

SUPPORTING CRITICAL THINKING IN ONLINE THREADED DISCUSSION BOARDS

SUBJECT AREA(S): ANY SUBJECT

GRADE LEVEL: UNDERGRADUATE TO GRADUATE

TIME REQUIRED: 6-15 WEEKS

STRATEGY SUMMARY

Synchronous learning (e.g., traditional classroom instruction) allows for meaningful discussion and synthesis of ideas and concepts gleaned through the reading of textbooks and other course material. Distance learning is often asynchronous in nature (i.e., students and instructors do not interact with each other at the same time and/or place), making it difficult to promote the same level of engagement and processing of content. Threaded discussion boards theoretically allow for asynchronous discussion but without careful planning result in shallow discussion of ideas and a lack of social interaction and community that the best synchronous discussions often generate by instituting specific requirements for threaded discussion such as alternating student-led discussion questions; instructor modeling and intervention early in the process; standards for frequency, timing, and quality of posts; and synthesis of the class discussion for that week, it is possible to generate meaningful discussion and a sense of community with threaded discussion boards. This strategy has been used successfully in our hybrid (synchronous and asynchronous class sessions) blended (on-campus and distance students in the same class sessions) graduate program. One class implementation will be used as a case study to describe how to set up and manage threaded discussions and to illustrate the effect they can have on establishing a learning community in the classroom. It is as appropriate for traditional classes (face-to-face) between class sessions as it is for distance-only or hybrid courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

GOAL

As developing experts in this domain, students will be able to engage in informed discourse with peers on the key concepts, processes, and facts, labels, and definitions of this field, and will be able to demonstrate leadership attributes with individuals and groups (e.g., interpersonal skills, group dynamics, team building) within their disciplinary practice

OBJECTIVES

Given access to asynchronous communication technology, articles, chapters, and other information sources from within their discipline, learners will be able to:

1. Synthesize multiple sources of information,
2. evaluate different positions and information,
3. and relate key concepts and ideas to each other and to real world experience

by:

- a. Responding in threaded discussion to questions by leaders
- b. Responding to peers during threaded discussion
- c. Interacting frequently and thoughtfully
- d. Relating personal anecdotes and experience to concepts under discussion in discussion board

AND

4. Generate meaningful discussion amongst peers

by, on a daily basis:

- a. establishing and posting parameters for discussion at the beginning of the week
- b. generating and posting discussion questions in the discussion board
- c. responding to emerging issues, trends, and discussion as they arise in discussion board
- d. adopting a constructivist pedagogical stance in their interactions with peers
- e. synthesizing discussion across multiple days and viewpoints by posting to the discussion board

RESOURCES

Computer-Related: LMS such as Blackboard, eZ, Moodle Asynchronous Threaded Discussion Board Adobe Acrobat Reader (for shared PDFs) Internet Access (Broadband is Best)	Paper-Based: Textbooks, articles, and other media as source of disciplinary information
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OVERVIEW & RATIONALE

Communities of practice (CoPs) can be thought of as networks of individuals with varying levels of expertise who share common interests (e.g., Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). CoPs are characterized by the sharing of ideas, question asking, and conversations about a particular area of expertise (e.g., Bielaczyc and Collins, 1999; Sherry, 1996; Voosen and Coneelly, 2002).

While the earliest CoPs predate the information revolution (e.g., quilting circles in the 1800s), they have become more relevant today, now including online communities (Palloff and Pratt, 1999; Preece, 2000). This is due primarily to the changing nature of information and knowledge management and to the advent of distributed learning via distance technology. Content knowledge today is not static, nor is it the result of one individual working in isolation. Information in the 21st century is distributed amongst many individuals and media sources; knowledge is generated through the interaction of individuals in communities of practice and learning communities who make meaning out of those sources of information.

