Promoting Critical Thinking through Online Discussion: Developing Questions and Managing Conversations

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Materials can also be downloaded from: http://drchristineharrington.org/

Message Board Conversations

Message board conversations foster learning by giving an opportunity to dive deeper into the course content. It will also give you a chance to "see" what others think and to provide and receive feedback from one another. This will help you achieve the course learning outcomes.

Before You Message Board

- Actively read/view (and take notes!) the material on the topic (textbook; Power Point; outside resources, etc.). You will need this background information to make significant contributions.
- Ask questions as needed regarding the background information or the task.
- Create a brief outline of what you want to say before you start typing out your response.
- Review what others have already contributed.

Message Boarding!

- Participate early so others are able to read and respond to your contribution.
- Be sure to respond directly to the prompt/question.
- When stating an opinion, back it up with theory and research. Citations from the book and outside resources are strongly recommended. Use APA style for in-text citations and include the entire reference all sources with the exception of our textbook.
- Organize your response so it is easy for the reader to follow. Use bold, larger font, highlighting, and so forth to bring attention to key points.
- Add to what others have already said- remember it's a conversation not an individual assignment on the topic. No one wants to read the same thing over and over.
- Use writing skills that you would use in a research paper and proofread your work before you submit it. (Suggestion- write your response in a Word document and then copy and paste it so you don’t lose your work if there is an internet connection problem)

Feedback to Peers

- The purpose of responding to peers is to further the conversation, helping all members of the class to explore the content more deeply and achieve the course learning outcomes. Respond to at least 2 peers for each message board.
- Responses should add to, clarify, or constructively challenge. They should also be specific in nature. You can respond to questions posed by me or any member of our class not just ones that are specific to your post.
- Here are some examples of questions (based on the work of Paul ,1990; and Strang, 2011) you might ask one another:

Learning Purpose	**Socratic Questions**
Clarifying Explanations	What do you mean by….? Provide an additional example of…. How does this compare and/or contrast to….? What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of… ?
Questioning Assumptions	What other explanations might account for this? What are the assumptions behind this statement?
Exploring Additional Evidence	How can we find out more about this topic? How does this connect to the concepts we've discussed previously? What additional evidence can you find to support or refute this idea?
Multiple Perspectives	What would someone who disagrees say? What are the cultural implications?
Real World Implications	What are potential consequences or implications of this? Provide a real world example of….
Self-Reflective Processes	Why should this issue matter? What is the importance of learning about this issue? What other questions do you now want to explore?

The Professor's Role

- You can expect that I will be reading ALL posts but I will not be responding to each post individually. Instead, I will be sharing information, making comments and asking questions that are directed at the class rather than individuals.
- At the "end" of each conversation, I will be posting a summary of the conversation.
- Using the provided rubric, I will be entering grades for your message board contributions at mid-semester and then again at the end of the semester.

Guiding Questions and Rubric for Creating Online Discussion Questions

	Not really	Somewhat	Definitely
Does this question directly relate to course learning outcomes?			
Do students have the background knowledge needed to answer this question?			
Can the question lead to integration of many theories/concepts?			
Does this question require students to reference the text and/or other resources?			
Will students need to explore outside resources to answer this question?			
Is there more than one answer to the question?			
Will this question invite the sharing of different perspectives?			
Is there room for further contribution if the first responder thoroughly answers the question?			

Creating Effective Question Prompts

- Using the Rubric provided, evaluate the effectiveness of the question prompts.
- Modify the question to create a more effective prompt.

Ineffective Prompt	Effective Prompt
Define resilience. Give an example of someone who is resilient.	
Do you think infant television programming is beneficial? Why or why not?	
Are people good at judging others? What are some characteristics of those who are good at judging others? What characteristics do people have that would make them less good at judging others? (consider both personality traits and temporary states such as mood).	
Watch the documentary "A Class Divide". This video deals with a teacher, in a rural town, and how she dealt with and taught her class about racism. Do you think Jane Elliot's intervention should be implemented in classrooms today?	

When and How should the Professor Intervene?

Question Prompt:

Let's have a debate! Choose one of these positions for your post: Are people's first impressions accurate? Are people good judges of each other?

Yes! - Let's pretend that you are a prosecutor in a trial and you want to argue that you can tell a lot about people based on the first couple of minutes of interacting with them. You are going to argue that it is possible to judge a book by its cover. Because you are a good lawyer you are going to provide evidence from the textbook with research which supports your claims. You can also provide examples from outside sources.

