirit-Empowered leaders is new? He directs us to the biblical account of Samson and Saul to argue that “Spirit’s presence includes both an internal transformation” in addition to the more visible “empowering outward acts of deliverance” (Ma, p. 23). He offers us biblical evidence from 1 Sam. 8:6-7, 9 that the inner gift of a new heart was received by Saul at his anointing by the prophets. Based on this and other passages, Ma (34) concludes that this “experience with the Spirit... was meant to enhance Saul’s personal and character development as a chosen leader of God.” How do we make sure that we are responding to God’s work, to shape our internal character, not just our external ministry performance?

References

Ma, W. (2017). Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered heroes: A close look at Samson and Saul. *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2(1-2), 23-38.

[See how above forum is structured below so that it covers all four pillars of a well-crafted forum post (Frame, Advocate, Illustrate, Inquire) as well as a title & references.



Base	My Post
Title	Tragic Heroes
1 Frame	The ethical failures of prominent Pentecostal leaders are well known.
2 Advocate	Shrewdly, Ma (2017) asks whether this failure of prominent Spirit-Empowered leaders is new? He directs us to the biblical account of Samson and Saul to argue that “Spirit’s presence includes both an internal transformation” in addition to the more visible “empowering outward acts of deliverance” (Ma, p. 23).
3 Illustrate	He offers us biblical evidence from 1 Sam. 8:6-7, 9 that the inner gift of a new heart was received by Saul at his anointing by the prophets. Based on this and other passages, Ma (34) concludes that this “experience with the Spirit... was meant to enhance Saul’s personal and character development as a chosen leader of God.”
4 Inquire	How do we make sure that we are responding to God’s work, to shape our internal character, not just our external ministry performance?
References	References Ma, W. (2017). Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered heroes: A close look at Samson and Saul. <i>Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology</i> 2(1-2), 23-38.

1. Frame

2. Advocate

3. Illustrate

4. Inquire



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