

A Guide to Online Critique

Overview

Over the past several decades, teachers in Vermont have been using methods of respectful dialog to help students improve their work. Building on knowledge gained from the Vermont Writing Process and the Vermont Arts Assessment Project, as well as from professional critique circles in writing and visual art, the WEB Project has developed an online system for continuing and improving these processes at a distance.

Music teachers, their students, and some professional composers began the move to online critique with the establishment of the Vermont MIDI Project. Their early lessons have since been built upon by a visual arts exchange, online literature discussions, and a dialog about current events and civic discourse. The ideas for how this online critique should function and for what purpose are still in development.

Participants are giving careful consideration to the type of online culture they want to foster in order to maintain a healthy exchange of thoughts, ideas, and personal work. This culture was articulated in May 1997 by a group of 15 participants representing most of the mentoring initiatives and three of the cooperating schools.

“There are two things within the culture of the Initiatives that are inextricably linked: individual expression tied to a respect for others. In doing so, we are trying to:

1. create safety in connection with risk taking
2. establish standards or expectations
3. use reflection, critique, and improvement as a process for learning according to these ground rules:
 - a. be emotionally and mentally present when participating
 - b. make an honest effort
 - c. collaborate
 - d. express yourselves creatively/artistically
4. treat others with honesty and integrity.”

In addition to receiving comments from one another, participants are using mentors, who work outside of the K–12 school system, to give feedback. Online activity extends beyond school. Some students participate from home or from community sites as well.

Current Agreements

Throughout the last three years, groups of Vermont teachers, students, and mentors have gathered to discuss how online critique is or is not functioning for them. Based on suggestions from participants, we currently use the following agreements:

Agreement One -- *Describe in detail what you are trying to do.*

Rich descriptions help listeners and viewers understand the intent of the creator or know assignment is being worked with. Supplying this information gives the responders a context for commenting.

Agreement Two -- *Request feedback, but be open to more than what is asked for.*

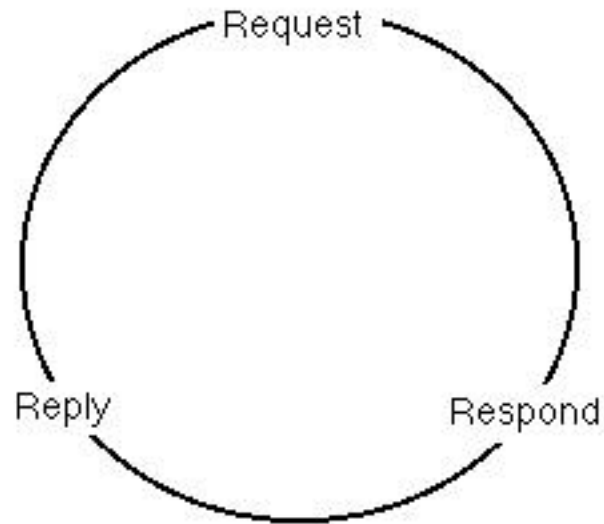
Saying what it is that you would like to have input about helps the responder to focus and give comments that are useful. That being said, a responder may also wish to give comments about some aspects of a piece which have not been specifically requested. High school students, especially, have asked that mentors use their expertise to help them stretch their imaginations and the possibilities offered.

Agreement Three -- *Give specific and detailed comments that are based on helping a person reach his/her intent.*

The goal of the online critique process is to develop multiple suggestions for how a student can go further with his or her work. That means that those giving responses need to listen to what is trying to be accomplished rather than responding solely from personal opinions, beliefs, or taste.

