How to Write a Quality Post

Objectives for *Reflection Group Online Forums*:
1) Students will reflect theologically on their own and others' practice of ministry.
2) Students will interact weekly online with their assigned *Ministry Reflection Group* by reflecting and posting on given prompts and responding to other students' posts.
3) Students will demonstrate depth of thought, height of respect, and effective communication skills in every *Reflection Group* interaction.

General Introduction to *Reflection Groups*

One of the most dynamic ways for students in Field Study to learn is to talk with each other about what they are experiencing. Unfortunately, that is nearly impossible with online courses. Even online "discussions" cannot replicate the dynamic of a live conversation. But there is hope! I have worked hard to remedy that problem and have put together a plan for ministry reflection groups (or simply "Reflection Groups") that will allow you to engage with other students in a meaningful exchange of ideas online.

I have repeatedly said there are three key elements of an effective Field Study: Doing Ministry; Reflecting on Ministry; and Improving in Ministry. Reflection formally occurs in two ways throughout Field Study. The first is with your Field Mentor in your regular meetings with them. The second is through these online forums in your *Reflection Group* where you get the chance to process the hopes, fears, frustrations, and joys that you experience in ministry. *Reflection Group* forums are a vital part of your preparation for Christian leadership and ministry.

If you've participated in online discussions in the past, you may have had very positive experiences and are excited at the idea of doing so again. For others, it's possible you did not have a positive experience. And for still others this is all new to you. Don't worry. I will walk you through the whole assignment so you'll feel comfortable as you launch into the online discussion part of this course. I will make sure you know what is expected of you each week. And I will take you through step by step to help you become familiar with the technology.

Overview of Reflection Groups

In order to allow you to interact with other students, you will be grouped with 5-9 students in a "Reflection Group." Throughout the duration of this course you will engage in weekly online forums. Each week the exchange of ideas will be guided by a "Prompt" and suggestions for your "Replies" and "Final Reflection." In the first week you will be asked to participate in an "Ice Breaker" discussion that will help you get familiar with the process and give you time to work out any glitches while you get a bit more familiar with the other members in your Reflection Group. Each section of Field Study may use the Reflection Group forums to process different elements of the course, but the basic set up and Weekly Rhythm is the same in every Field Study course. You can find a schedule of weekly topics on the opening page of the "Reflection Group Forums" container.

Schedule for the Reflection Groups

Each week will run like this: I will provide a "prompt" by noon on Monday. The prompt may be simply a set of questions, or it may be a short essay with a few questions. You will be asked to make a **First Post** a response by Midnight Tuesday. You will have Wednesday and Thursday to read the posts in your group and **Reply to at least three** by midnight Thursday. You may participate in free exchange of ideas until midnight Saturday. By the following Monday at midnight you will need to write a **Summary Reflection** post sharing what you are taking away from the previous week's discussion. If you plan the timing of your posts properly you will only need to be active on the forum twice each week. However you are encouraged to post as often as you wish.

Weekly Rhythm for Posting:
1) Prompt is activated **Monday before noon**.
2) Students read prompt and make *First Post* by **midnight Tuesday**.
3) Students read other's first posts and *Reply to at least three* other students by **midnight Thursday**.
4) Students engage in free exchange of ideas until **midnight Saturday**.
5) Students make a *Final Reflection* post by **midnight Monday**.

Expectations for Reflection Groups

The quality of your posts is critical. If you have not yet done so, please read "**Great Net-spectations**," found in the "Reflection Group" container. You will be expected to display the qualities describes in *Great Net-spectations* when you Post or Reply.

I will provide suggested word counts for each Post, Reply and Final Reflection. They are only **suggestions**; you should aim at being in the ballpark. The purpose of the word count is not to make you fluff up your posts and fill them with blather. In fact, I have tried to make them minimal so you will have to work hard to say what you mean within the target number of words. This encourages two things: 1) for you to choose your words carefully, and 2) limits the number of words each student has to read.

The purpose of the online forums is to give you the opportunity to think and share openly about what you are experiencing in relation to the prompts. There are no right or wrong answers, so you are free to express what you think. However, you need to keep in mind a few factors.

1) As a graduate course in ministry practice, your posts must convey substance. You should provide more than merely your opinion on a subject. Explain your reasons, share what you have read or experienced that leads you to hold the view you do.

