Hi. I want to discuss with you some effective online communication strategies and specifically strategies related to scholarly writing on the discussion board. For many new students at Walden University, scholarly writing may be a very new experience and this type of writing may be very different from experiences that you've had in the past. At the end of this session you'll be able to write effective, scholarly posts for the class discussion board in response to instructor-generated questions. And to write effective scholarly posts for the class discussion board in response to the postings of other students.

What is scholarly discourse? Scholarly discourse is critical reflection that weighs personal opinions against evidence. And this is a very crucial point. What we're going to be teaching you how to do in graduate school and what you'll be learning in your coursework is how to take what you believe to be true, and to match that against what you see in the research literature, to have, to use that information to support your opinions or to disconfirm your opinions. The important point is that anecdote is not equal to fact. And what we're going to ask you to do is to go into the professional literature and see what the evidence says before arriving at a conclusion.

This leads to the second point: that scholarly discourse is based in evidence, either empirical or logical. All of your schools have professional journals associated with them and that is going to be the primary source of empirical evidence that you will use in your paper writing. Scholarly discourse is objective in tone. What this means is that what you're writing is not subjective. That is, it's not based on your opinions. Rather, it is balanced in its presentation and allows the reader to come up with a conclusion based on the evidence. Scholarly discourse is concise and presented in a logical order. And it's also written with correct grammar and punctuation.

Now what are some of the goals of scholarly discourse? Some of the things that we want to do are to stimulate evidence-based discussion. One of the things that I notice with new learners in the online environment is that they tend to want to write from their own experience and their own personal opinions rather than bringing in the evidence. And what we're going to do in your program of study is to teach you how to use that evidence to balance that with your opinion and then to stimulate discussion with other students and faculty members in your classroom. It's also to facility learners as teachers, and teachers as learners. What do I mean by that? We have a large number of students at Walden University who are professionals. They come with a rich body of knowledge and experience, as do the faculty members. And one of the common things that I hear from faculty members is that they report themselves being as much students as the students are. And so we foster this environment where teachers and learners are both learning as we go through the, the process of the course. The third is to exemplify the scholar-practitioner model. The scholar-practitioner model very simply means two things. One, is that the scholar-practitioner is concerned with practical problems that require solutions. The second is that the
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scholar-practitioner is continually using evidence-based scholarship and matching that to their practice. One example of this would be the therapist. [00:03:50] Rather than just doing therapy because a therapist thinks that it will work, the scholar-practitioner will go into the research literature, will figure out what the best practices are, and then take those best practices and incorporate them into the practice.

And another goal of scholarly discourse is to evaluate the evidence to further personal and social understanding and knowledge. Scholarly discourse in the virtual classroom is a little bit different than it might be in a classroom where you're talking face to face with other students. [00:04:22] First of all, all students participate and no student is left behind. This may be very different from what you're used to in a traditional classroom where you're not always required to speak in class. In the virtual classroom you are going to be required as part of your participation grade to engage in the scholarly discussion. [00:04:41] So it's very important that you begin now by learning how to write good scholarly posts since you're going to have to be participating in those classes.

There are no visual cues. Basically what you see in the post is what you get. You don't have the other person, you don't have nonverbal bo-, cues to go on to try to determine meaning. What's in that posting is what is to be interpreted.

The last point is that online discourse is really a combination of the formality of paper writing combined with the lesser formality of verbal discourse. And part of the challenge to learning how to engage in scholarly discussion in the virtual classroom is finding the right mix of these two principals.

In general there are two types of discussion posts that you're going to be required to write. In the first one, the instructor presents questions to which you will need to write a response to. The second type of posting, and this is what stimulates conversation in the classroom, is that generally you'll be required to respond to the posting of another student. [00:05:52] And so what we're going to talk about here is how to write each of those types of postings.

So for the first one, when responding to the instructor question, consider these things. The first thing to consider is the instructor's question. The instructor will pose one or more questions for you to respond to. What I would suggest is that you write those on a separate sheet of paper so that you can compare back to the instructor's original request to make sure that you are prepared to answer all of the questions that the instructor has posed for you. [00:06:24] Also consider the instructor's guidelines for answering the question. In your courses you're probably going to find something called a posting rubric, that will give you very clear and detailed instructions for how to write the post and also how that posting is going to be scored. [00:06:42] Third, information from the textbook or the scholarly peer review literature. And when I talk about peer review, most of your professional scholarly journals engage in a peer review process. This just means that when an article is submitted for publication it is reviewed by scholars in the field prior to its becoming published. [00:07:02] So what you're guaranteed is that you have the best research in your field. The last consideration is what your personal experience is bringing into the question. We don't want to disregard personal experience because our personal and professional experiences are extremely important in terms of
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furthering knowledge.

The second type of post that I had talked to you about was the, the response post that you will make to another student. Here are some guidelines for creating the response post. After you read the post that has been put on the discussion board by the student, ask yourself: what did the student say in the post? [00:07:41] Think about this. Can you summarize briefly the main points that were provided? What was it about the student's answer that was well done? This is extremely important. We want to always be providing students with positive feedback. Even if the post isn't done the way we would've like to have it done, generally whenever students write something, they say things that are good. [00:08:03] And we want to make sure that we provide that feedback up front in the post so that we acknowledge the work that the other, that our colleagues are doing. What do I think about the response? Some other questions to ask about this are how does it relate to what I know about the topic, and how does it compare to what the literature says? [00:08:21] This is when, when I'm engaging in a process of critical reflection. Finally what further question for inquiry does this discussion posting raise? This is a critical aspect of responding to the other students, and this is what we use to help stimulate scholarly discourse in the classroom. [00:08:38] The questions that you posed, that were raised by you in the posting, will be useful for the faculty members and the students, to continue thinking about the particular discussion question in perhaps different ways than they had previously. So write your response using these points as an outline.

