Instructors are increasingly turning to online discussion boards to augment classroom discussion, but making sense of the posts in an online discussion board can be difficult, even when the conversation is threaded (Kay, 2008).

Online discussion boards provide a number of advantages for both students and teachers (see, e.g., Xie, 2006; Krentler & Willis-Flurry, 2005). The general use statistics most boards make easily available, such as counts of posts or words, are poor measures of the quality of learning taking place in those discussions (Mazzolini & Madison, 2005) and incorporating online discussions into existing teaching positions can increase the course’s workload for both students and instructors (Brush, et al., 2002).

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