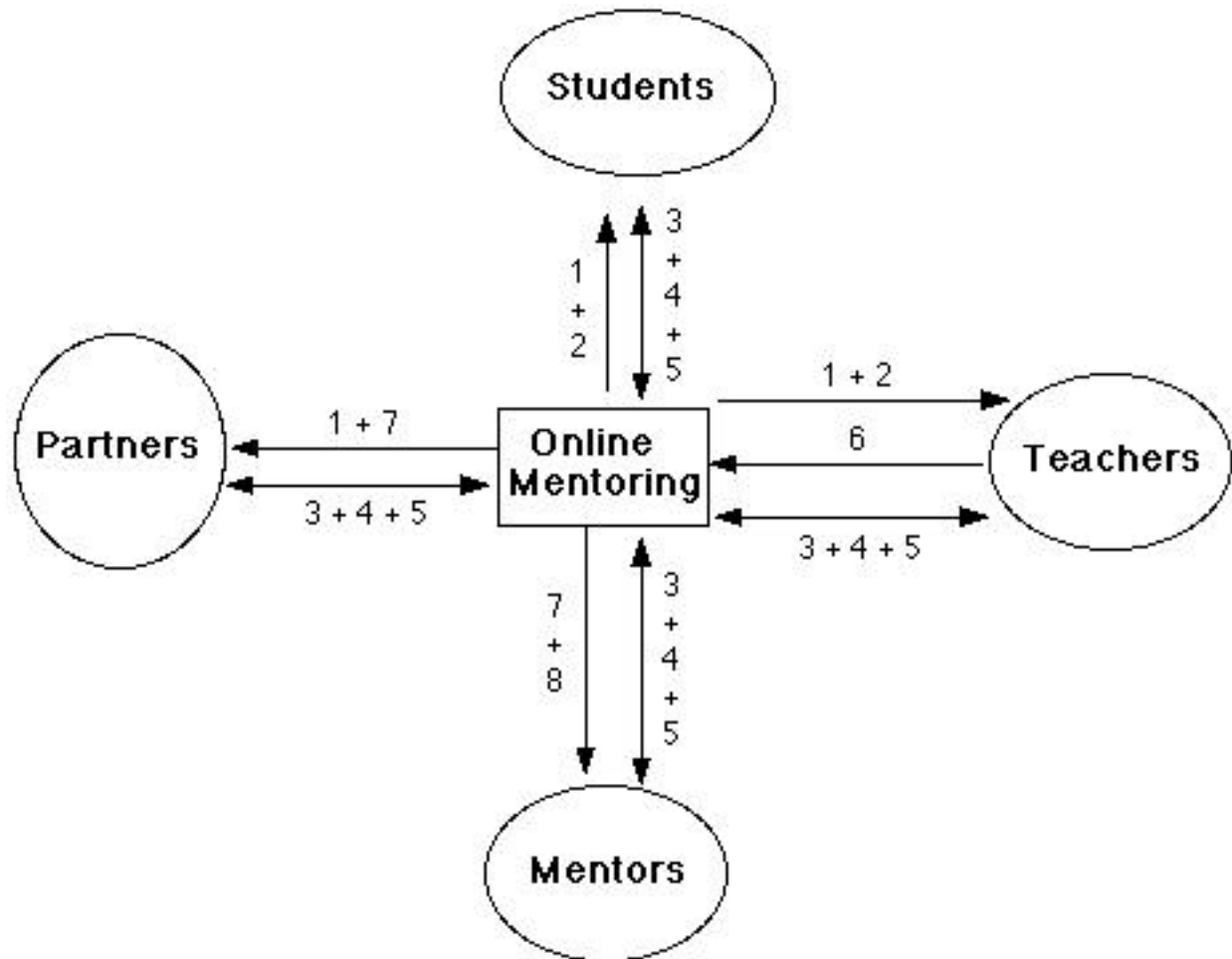
Agreement Four -- *Communicate using a cycle of request-respond-reply.*

Users have found it rewarding when the person who uploads a piece replies again once a few comments have been made. This creates a dialog that helps commenters know how their suggestions were received. At this point the communication about the work becomes a real conversation. The WEB Exchange has been recently updated to promote increased dialog.



Perceived Benefits

Online critique involves a mix of participants whose sense of learning is mutual. The following diagram shows recent survey results from users who responded to a question about what benefits they derive from participating in online critique.



1. improving their work
2. getting affirmation
3. seeing range of examples
4. giving critical feedback
5. learning to use technology
6. giving curriculum examples
7. better understanding the educational system
8. learning more about students

Providing Substantive Feedback

Learning from the experiences of students on the MIDI network, we know that substantive feedback is really important for the students whose work is submitted. A simple 3 point rubric has been developed to help guide you through giving basic feedback which is keyed to several Vermont standards for reflection and critique, most notably Communication Standard 1.16 (*students improve upon their products and performances through self-reflection and outside critique, using detailed comments that employ the technical vocabulary of the artform*).

