



Center for Teaching and Learning

March 24, 2015

Tips for Engaging Students in On Line Discussions

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Structuring and Facilitating Online Discussion:
**How can We Maximize the Power of
Words in the Virtual Classroom?**

The primary objectives of this interactive session are to:

1. Generate a rich conversation regarding best practice in **structuring and facilitating** online discussion;
2. Share specific designs/strategies that we have used;
3. Inspire a **community of practice** focused on improving online discussions.

Community of Inquiry Framework

(Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2010; deNoyelles, Mannheimer Zydney & Chen, 2014)

- **Social Presence** - ability of learners to project their personal characteristics into the community of inquiry, thereby presenting themselves as 'real people.'
- **Cognitive Presence** - the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication.
(triggering event → exploration → integration → resolution)
- **Teaching Presence** - design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes.

Design Principles for Online Discussions

(Adapted from Rovai, 2007)

Macro Design: the ‘house’ of online discussion

1. Generate motivation for students
2. Describe the expectations & set ground rules

Micro Design: ‘individual rooms’ of discussion

3. Socio-emotional discussions
4. Authentic content-and task-oriented discussions

Design to Generate Motivation

- Communicate the purpose of discussions
- Grade online discussions
- Customize and contextualize discussions

Design for Motivation Example 1 (Chappell)

Items	Percent of Final Grade
(1) Class engagement	22%
(2) Reflections	24%
(3) Society 4.0 Research Project	10%
(4) Stakeholder Interview	10%
(5) Online discussions peer assessment	10%
(6) Final Project	24%
Total	100%

Design for Motivation Example 1

(slide 2 of 2)

Participate in classroom discussions and/or online circle-conversations.

- Students attending the live class sessions will engage in small group discussions regarding that week's learning objectives and reading materials.
- Asynchronous students, which will include the whole class on asynchronous weeks of the course, are required to participate in online discussions and circle-conversations regarding that week's learning objectives and reading materials. In order to avoid the 'last minute rush' there are specific timelines required for posting early and often. These are described in more detail in the section titled 'rules for online discussion'.

Your engagement with these elements of the class will be assessed and can contribute up to 2% of your overall mark each week ($2\% \times 11 \text{ weeks} = 22\%$ of final mark). Gaining the full 2% each week means that you complete the readings, attend class and/or complete the learning activities and contribute to the discussions, either online or in-class.

Design to Specify Expectations

- Allow time for training students to participate and facilitate
- Create a detailed rubric
 - Example #1 from Rovai, 2007
 - Example #2 from Lucy Ford
 - Example #3 from Lynn Bowes-Sperry

Rubric Example 1
(adapted from Rovai, 2007)

	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Quantitative	Lurker; reads but doesn't post messages	Reads messages; posts at least 1 constructive message each week	Reads all messages; posts 2 or more constructive messages each week
Content	Messages address peripheral issues and/or ramble; Content is generally accurate but with omissions/errors; tends to recite fact/provide opinion	Messages provide good general answers but may not directly address discussion topic; Assertions not always supported by evidence; Avoids unsupported opinions	Messages indicate conciseness, clarity of argument, deep (sometimes unusual) insight, originality, relevancy
Questions	Rarely includes questions that promote discussion; Rarely responds to questions	Sometimes includes questions that stimulate discussion; sometimes responds to questions raised by others	Often includes good questions that stimulate discussion; Frequently responds to questions from others

**Rubric Example 1 Continued
(adapted from Rovai, 2007)**

	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Collaboration	Shows little evidence of collaborative learning; Most comments directed to instructor	Collaborative learning is evidenced by comments directed primarily student-to-student rather than student to instructor; Evidence of support and encouragement is exchanged between students, as well as willingness to critically evaluate the work of others with constructive comments	
Tone	Members are empathic rather than aggressive; Postings and email reveal the ability of students to conduct themselves appropriately in professional relationships by manifesting such qualities as sociability, sensitivity, discernment, concern, kindness and gentleness; Self-control is also demonstrated in qualities that would include respectfulness, flexibility, temperateness, discreteness, humbleness, forgiveness, and confidence		
Mechanics	Some messages contain numerous errors in spelling and grammar	Messages contain few if any errors in spelling/grammar; Messages are well-formatted with spacing and are easy to read.	

Rubric Example 2 - (Lucy Ford)

Discussion Board Activity

0 Points (Did not participate)

- Student did not respond to the discussion board question(s) for this module prior to the beginning of the next module

1 Point (Insufficient)

- Student activity in discussion board for this module was minimal, and perfunctory
- Included here are echo type responses, without substantive comment, or inaccurate/ irrelevant/ incomplete responses.
- Failure to engage in substantive ongoing conversation

2 Points (Competent)

- Student competently answered the question(s) asked
- Content of response is relevant and accurate
- Student did not engage in ongoing substantive conversation about their own or others' posts. (Or simply echoed others' responses).

Rubric Example 2 - (Lucy Ford)

3 Points (Nicely Done)

- Student wrote an above average response to the question(s) given and/or engaged in a substantive conversation about the content
- [At a minimum, regardless of the quality of ongoing conversation, student's original response to the question(s) must meet the standard of competence (2) to earn this score.]
- Demonstrates ability to apply, analyze and synthesize course material.