No! You want to argue that people are not good at judging others. In fact, people are actually really bad at judging others! Provide evidence from the textbook or outside sources to support your claims.

Sample Discussion

I do not believe that the general population is good at judging others based on first impressions. Many people act better than they usually are when meeting people for the first time. For example, when going on a job interview or on a first date, you are always told to be on your best behavior, act appropriately and to try to impress the other person. Also, as we learned, there are micro-expressions which normal people are not able to detect. The micro-expressions can tell us if people are lying but as we learned most people don't pick up on them and training is needed.

I agree! I do not think the general population is good at judging others when it comes to first impressions. Nowadays, everything is very competitive, and people tend to be a lot more judgmental - which usually leads to others exaggerating their personalities in efforts of succeeding or pleasing.

I do not agree, I think when a person has a gut feeling it is most likely to be true. They get physical, mental, and verbal cues that they may not be able to be verbalized. I am not saying that it is usable in court, but the micro-expressions will definitely help us at a gut level even if we cannot explain why we think what we do.

I do not believe that people are good judges of each other at all. For example, we could be biased by perceptual salience. Perceptual salience is when elements that capture our attention are more likely to be seen as potential causes, so things that stand out to us will more likely catch our attention and have more weight in the way that we perceive things.

I do not believe that people are good judges of each other at all. Just by a first impression it is so hard to tell what someone is really like. You may get a first impression of someone at a party, in a store, or through some other event. For example if it's at a party and a person there is so drunk they can't even manage to walk straight and they're being rude, pushing people, they're basically just downright trashed. You may think wow this person is an idiot, they don't know how to handle their alcohol, and they are just ruining the party because they don't know how to act appropriately. This is an example of internal attribution because you think this is how the person acts on a daily basis. You probably think they're really rude when they are sober too. Turns out they are actually the nicest person and they're friends with everyone on campus

I agree! I have a friend that gets pretty rude when she is drunk but when she is sober she is the nicest person.

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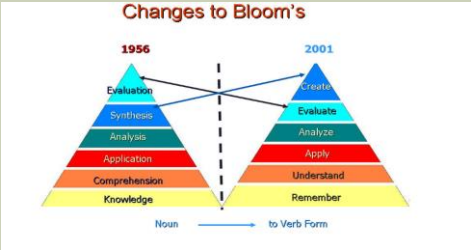
1

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

- "to think in a sophisticated manner- to ask questions, define terms, examine evidence, analyze assumptions, avoid emotional reasoning, resist oversimplification, consider alternative interpretations, and tolerate uncertainty"
- (Wade, 2008, p.p.11)

2

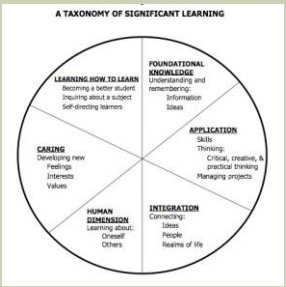
BLOOM'S ORIGINAL TAXONOMY (1956) REVISED BY ANDERSON AND KRATHWOHL (2001)



http://www4.uwsp.edu/education/lwilson/curric/newtaxonomy.htm

3

FINK'S (2003) TAXONOMY:



serc.carleton.edu

4

FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

- Readings
- Narrated Presentations
- Screencasts
- Videos

5

TURN AND TALK: WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE DISCUSSIONS?

6

ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Advantages

- More time to reflect before posing their comments
- Access to outside resources
- Writing ideas helps learning
- Less intimidating because of reduced need for immediacy
- Everyone participates

Disadvantages

- Delayed feedback
- Less spontaneous
- Reduced likelihood for high emotional engagement
- Less personable
- Could be repetitive

Thompson (2006) 7

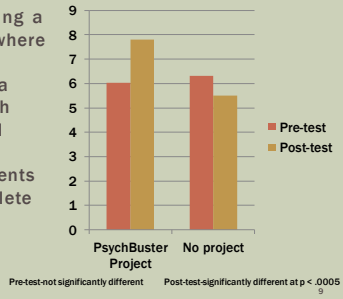
CRITICAL THINKING MORE LIKELY IN ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

(GUILLER, DURNDELL, & ROSS, 2008)

8

CONSISTENT WITH OTHER DATA: IN DEPTH RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS WORK!