Simple 3 Point Scale

Level 3: Accurately describes the area being discussed. Gives detailed examples, references, connections or responses to general insights. Uses technical vocabulary.

Level 2: Accurately describes the area being discussed. Uses a mix of technical vocabulary and general terms.

Level 1: Gives general comments that could apply to other situations as well as the one under discussion.

Establishing a Sense of Trust

QUOTES FROM TEACHERS WILL COME HERE

Reading the WEB Exchange/Shared Projects Site Messages

The WEB Exchange is located at: <http://www.webproject.org/exchange>. Once you have navigated there, select "Projects." You will be given a password prompt.



The image shows a 'User Login' dialog box with a dark header. Below the header, it says 'If you are a registered user please login below' and 'Otherwise use the [Registration Form](#)'. There are two input fields: 'Username:' and 'Password:'. Below the fields is an 'OK' button.

There are passwords established for students and adults. Both groups receive the same view of the Projects area, but the adult level password allows access to a different set of discussion forums at the Discussions area.

For students

Username:
Password:

eg.

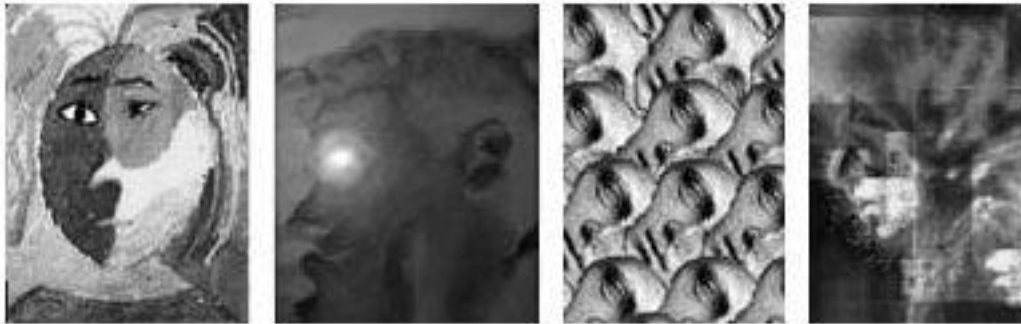
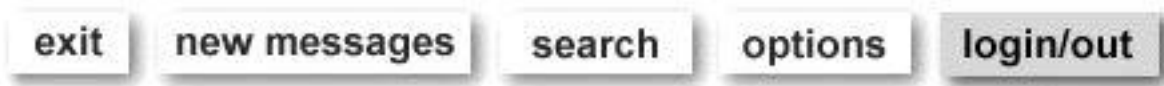
Username:
Password:

For adults

See another set of instructions.

The passwords are case dependent and an error with capitol letters will deny you access to the site. After you have typed in your password information, you will be asked to do so again. This is a built-in verification feature that comes with the software. If you see it, simply type your name and password again.

Upon entering the conference,





Welcome to Shared Projects.

For information about using this conference, refer to the [online manual](#).

Active threads from last 14 days :











add new work refresh

you will see a set of purple stripes. The purple stripes show the names of 5 forums: Text, Image, Sound, Motion, and Website Reviews. The numbers and dates next to the thread titles will alert you to current levels of activity in each discussion thread.

Text (1)		
Image		
 injection	07/08/98	(7)
 Hawk	07/08/98	(10)
 Caryn Self-Portrait	07/08/98	(5)
Sound (3)		
Motion (1)		
Website Reviews		
 Walker's Website	07/09/98	(13)

Once you click on a thread topic, you will see a list of **messages** that hyperlink to the messages themselves.