In addition, the increased pace of change in virtually every domain has required that people continue to seek out formal educational opportunities, many of which are not available in the same geographical area as the learner. This has given rise to increased demand for distance learning. As educators, one of the common outcomes we seek is to ensure that students are able to engage in meaningful discussion about complex ideas within the domain of study, both to ensure the highest level of learning and to reflect the nature of knowledge generation today. It therefore becomes critical that we find ways to promote and measure this kind of learning, whether in distance or face-to-face courses. CoPs have been advocated for and studied as a means of improving college distance courses (e.g., Applebaum and Enomoto, 1995; Ross, 1996; Sherry, Billig and Tavalin, 2002; Wilson and Whitelock 1998). Of course, in distance education, classes comprise individuals who are predominantly novices in terms of the content, so it may not be possible to establish a true CoP. Nevertheless, it is possible to adopt the same approach by scaffolding expertise and promoting the same kinds of interaction that occurs in CoP so that learners process information at a deep level, share and construct knowledge, and establish a sense of community within the course, which has been shown to promote learning in distance classes.

Unfortunately, while the tools available to us in traditional distance education are capable of supporting this kind of learning and instruction, by themselves they are only half of the equation. Without appropriate instructional design and pedagogy, tools such as threaded discussion boards will generate shallow knowledge and infrequent participation that cannot meet the educational goals of the 21st century, establish a sense of community, or promote meaningful knowledge generation. Fortunately, there are strategies for using such tools that can generate meaningful learning communities that meet these goals and which can be measured and assessed. What follows is a description of one approach to doing this, including instructions for setup, management, and sustainment. Recommendations are derived from a study done by faculty and students in the IDT program in which an effective class discussion was analyzed over the period of a summer course. All postings were saved and key indicators of community and expertise from the literature were used to analyze the kinds of posts that were made. In theory, community is a prerequisite to an effective discussion of content that leads to expertise. Therefore, successful online discussion should be characterized by frequent community posts in the first part of the course, a mix of community and expertise in the middle, and high expertise markers at the end. Further, expertise markers should continually increase, while community markers should plateau or decline slowly from the middle to the end of the course. In this study, community markers included disclosure, humor, inclusion, and socialization. Expertise markers included asides, clarification, context, reference, and support. Markers that indicated an intersection of community and expertise included acknowledgment, anecdotes, help request and response, invitation for comment, and quotes. We found that community-building comments were made primarily in the first week (to build community) and last week

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(to concretize community). Significant indicators of expertise increased over the duration of the course. For example, the number of asides decreased, while the number of posts that referenced the text and other sources increased, and the number of attempts to clarify spiked in the middle as students made the shift from community and novice to expertise.

DESIGN & PREPARATION

Note: Because threaded discussion is the most common form of asynchronous discussion, this strategy specifically addresses this technology. However, this strategy has also been used successfully using a Wiki, and you can see a sample assignment sheet using that strategy at the very end of this instruction. I recommend, however, that you begin with the threaded discussion, as it is far easier to scaffold both for yourself and for learners.

This strategy requires that students sign up to “lead” the reading discussion on different weeks, and to participate regularly in discussions during weeks they are not leading the readings.