- Students completing a research project where they had to find evidence against a psychological myth had higher critical thinking skills as compared to students who did not complete this assignment



Blessing and Blessing (2010)

9

A DIFFERENT ACADEMIC PRODUCT: AN ANSWER TO THE CALL FOR EQUITY

(TARAS, 2009)

- Ongoing exploration
- Numerous feedback opportunities and…
- Numerous opportunities to USE this feedback

10

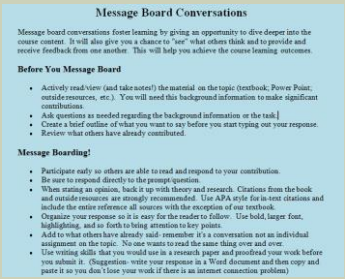
CREATING A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

GARRISON, ANDERSON, AND ARCHER (2000)

- Teaching Presence
- Social Presence
- Cognitive Presence

11

ONLINE DISCUSSIONS: EXPECTATIONS



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12

EXPECTATIONS: RUBRICS

Message Board Postings

Message Board Postings Rubric

You can earn this grade:	*If your posts meet these requirements:*
"A" Message Board Work (90-100%):	1. Posted on time and in time for others to read & respond; 2. Thoughtful, comprehensive (answered all parts of the question) responses with specific references to concepts from the book and other outside ressources (citations included) 3. Responded to and engaged with at least 2 classmates (asking and answering questions, highlighting themes, adding to conversation– not just "I agree" comments)
"B" Message Board Work (80 -89%):	1. Posted on time and in time for others to read & respond; 2. Thoughtful responses with some general references to concepts from the book and other outside resources 3. Responded to and engaged with at least 1 classmate (asking and answering questions, highlighting themes, adding to conversation– not just "I agree" comments)
"C" Message Board Work (70-79%):	1. Posted on time & in time for others to read & respond; 2. General, opinion based responses that were not connected to concepts from book or other outside resources 3. Minimal ("I agree" with no rationale about why) or no interaction with peers
"D" and "F" Message Board Work:	1. Did not contribute to conversation or posted after due date. 2. Contributions very vague, general and brief; did not add new ideas to the conversation; 3. No reference to concepts from book or other outside resources

13

QUESTION PROMPTS

- Not limited to facts but uses background knowledge
- Open-ended
- Stimulate discussions
- Multiple perspectives
- Room for many contributions

14

QUESTION PROMPT GUIDELINES

	Not really	Somewhat	Definitely
Does this question directly relate to course learning outcomes?			
Do students have the background knowledge needed to answer this question?			
Can the question lead to integration of many theories/concepts?			
Does this question require students to reference the text and/or other resources?			
Will students need to explore outside resources to answer this question?			
Is there more than one answer to the question?			
Will this question invite the sharing of different perspectives?			
Is there room for further contribution if the first responder thoroughly answers the question?			

15

YOUR TURN

- Using the Rubric, evaluate the effectiveness of the question prompt.
- Modify the question to create a more effective prompt.

16

CREATING YOUR OWN ONLINE DISCUSSION QUESTION PROMPTS

Step 1

Work in your small group to create an online discussion prompt

Step 2

Review the question developed by another group; Provide feedback

Step 3

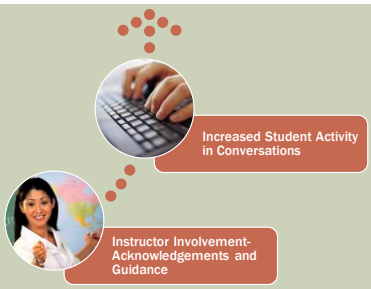
Review feedback and modify question if appropriate

17

INSTRUCTOR INVOLVEMENT

18

INSTRUCTOR INVOLVEMENT
TAGG AND DICKENSON (1995)



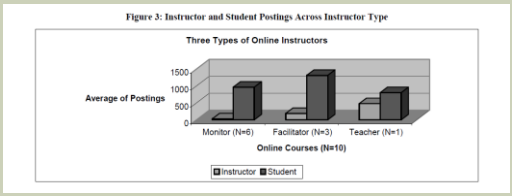
as cited in Garrison, et. al. (2000)[19]

TOO MUCH INVOLVEMENT MAY BE PROBLEMATIC (THOMPSON, 2006)