Hawk

 Hawk	Lee	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk	Joan Curtis	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk	Kris and Katy	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk	Ken Leslie	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk	Alice Bourgoin	07/08/98
 Hawk/Eagle (revised)	Lee	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk/Eagle (revised)	Joan Curtis	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk/Eagle (revised)	Ken Leslie	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk/Eagle (revised)	Kris	07/08/98
↳  Re: Hawk/Eagle (revised)	Jerry and Derek	07/08/98

 [Post new message in this thread](#)

[top](#) [previous](#) [next](#) [print](#) [respond](#)


Notice that some of the messages come to the far left margin and that others are indented. This is the difference between “post new message to this thread” and “respond.” The “new message” button has been designed for use by the person posting work to the thread and the “respond” button has been established so that users can give comments.

Location: <http://forums.dosolutions.com/Forums/Attach>

Netscape: Thread

Location: <http://forums.dosolutions.com/webproj/Thread/>

[top](#) [previous](#) [next](#) [print](#) [respond](#)



Date: July 08, 1998 11:08 AM
Author: Caryn
Title of Piece: Self-Portrait
Organization: Founders Memorial School, Essex Town
Grade Level: K-5
Submission Is Teacher Assisted: Yes
Submission Is Group Work: No
Medium: 9" x 12" craypas and crayons
Stage of Progress: Work-in-progress
Description of Work:

Our fourth grade art class looked at many portraits by Vincent Van Gogh. We talked about the moods he created in each of the portraits we looked at. I wanted to create a calm, pleasant mood in my picture, because that's the way my life is. The background is made up of some woods and the hammock in my back yard. I drew those because I like nature. The picture is about 9" x 12".

Attachments: [caryn1.jpg](#)

Feedback Requested:
 Should I make any improvements in my portrait? Do you think that I succeeded in making the mood look calm and peaceful?

(http://forums.dosolutions.com/webproj/index.cfm?Message_ID=4817)

This conference supports easy attachment of media files. By resizing your windows, you will be able to read comments and see or hear the work under discussion.

Uploading Work for Discussion

If you would like to submit a piece of work for discussion, click the “add new work” button located on the first page of the conference.

Active threads from last 14 days :

[add new work](#) [refresh](#)

Text (1)		
Image		
	injection	07/08/98 (7)
	Hawk	07/08/98 (10)
	Caryn Self-Portrait	07/08/98 (5)

Then, you will be asked to title the piece and assign a forum. This determines the forum in which the software will place your discussion.

New Thread

Topic:

Create in Forum:

Text	↑
Image	
Sound	
Motion	
Website Reviews	↓

After you click “ok,” you will see a form that has been designed by WEB Project participants to gather the information needed to adhere to the first two network agreements, those for detailed description and specific requests for feedback. The beginning portion of the form gathers background information and uses “pull down” menus for some fields, while the end portion asks for specific details.

Post Message

Your Name:

E-mail:

Title of Piece:
(R)

Organization:

Medium:

Grade Level:

Stage of Progress:

Is this submission teacher assisted?

Does this work represent a group work?

Description of your work:

Feedback requested:

Attachments: *None*

Notify me by e-mail about all messages posted in this thread

Please make sure that you are detailed in the information that you give about your piece. The better that others understand what you are trying to do, the easier it becomes to give thoughtful responses.

Attaching Files

The conferencing system supports file attachments. That means that you can upload text, image, sound, or motion files to go along with the messages you are posting. These files need to be saved in “universal file formats” to be seen by other users. Such formats include: (.jpf), (.gif), (.txt), (.mid), (.aiff), and (.mov).

Edit Message

Author: Fern Tavalin

E-mail: tavalin@sover.net

Subject: (optional)

Message:

Let's use this discussion to talk about your monograph and to practice the remaining technology skills that you all need to demonstrate in order to complete the course requirements.

