# Slide 5: Build Community, Critical Thinking, and Interaction with Discussions

Discussions are one of the best ways to encourage interaction and build community in the online environment.

* Set guidelines for interacting in the online discussion board.
* Consider providing choices so students can select from two or three topics.
* Keep discussions focused on relevant issues. Post a reply re-directing the conversation.
* For evaluation, provide guidelines so students will know how the discussion is to be graded. The grade may be based on quality, number of posts and responses, spelling and grammar, and so forth. If you use a rubric, it will vary depending on the purpose of the discussion. Search for rubrics or try [Rubistar](http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php).
* When evaluating, provide helpful feedback including:
  + Specifics of where the learner excelled.
  + Specifics of where the learner needs improvement.
  + Actionable ways to improve performance.
  + Final positive statement on learner’s behavior.
* Encourage knowledge construction and critical thinking by using the Socratic method of questioning. When posting responses to student discussion postings, encourage critical thinking by imposing though-provoking questions. Here are some questions you might include: [Universal Intellectual Standards--http://louisville.edu/ideastoaction/about/criticalthinking/framework](http://louisville.edu/ideastoaction/about/criticalthinking/framework) by Elder and Paul, 2010.
  + Clarity Questions:
    - Could you elaborate further?
    - Could you illustrate what you mean?
    - Could you give me an example?
  + Accuracy Questions
    - How could we check on that?
    - How could we find out if that is true?
    - How could we verify or test that?
  + Precision Question
    - Could you be more specific?
    - Could you give me more details?
    - Could you be more exact?
  + Relevance Questions
    - How does that relate to the problem?
    - How does that bear on the question?
    - How does that help us with the issue?
  + Depth Questions
    - What factors make this a difficult problem?
    - What are some of the complexities of this question?
    - What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?
  + Breadth Questions
    - Do we need to look at this from another perspective?
    - Do we need to consider another point of view?
    - Do we need to look at this in other ways?
  + Logic Questions
    - Does all of this make sense together?
    - Does you first paragraph fit in with your last one?
    - Does what you say follow from the evidence?
  + Significance Questions
    - Is this the most important problem to consider?
    - Is this the central idea to focus on?
    - Which of these facts are most important?
  + Fairness Questions
    - Do I have any stake in this issue?
    - Am I sympathetically representing the viewpoint of others?