2) Be sure to write clearly, following the *Great Net-spectations* guidelines provided for online communication. Your posts don't have to be formal, but they must be clear and show you are trying to engage with the subject and one another.

3) Post sooner rather than later. If everyone in a group waits till 11:59 to post, quality will be diminished. Check in on the discussion as soon as you can, and post as soon and often as you are able. Please see the **Grading Rubric Participation and Quality**, below.

The Technological Side of Reflection Groups

A list of the members in each Group can be found in the Reflection Group container. Each week when you open the Reflection Group learning object, you must be sure to enter the forum that is labeled with your group name. Make sure you participate only in the Reflection Group in which you have been assigned.

Creating a New Post and Reading Existing Posts

Open the Reflection Group learning object in the appropriate weekly container.

To Post: Read the prompt instructions. Scroll to the bottom of the page and open the forum labeled with your Group name (A, B, C, etc.) – click on the gray bar beneath your Group name. If others have already posted, you will need to scroll to the bottom of the previous posts in order to add yours. Then write your post. Compose in Word and then copy and paste your text using the "paste in Word" feature. Be sure to follow the guidelines offered in *Great Net-spectations* for this course. When you are finished be sure to click "Respond to Topic" in the bottom right corner.

To Read: You may read existing posts by clicking on the gray bar beneath the forum for your Group.

Replying to a Post

To reply to someone else's post (or even your own), don't start a new post. Instead, go to the post you want to reply to and click "Reply to this response" along the bottom right of their post. Type your reply, then click the "Reply" button at the bottom right. In BlueQuill, you are not able to reply to a reply, so if you want to do so, reply to the original post, and simply address it to the person to whom you are replying.

If You Need Help
It's that simple! If you have trouble posting, try using a different browser, like Mozilla Firefox (ATS recommended) or Google Chrome (my preference). If you have technological trouble, seek help accordingly:
If you have trouble with BlueQuill please contact:
- **Jonathan Cole,** Help Desk Support at jcole9@ashland.edu or 419.289.5770
  Jonathan cole is providing help desk support for faculty and students during normal office hours.
  If Jonathan is not available you are able to contact the Franklin University Help Desk directly.
- **BlueQuill Help Desk:**
  o Contact by Phone (Toll Free): 1.866.435.7006
  o Contact by Email: servicedesk@franklin.edu (include a reference to Ashland Theological Seminary in the message)
  o **The hours of operation for the Help Desk are as follows:**
  o Monday-Thursday: 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. EST
  o Friday: 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. EST
  o Saturday: 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. EST
  o Sunday: 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. EST
Please be sure to contact the Field Education Office if your technology troubles will make you late for a deadline, or if you need other assistance.

Rubric for Forums
The forums are intended to allow students to learn from each other, which is a challenging goal to assess. In order to encourage you to engage with one another freely, only a portion of your posts will be graded. Instead, the major portion of your grade will be based strictly on participation. That is, whether you posted every time and on time. Additionally, the instructor will select random posts each week and assess them according to the rubric below. The instructor might write comments to individuals or groups for the purpose of improving quality and encouraging a deeper exchange of ideas. These comments may be made in the forum or as an email to one or more students. A final grade will be assigned at the end of the term according to the rubric below.

Your grade for Reflection Group will be based on participation (70%) and quality (30%).
Participation: Every post/reply you make on time will count 1 point. Minus 1 point for every 2 late posts/replies made in the same week. 0 points for any post/reply made after the week is over.
You are assigned 5 posts per week for 14 weeks = 70 points possible.
Quality: Your posts will be assessed based on the following criteria on a 0 to 4 point scale:

0 – Lacking   1 – Poor   2 – Fair   3 – Good   4 – Excellent

Criteria	Description	Points
Commitment	provide substance, engage topic, check in frequently	
Courtesy	respect others, show kindness	
Clarity	Meaning is clear, written specifically	
Concise	say what you mean and no more	
Courage	disagree respectfully, criticize ideas not people	
Caution	care with humor, avoid sarcasm, avoid insensitive language	
Careful	proofread all posts, double check for meaning, address the issues	

These seven criteria offer a total of 28 points for Quality. All students get an additional 2 free points.

Ice Breaker: 2 points possible
Participation: 70 points possible
Quality: 28 points possible
Total: 100 possible