Would each of you please observe in your classes for visual evidence of problem solving as you've defined it, take turns with the Mavica to capture this visual evidence, and then upload the visual images (as a jpg) to this site along with a description of what it represents? That will give you a

I want to use fixed-width font to display this message

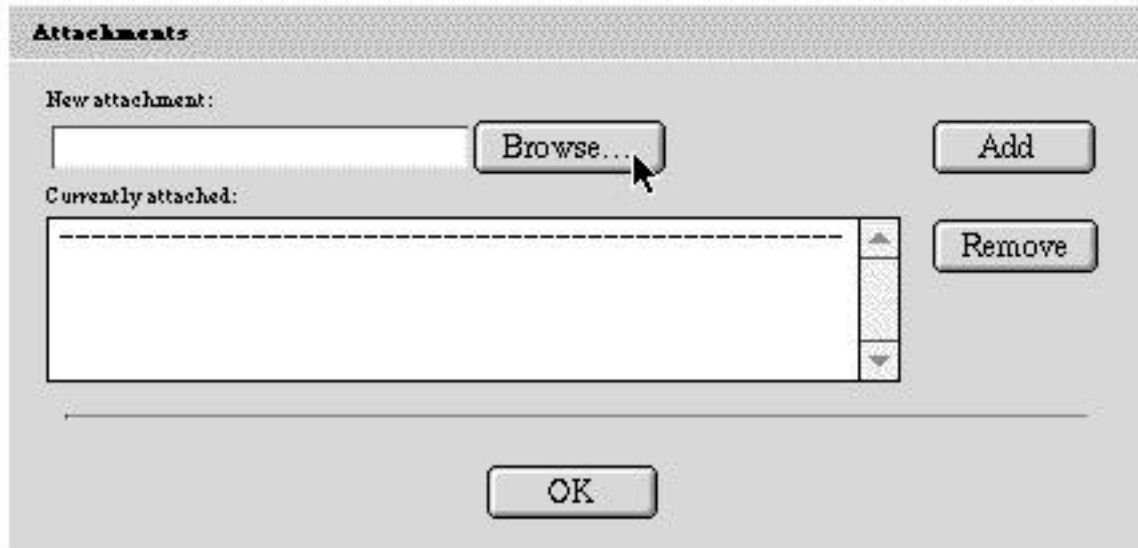
Notify me by e-mail about all messages posted in this thread