- Avoid dominating discussions
- May diminish student activity and involvement

20

A MODERATE AMOUNT OF INVOLVEMENT IS BEST
MORRIS, XU, AND FINNEGAN, 2005, 17

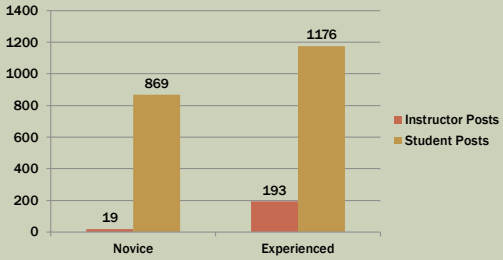


125-275 Instructor Posts: Highest Student Participation

Average class size: 20

21

NOVICE VS. EXPERIENCED ONLINE INSTRUCTORS
MORRIS, XU, AND FINNEGAN, 2005, 17



22

AMOUNT OF INSTRUCTOR TIME IN CLASS MATTERS
CRANNEY, WALLACE, ALEXANDER, AND ALFANO, 2011, 345

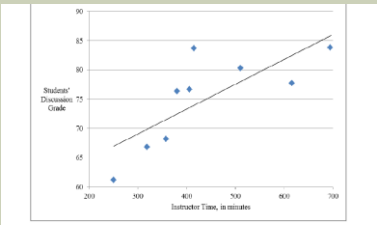


Figure 1. *Amount of instructor time spent in online course in relation to students' overall discussion grade*

Recommendation:

6.25 hours per week minimum

23

TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT? SOCRATIC QUESTIONS

24

EXAMPLES:
BASED ON THE WORK OF PAUL (1990) AND STRANG (2011)

Learning Purpose	Socratic Questions
Clarifying Explanations	What do you mean by….? Provide an additional example of…. How does this compare and/or contrast to….? What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of…?
Questioning Assumptions	What other explanations might account for this? What are the assumptions behind this statement?
Exploring Additional Evidence	How can we find out more about this topic? How does this connect to the concepts we've discussed previously? What additional evidence can you find to support or refute this idea?
Multiple Perspectives	What would someone who disagrees say? What are the cultural implications?
Real World Implications	What are potential consequences or implications of this? Provide a real world example of…..
Self-Reflective Processes	Why should this issue matter? What is the importance of learning about this issue? What other questions do you now want to explore?

25

FACULTY ROLE IN CONVERSATIONS

26

CHALLENGES IN ONLINE CONVERSATIONS

- "I agree" responses
- Repetition (Assignment vs. Conversation responses)
- Thorough First Responses
- Off-target or Minimal Responses
- Oversharing…
- Other Challenges?

27

THANK YOU!

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28

Ineffective Prompt	Effective Prompt - Example
Define resilience. Give an example of someone who is resilient.	Resilience is the ability to bounce back after a traumatic event. Find a peer reviewed research article on resilience and provide a brief summary of the article. Based on others' posts what themes are you noticing?
Do you think infant television programming is beneficial? Why or why not?	Read the 2 attached research articles on television programming for infants and children. Describe one or two of the findings discussed in the literature review and make connections to concepts in the text. Use your knowledge of developmental psychology to explain why the results were different for infant vs. preschool programming.
Are people good at judging others? What are some characteristics of those who are good at judging others? What characteristics do people have that would make them less good at judging others? (consider both personality traits and temporary states such as mood).	Let's have a debate! Choose one of these positions for your post: Are people's first impressions accurate? Are people good judges of each other? Yes! - Let's pretend that you are a prosecutor in a trial and you want to argue that you can tell a lot about people based on the first couple of minutes of interacting with them. You are going to argue that it is possible to judge a book by its cover. Because you are a good lawyer you are going to provide evidence from the textbook with research which supports your claims. You can also provide examples from outside sources. No! You want to argue that people are not good at judging others. In fact, people are actually really bad at judging others! Provide evidence from the textbook or outside sources to support your claims
Watch the documentary "A Class Divide". This video deals with a teacher, in a rural town, and how she dealt with and taught her class about racism. Do you think Jane Elliot's intervention should be implemented in classrooms today? Is it ethical?	As you have discovered, there are ethical issues with Jane Elliot's intervention. Let's assume you are a member of the Institutional Review Board. Would you approve of such an exercise? Provide evidence to support your position. Refer to the ethical guidelines on p.40-41, other studies which have been conducted which are relevant to your case in various chapters in the textbook, and other outside sources.

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