

Yellowdig Community Interaction Strategies

Make sure Yellowdig is not a side-show: First and foremost, Yellowdig is designed to be an organic and connected learning community which is used as part of a course in tandem with synchronous sessions (if any) and the LMS. It is not meant to be an isolated part of a course and learners should not be expected to be the only ones connecting the community to the course. It can be a place where students interact with each other to learn with each other and where they can find agency to ask the questions they have, as well as share any personal experiences or things they see happening in the world that are course or concept relevant (e.g., news articles, videos, etc.). This helps students better connect with the material, as well as providing relevance and making abstract concepts more accessible with real world examples.

Yellowdig communities work best when they do not exist in a vacuum. Yellowdig should be a vital and synergistic piece of the entire course experience and students shouldn't feel they can complete the class and get everything it has to offer without participating. Finding ways of bringing Yellowdig into other aspects of the course and bringing other aspects of the course into Yellowdig will remind students and increase their initial rates of participation.

Starting a new cohort with higher stakes: Getting students into the community for the first time is often down to appealing to what will motivate them. Other things described in these suggestions can help make the community have clearer value, which will provide some intrinsic motivation to participate. With that said, if Yellowdig is worth a full letter grade, that will go a long way towards driving students into the community and participating. If it's worth less than a letter grade, some students may never enter because they feel the stakes aren't high enough. Some communities thrive with a lower grade value if students are shown that the community will be of value to them, but it is vitally important to find something that will motivate them to start participating.

Set expectations and explain the value to students: It's important to set explicit expectations with students at the outset of the community around the purpose of the community, the instructor's role in the community, and what students should and should not do. Yellowdig is a different experience than a discussion board, so it can be very helpful to spell this out clearly and reduce the ambiguity of being in a new environment. [This article presents a script an instructor can modify to record a short welcome video in an initial Yellowdig post.](#) Though it is important to set expectations in the course design and community, it is also important to do it in a way that makes Yellowdig sound like a useful and helpful place, not just another thing to do with a ton of rules governing how they participate.

Modeling behavior for students: Your students are likely new to Yellowdig and may be more used to traditional discussion boards, or may not have participated in an online course previously. As Yellowdig is something entirely different, and as mentioned above, letting them know at the outset and reducing ambiguity is an important step in introducing them to the Yellowdig community.

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Yellowdig communities work best when the instructors model the behavior they want to see rather than leading every conversation. Yellowdig and the gameful learning point system, as well as Yellowdig Topics, are designed to encourage course-relevant, organic student conversations, rather than rigid weekly prompted discussions with all students answering the same question each week. When a new course cohort is starting, the instructors can model the type of posts that they wish to have students produce. That might mean sharing intro posts, with videos of the instructor and TAs, if any, who will be participating in the community. Sharing those can encourage students to create their own intro posts. Introduction posts are also a wonderful and easy way for students to get their feet wet in the platform and start earning points. They will also start to get to know each other and feel more comfortable interacting with each other. Sharing an occasional course-related news article will provide further guidance to students and encourage them to share similar items.

Posting vs commenting: Our data shows a correlation between instructor commenting (not posting) and student participation. In other words, commenting by the instructor tends to lead to more student participation, likely because instructors that interact with their students are more likely to be helpful and will be seen by students as more present, more engaged in what the students are doing, and more responsive to what students need. Instructor posting is often more about communicating specific content or information to students, which may be valuable in its own right, but often does not feel as responsive to students and may “miss” in sharing what they actually care about or need. Thus, beyond initial or occasional posts to share information or model the type of posts that students should try to emulate instructors should consider commenting on student posts when that will extend a valuable conversation, for example when that post isn't getting traction it deserves, or if the instructor wants to add a new perspective to an existing post.

Of course, the instructors should feel free to post occasional course information, questions and polls for students, but not requiring all students to answer any particular question. It is a good practice to have students have optionality in responding to those questions, and they should be encouraged to start their own posts or reply to their peers' posts, rather than having everyone reply to the instructor post. (Using “No-Point” Yellowdig topics when instructor posts can assist with this.) A strong instructor presence is a vital way to build toward a successful Yellowdig community, but that presence does not need to be achieved only through having a regular slate of posts. When posting, it's suggested for the instructor to use a “no-point” Topic to encourage students to start their own conversations, rather than continuing the thread from the instructor.

Accolades: Another valuable and easy way to model behavior is the thoughtful use of Yellowdig point-bearing Accolades to recognize outstanding posts and/or comments that you want other students to emulate. Consider using specific accolades to recognize specific types of encouraged behavior. The Verified Response Accolade can be used to point out the best student submitted answer to any student question and can then be an effective tool to create a study guide for students. It also can help alleviate the burden of instructor's answering all student questions.

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Bringing students back to the community: As noted above, making the Yellowdig community a vital and synergistic part of the course will provide value and motivation for students and also encourage them to participate. One good way to connect Yellowdig more to any course is by using Permalinks from the community. Permalinks are available on every Yellowdig post and comment (click the “...” menu at the top right of any post or comment.). They offer a one click journey (plus login, if necessary) to any individual post or comment that the instructor’s want to share with the community and they can be an effective tool to drive students back into the community. They can be easily copied to share outside of the Yellowdig community in any other course communications or materials. Sharing key Yellowdig conversations in emails to students, synchronous sessions, or even on the LMS page can create interest, show value, and point students back to the community. It also helps show that those running the courses care about what is happening in the community and are treating it as an indispensable part of the course.

The Yellowdig Community Success team is happy to meet and go through these strategies, discuss instructor workflow, and answer any questions you may have.