I want to send this message to every participant in this thread

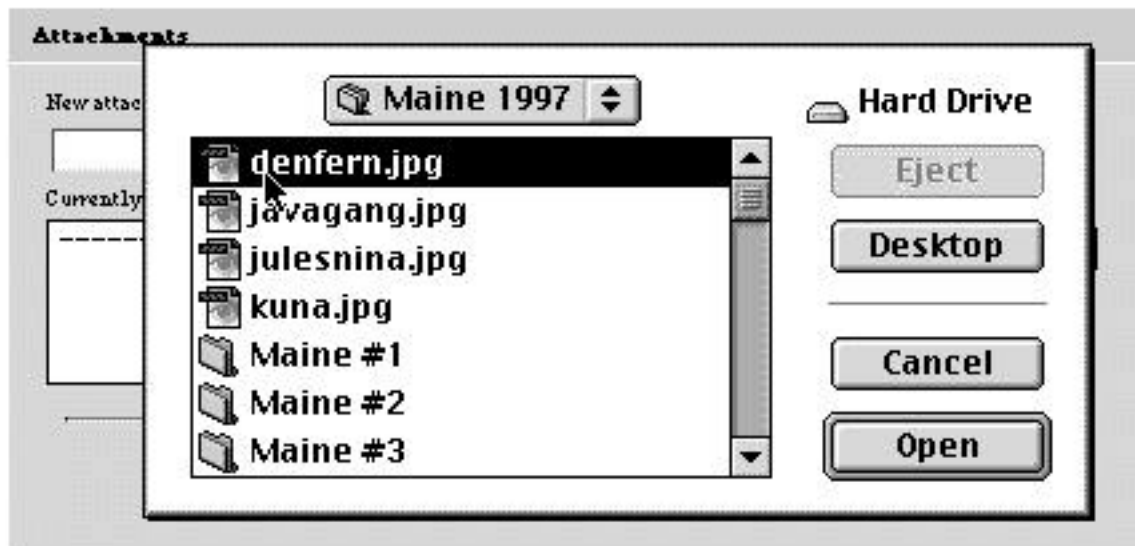
Quote Preview Post Cancel

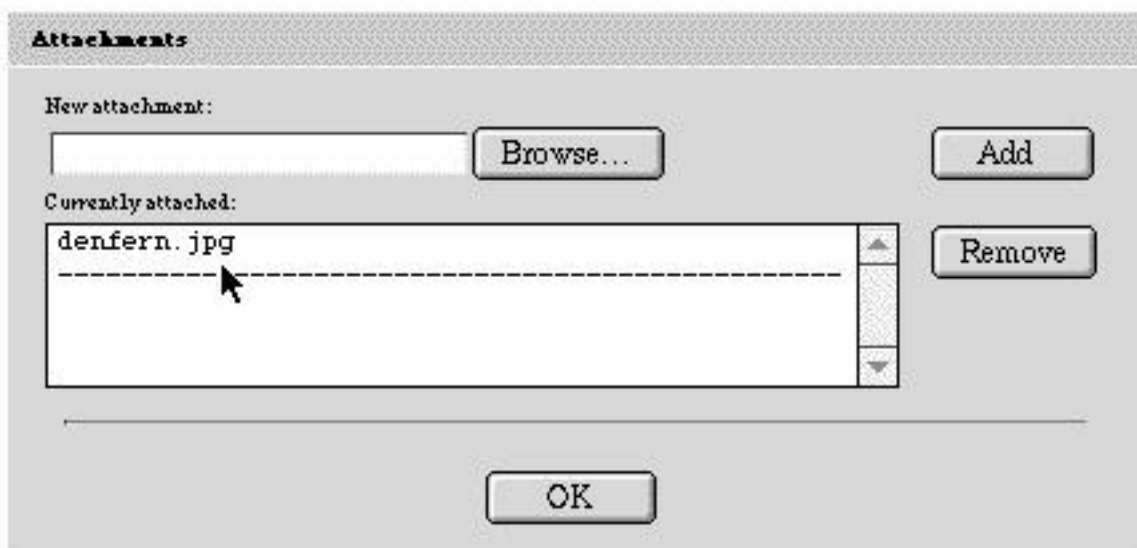
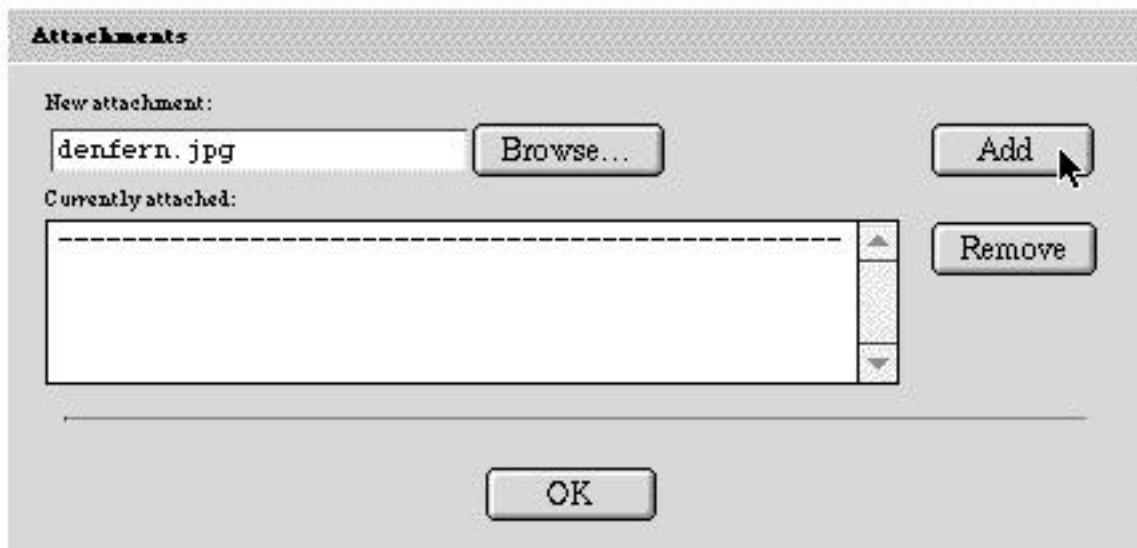
Attachments: None

To attach a file to a message you are composing, click the "Attachments" button .

