Participating in online discussion at the Open Access College

What is an online discussion?
Many courses and resources that are offered online have a discussion forum. This facility gives you the opportunity to have a discussion with other students and your teacher, apart from your weekly telephone lesson.

The discussion groups used in OAC courses are asynchronous threaded discussion groups. This means that participants contribute at any time – they don’t need all to be online at the same time.

Why participate?
Online discussions provide an opportunity to learn collaboratively with others. You may be required to participate in an online discussion as part of your course requirements. By exploring ideas with others you can improve your knowledge and understanding and develop your communication and critical thinking skills. You can also get to know other students in your course and discuss common issues with them.

Accessing online discussions
You will need to use your user name and password to access the online course that you are undertaking.
The Discussion link is usually located on the ‘home page’ of the course.

Making the most of online discussions
Here are some suggestions for communicating effectively online.
- Introduce yourself briefly when making your first contribution – as you would when meeting someone for the first time
- Read your contribution carefully before you send it.
- Present your ideas in smallish screen-sized chunks.
- Give examples or evidence supporting your ideas.

You will gain much from an online discussion if you build on the contributions of others. You can do this by:
- agreeing with what they have said and explaining why you agree
- re-stating or clarifying or explaining in your own words what they have said
- making a ‘yes, but...’ statement, partly agreeing with what they have said and then offering a further perspective
- explaining why you disagree with their statement
- suggesting a completely different viewpoint on the topic
- asking another participant to justify, explain or elaborate on their contribution
- inviting others to comment on, add to or critique, your views
- summarising or finding patterns in the contributions that have been made so far
- suggesting another direction the discussion could take
- inserting links to web sites in your discussion
- sharing journal references or other useful resources which are relevant to the discussion
- asking a question.