4 Points (Outstanding)

- Student wrote an outstanding response to the question(s) and contributed significantly and effectively to the ongoing conversation.
- Demonstrates ability to apply, analyze and synthesize course material.

Rubric Example 3 - (Bowes-Sperry)

Criteria ▾	Level 1 0 points ▾	Level 2 0.5 points ▾	Level 3 1 point ▾	Level 4 1.5 points ▾	Level 5 2 points ▾
Timeliness of Initial Postings ▾	Nothing was posted by the deadline.		Student posted before the deadline but didn't post anything before Saturday at Midnight.	One post before Saturday at Midnight.	One post before Friday at Midnight.
Quality of Contribution (includes number of posts and content quality of posts) ▾	No posts made.	Student made initial post only (even if the post is of outstanding quality, the response is still considered "Level 2") OR Student made initial post of low quality and one response.	Student made initial post of satisfactory quality and at least one response of satisfactory quality.	Student made initial post of good quality and two (or more) responses of good quality.	Student made initial post of exceptional quality and two responses of good or outstanding quality.
Overall Score ▾	Level 1 0 or more ▾	Level 2 1 or more ▾	Level 3 2 or more ▾	Level 4 3 or more ▾	Level 5 4 or more ▾

Design Socio-Emotional Discussions

- Sense of community → cognitive presence
- Ice-breaker conversations CRITICAL
 - at the beginning of the course
 - At the beginning of each class/week
- Specific areas: ‘water cooler’ or ‘break room’
- The value of ‘me too’ comments

Socio-Emotional Example 1

(Chappell, MAN 652 Fall 2014)

- WK 1: Online Discussion Post 1 of 2:
 - Make a posting to the WK #1 discussion titled [Who are you?](#) Make five (5) value-adding postings to the 'original responses' of your peers.
- [Who are you?](#)
 - What is your name?
 - What is your organization and role?
 - Where else have you worked?
 - What is the best example of leadership that you have experienced?
 - What do you believe is an important contemporary leadership issue?
 - What's something quirky or fun about you?

Socio-Emotional Example 1 (slide 2 of 2)

(Chappell, MAN 652 Fall 2014)

- WK 2: Online Discussion Post 1 of 1:

The purpose of this discussion is to enable to you share your thoughts on the material covered this week and to deepen your thinking regarding reflection #1.

Respond to the following question prompts:

1. Introduce your personal story with one or two formative experiences that shaped the person you are.
2. Where do you experience a world that is ending/dying, and where do you experience a world that is beginning/wanting to be born?
3. What do you consider to be the root causes and issues of our current crises and the three divides?
4. What do you personally feel is going to happen over the next ten to twenty years?
5. What would you like to do right now in order to make a difference going forward?

Socio-Emotional Example 2

(Bowes-Sperry, MAN 610 Fall 2014)

Introduce Yourself!

To develop a sense of community within our course, please compose a message introducing yourself to the class. In your introduction, please include at a minimum

- (a) years of work experience
- (b) organizations for which you have worked; your current organization & brief description of what it does
- (c) occupation(s)
- (d) dream job (if money wasn't an issue and you knew you could get the job)
- (e) biggest problem you are currently facing at work
- (f) anything else you want us to know (family, hobbies, pets, ...)

Authentic Content/Task Discussions

- Authentic = relevant
- Online discussions can take multiple forms
 - Structured
 - Scaffolded (facilitated by peer or instructor)
 - Debate
 - Role Play
- Great resource: <http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/otai/>

Content/Task Example 1

(Chappell, MAN 652 Fall 2014)

- **POSTING YOUR OWN WORK:** Please have your piece of work posted to the [WK #5 - The Emergent Economy](#) by **Wednesday midnight**. As per usual, you will need to post your own work before you will be able to view or comment on others' work.
- **COMMENTING ON YOUR PEER'S WORK:** You should listen/read each of your peer's reports and make two value-adding posts to each peer regarding their work before **Sunday midnight**:
 - 1) After learning about their topic and the case they have presented, what questions do you have? What would you like to know more about? How would you add to the information presented?
 - 2) After learning about how their creative application of this topic to their own organization, contribute to the brainstorm of how this idea might be used in organizations. What additional ideas can you offer here?I am so looking forward to these discussions!
Stacie

Content/Task Example 2

(Bowes-Sperry, MAN 610 Fall 2014)

After watching "A class divided," I want you to have a conversation about the video here. Here are the types of questions/issues you can address:

- What did you find most interesting? Most disturbing?
- What factors do you think contributed to the children's behavior?
- Why do you think I showed this video in a class on Organizational Behavior & Theory?
- Anything not mentioned above that you would like to discuss?

Please note that the way the module is set up, you must start a new thread yourself before you are able to comment on threads started by other students.

References

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Join me in

Thanking our Speakers!

Upcoming Event

Wellen Davison Seminar

**Enhancing our Community:
Inclusion at Western New England University**
Keynote Speaker:
Azekah Jennings, Community Relations Service
U.S. Department of Justice

Monday, April 6, 2015

8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p. m.

Sleith Hall, Wood Auditorium (S100)

RSVP by March 27th to Wellen.Davison@wne.edu



Have a Sparkling Evening!