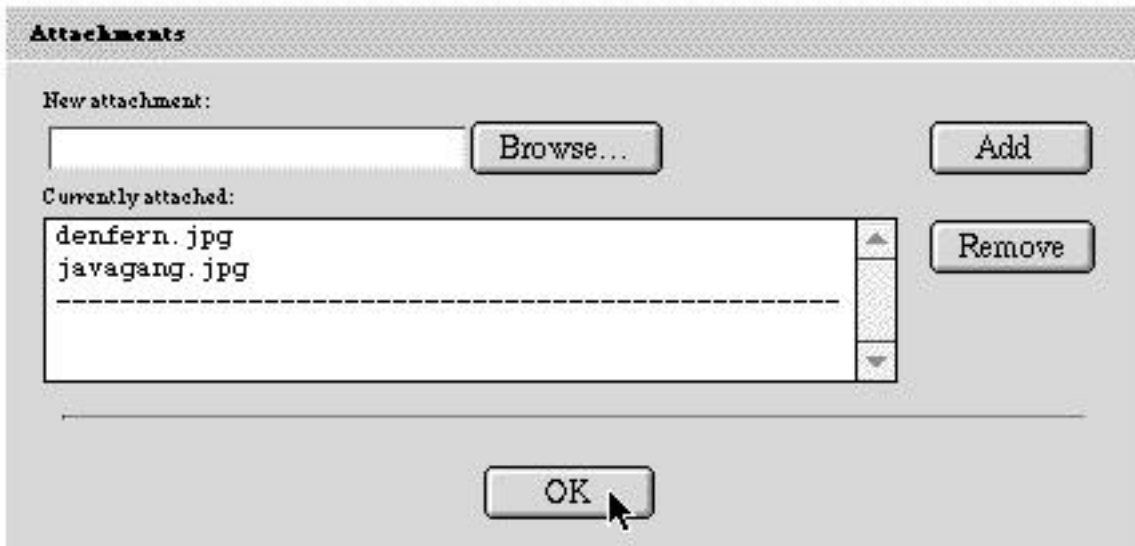


Then, click the "Browse" button to find your already properly prepared image file. This allows you to search your computer's hard drive to find the file that you wish to upload. **Mac users** should copy files onto their hard drives rather than trying to upload from the disk drive. **PC users** should be able to load directly from the disk drive without problems.





Next, click the "Add" button. You will see the name of your file transfer to the Attachments list. You can then add other files, as you will. Notice that the software allows you to remove files as well as to add them.



When finished adding attachments, click on "Okay." This will bring you back to the original message page. From there, click "Post" to put your message and the attached files online.



Make sure that you **DO NOT** place a check mark in the box to the left of the file attachment. The check mark means that the attachment should be made visible within the thread. If this happens then it will take **FOREVER** to download the discussion!



Establishing Dialog

As you view projects, there will be certain pieces to which you would like to respond. Some users respond to those pieces that they think best suit their knowledge. Others respond because they find the work intriguing. Others use the response as a teaching tool for their own students. Responding is similar to posting, however the form looks different and the placement of the “respond” button is located alongside the posted message instead of underneath the messages index.



Make sure that you are selecting the “respond” button that applies to the message you intend to respond to. Many users forget to scroll up to the original message and inadvertently reply to a response rather than to the original message.

Once you choose “respond” you will see another form, again designed by users to gather the information they desire about the commenter.

Post Reply

Your Name:

E-mail:

Organization:

Grade Level:

Is this comment teacher assisted?

Does this comment represent a group work?

Enter your comment below:

- Notify me by e-mail about all messages posted in this thread
- I want to send this message to every participant in this thread

Exploring the Conference Site and Suggesting Improvements

This guide is not exhaustive. There are many buttons on the conference site. Press them See what happens! As you use this guide in your classroom or as an online mentor, note what works for you and what doesn't. Your experience is a crucial part of improving this process.

THIS IS A ROUGH DRAFT SEVERAL ADDITIONAL SECTIONS NEED TO BE WRITTEN ABOUT STUDENTS AND ABOUT CLASSROOM FACILITATION.

THE PURPOSE OF THE SITE WILL BE EXPANDED OVER TIME.