

Advice for Using Slack

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The following is adapted from the advice I provide to online instructors who will be teaching a class that I've designed to use Slack. The course in question for the following notes is EN207: Professional and Technical Editing, a fully asynchronous, 8-week course. Feel free to adapt it for your own use.


The more you can help students create a habit of checking on and posting to Slack (or whatever technology you've chosen for class discussions) early in the semester, the more likely they are to continue to use it throughout the term and to organically create the sort of community we instructors are always hoping for. **Therefore, I recommend posting a few times each day, especially in the first few weeks of class.**

Your posts need not be big to-dos—in fact, it's almost better if they aren't. Students tend to respond best to informal, natural, off-the-cuff exchanges on Slack because that makes it feel more like social media and less like an assignment. (Also, they can smell a canned, pre-meditated post a mile away.)

Most important is to interact with students when they post. You can expand a discussion into a full-blown thread of course, but don't underestimate the power of merely leaving a reaction emoji.

Some ideas:

- On the [#general](#) channel, I usually post reminders whenever I'm in office hours so that students know they can get real-time help from me on Slack or even jump into my Zoom office:




Dr. G 10:03 AM

[@everyone](#) Office hours are from now to 11:30—I'll be here on Slack ready to answer your questions or in my Zoom office ready to chat: <https://park.zoom.us/my/grooover>


This is an asynchronous class, but that doesn't mean you can't ever see my face or dig deeper into the material than the Canvas shell asks you to. Come find out what lame Target dad t-shirt I'm wearing today!

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- Sometimes I invite students into a discussion:

 **Dr. G** 5:11 PM
 @channel It's been a week or so since you read about developing an "editorial mindset," and since that time you've begun editing yourself. So let's hear it:

- What does your own editorial mindset feel like?
- Which tips from the reading have proved useful? Which haven't?
- What additional tips do you have, if any?
- What additional advice or additional development, if any, do you still need?

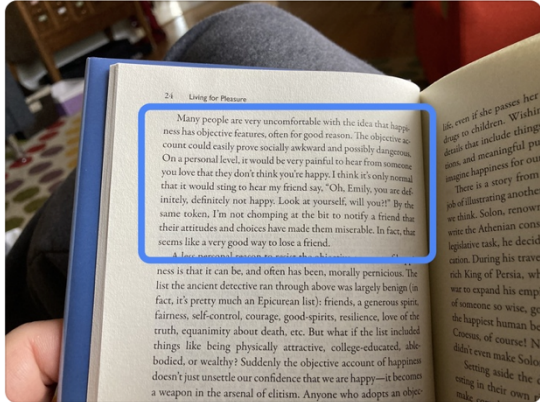
 **4 replies** Last reply 8 days ago


- On #editing-in-the-real-world, I post errors and ambiguous sentences I find in things I'm reading:


 **Dr. G** 10:17 AM
 Here's an editing fail I found this weekend. I'm reading a book on Epicurean philosophy, *Living for Pleasure*, by Emily Austin. The book was published by Oxford University Press, so you would expect them to employ the best and brightest editorial staff.


And here's what I found:

epicureanism.jpg ▾




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 **Dr. G** 10:18 AM
 Can anyone find the error in this paragraph? Extra credit to the winner!

 **12 replies** Last reply 3 days ago


- On [#crowd-sourcing-answers](#), I ask for advice, offer help, and link to interesting articles or online resources related to editing:

 **Dr. G** 9:50 PM
 @channel By the way, if anyone ever needs me to look up something in a dictionary, thesaurus, style guide, usage manual, or other resource, I'm happy to do so and post what I find here on Slack for you. Many of you have expressed interest in these types of resources since reading about them in the textbook, but I certainly don't expect you to run out and buy them all or anything (they expensive!).

But I have a bunch lying around, so just let me know!

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- On [#random](#), I just goof around:


 **Dr. G** 11:03 AM
 Just want to report that I made Rice Krispie treats the other day according to the proportions my old college dorm cafeteria always used. That is, I increased the Krispies by 60%, but I increased the butter and marshmallows by 150%.





They good

I'm eating one right now (edited)

Someone stop me by asking a question about editing

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 **Dr. G** 11:13 AM
 It's too late. Where were you when I needed you?

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I often find that, while I'm grading the previous week's work, I think of half a dozen or more things to post about. Rather than post them all at once, I'll keep a running list of ideas and post one or two a day to spread things out.

I've learned over and over—from personal experience and in conversation with students—that you cannot force a community to develop on Slack or anywhere. At best, you can

- **lower the barrier of entry** (by choosing elegant software like Slack over clunky familiarity like Canvas),
- **reduce the obligation to participate** (students won't do it if it feels like a weekly chore, which is why the Ongoing Discussions aren't due until Unit 8),
- **and encourage organic, joyful participation** (by engaging in it yourself).

After that, it's up to students to collectively decide through their actions whether a community will form. Some terms it does, some terms it doesn't. (I find this very frustrating, but that's just how it is.)