I'm going to show you examples of three different postings. What I'd like you to do is to read the postings, and then I will provide some brief commentary on where these postings were strong and where they could've been improved. The first posting, or example one, discussion question posed by an instructor in the School Of Engineering. [00:09:18] The basic question that he asked: "In what kind of memory would you store each of the following: the program for an intelligent VCR of which your company hopes to sell 10 million units; a user-configurable name for a printer attached to a network that the printer should remember even if the power failed." And then the instructor asked, "Discuss the types of memory found in embedded systems, and what type of data you would store in each. Give some examples to illustrate your ideas." [00:09:49] That was the instructor-generated question. This was the student response to the instructor. If we recall the, the criteria for responding to the instructor's postings, we can see that there are a couple of things that are missing from this student's response. [00:10:08] First, the answers are not provided in complete sentences. It's very jargonistic. If we notice here that there's a lot of abbreviations, and while somebody in the School Of Engineering may understand those, not everybody will know what they are. [00:10:24] I always suggest that students learn to spell things out because one of the things about your education is that you're learning the, the meanings of the terms that you're using, and also to be able to describe those terms to other people. And this gives you good practice in doing that. [00:10:40] It also gives you practice in learning how to write in complete sentences and using proper grammar. In this particular case the student did not do that. If we recall back to the second question that the instructor asked, it's not clear in this particularly posting that the student actually addressed that question.

The second kind of post that we talked about was the one in which the student responds to the posting of another student in the class. This is the response that one student made to the
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posting that we previously examined. [00:11:12] Overall I would just this to be a, a relatively
good response, although if we recall back to the checklist that we were examining for
response postings, we can see that there are some parts that are missing. First I would start
with just a very brief summary of what the student wrote. And there is some of that in this
particular posting. [00:11:33] The second part that I would suggest here is that the student say
something positive about the original posting. And I would put that at the very beginning,
because it really does set the communicate off on a very positive and upbeat start. [00:11:48]
The student does say that he or she agrees that with such high volume one would want to
keep the cost down, and while this is positive what one would want to strive for in the positive
response is to give some kind of a synopsis of the overall feeling that was engendered by the
post. [00:12:07] The last thing that I would suggest in this particular post, and, and we should
always get in the habit of doing this in our postings, is to ask questions. I would always end the
posting with some kind of question that encourages the, that author and other readers to think
about those issues in different ways.

Example two is a discussion question posed by an instructor for an early assignment in (MBA
6000), an orientation course. And this is the question that the professor asked. "Please take
this self evaluation quiz in the Week 2 course document folder of this classroom to find out if
you will be a successful online learner. This quiz also includes a computer skills inventory to
help you identify the skills you will need to succeed in your online program. Report on your
quiz results as a reply to this discussion thread. Reflecting on the feedback you received from
the quiz results, what did you learn about your strengths and weaknesses as an online
student?" [00:13:07] And this was the student's response. In this particular case the instructor
did not ask the students to prepare response to other students. However we can look at this
particular post and see that there's a lot of good qualities about that. This student not only
conveyed some of her strengths but she also conveyed some of the insecurities that she has
about being in this new online learning environment. [00:13:34] And through that she's
connecting with other students who are probably feeling the same way that she is. And also
she has addressed both of the questions that the professor asked her to address. One of the
things that I would look at as a professor reading this, is that I would be giving some feedback
on sentence construction and grammar. And this is one thing that you should expect from your
very beginning coursework in your program. [00:13:58] The reason that we do this, and we will
do this in your online postings is to help to shape you into becoming a scholarly writer. And
someone who can engage in scholarly discourse.

This third example is a student to student response in the School of Psychology. This posting
is rather length, and one of the things that we want to be cautious about is having postings
that are too long on the discussion board. However this posting captures all of the key points
that we want to include in a response posting to another student. This student first is very
positive about the overall feeling that was engendered from the original post. [00:14:41]
Second the student has summarized very briefly some of what was included in the original
posting. Third, if we look, there are several places where the student has asked very insightful
and critical questions, again meant to stimulate scholarly discourse in the classroom.
[00:15:01] One of the things that is expected of you is that if students ask you questions in the
posting that you'll respond back to the student. This is a general common courtesy that would
be expected of all students. So get into the habit early, if students ask you questions that you
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respond back to them.

So in review, let's examine a checklist for discussion posts. Read the question. Read the rubric. Read the text book if appropriate. Read and incorporate peer reviewed scholarship if appropriate. [00:15:33] Weight personal experience. And also incorporate instructor feedback into the next post. This is very important. The instructors will spend time each week giving you feedback on your posting. What you need to do is to take that feedback from the postings, critically reflect on it, and incorporate that feedback into subsequent postings that you write. [00:15:59] This is one of the ways that the faculty member has to help shape you into becoming a better writer and into becoming a critical thinker.

The checklist for response posts. Give positive feedback. Summarize. Reflect critically. And question. Do not limit your post to "good response" or "nice job". These two types of responses do not reflect critical thinking. Incorporate instructor feedback into the next response. [00:16:32] This is similar to before, the instructor will give you feedback on all of your postings, and the instructor is only doing this to help make you a better writer and a better critical thinker.

I've just spent some time talking with you about effective online communication and some tips that you can use for scholarly writing on the discussion board. Use the checklists and practice. The first posts that you write are not necessarily going to be the best posts that you ever write, but if you use the checklists and you use the feedback that the professor provides you, you'll be on your way to becoming a better scholarly writer.

[00:17:12] - RECORDING ENDS