Before Class Begins

1. Determine the points for leading and participation
 - a. *These should be separate activities with their own points. Leading the readings should not be worth as much as overall participation. Overall participation should be worth as much or more as anything else in the course. You want students to take it very seriously.*
2. Decide on the reading list for your course
3. Divide the readings into equivalent “chunks”
 - a. *Make sure to consider both the page length AND complexity of the reading when making these decisions. Twenty pages on a complex subject in your field can easily equal fifty pages of introductory material; a preface is not the same as chapter 1!*
4. Assign readings to weeks for discussion
 - a. *It is best to think of weekly readings as “topics” that are related. One of the goals of this strategy is to help students learn how to relate different ideas and perspectives to each other and to their real-world experience, so if you can’t think of a “theme” for the readings you have assigned, your students will have even more trouble relating the material.*
5. In the discussion board, create a forum for each week’s topic
 - a. *Students need a lot of support to make the kinds of connections you want them to make. The learning you want them to do will be challenging (what we call Germane and Intrinsic Cognitive Load). Asynchronous learning requires its own learning, such as how to login, how to use the discussion board, etc. (what we call Extraneous Cognitive Load). The goal is to reduce Extraneous Cognitive Load that results from the interface itself so that learners have the maximum resources to devote to the learning. So while it is possible to ask learners to generate their own forums, or to throw them all into one large discussion forum, doing so uses up cognitive resources better devoted to the learning outcomes. Additionally, creating individual forums helps to reinforce the relation of the topics that you have chosen. It will also GREATLY reduce the number of errors and false starts and the resulting emails you get with requests for help!*
6. Type in instructions for how to use the forum inside EACH forum as its description
 - a. *The same goes here as above—you want to remove as many impediments and obstacles between the student and the learning as possible. The more you do to make the interface and technology invisible (or at least, transparent), the faster your students will begin interacting meaningfully with the content.*
7. Develop a “Lead the Readings” sign-up sheet
 - a. *You’ll use this to get students to sign up to lead the readings each week.*
8. Decide on the number of “leaders” for each week

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- a. *It is recommended that at least two and no more than 5 students sign up to lead the discussion during a given week. The number of leaders is determined by the complexity or length of the given readings, and/or the number of readings. Depending on the number of students in a course, this may result in students leading the readings on more than one week.*
9. Develop instructional handouts for leaders and for participation in weekly discussion
- a. *See the Assignment Sheets for Leading the Readings and for Participating in Discussion at the end of this document.*

First Day of Class

(should be done live via chat or Adobe Connect, but you may be able to adapt this to asynchronous as well)

1. Start by discussing as a class how people learn best when reading about new ideas and concepts
 - a. *Look for opportunities to bring up interacting with others, discussion, relating to real world experience*
2. Explain that that is why you have created the reading structure you have
3. Point them toward the assignment sheets and discuss them as a class
4. Walk them through the discussion board forums you have created
5. Ask for questions
6. Do a “What If” scenario
 - a. *Pick a week at random, and ask someone what THEY would do if they were the leader for that week*
 - b. *Ask the others what THEY would do in response*
 - c. *Make sure to address timing type of response, etc.*
 - d. *Make sure to include how to interact with the discussion board (e.g., creating a thread, naming subjects, etc.)*
7. Give students time to look over the schedule of readings, and tell them that after the break (mid-point of class) you will ask them to sign up for times
 - a. *Tell them that those who go first can set the bar for others, that they in turn have nothing to be compared TO, and that you are more lenient on those that go first because they have no examples to go by and because they have less time to prepare.*
 - b. *Tell them that those who go last are expected to be more exemplary, since they will have a full term’s discussion to go by.*
8. Have them sign-up for leading the readings
9. Discuss what makes a good discussion, what makes a good question, and what makes a good response
 - a. *Do so collaboratively, rather than solely in an instructivist manner, to promote buy-in and ownership. Resist the urge to “Tell Them The Answer”. If you are to direct (even though YOU may have a good idea about what you want to see), you run the risk of creating the impression that there is only one good way to do it, and all your students will end up writing carbon-copy clones of your structure and each other.*
10. Tell them that they must ALL make a post to the forum for the next week’s class
 - a. *This post is NOT on the readings, but is instead an “introductory” post. The idea is to get them used to posting, to do so in a risk-free way (no points assigned), and to diagnose early on any problems that people have connecting, posting, or remembering to do so!*
 - b. *It is a good idea to suggest elements such as their preferred name, what they do for a living, where they are in their degree program, and something about themselves that is unique and/or might surprise others to know. Students should be encouraged to respond to as many posts as they want.*

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- c. *You can also use any of a wide variety of ice-breaker activities you've used elsewhere as a means of structuring the discussion posts for this first week.*

Background Information for Day One

If students are not comfortable with each other and/or the technology, they will be reluctant to do more than the absolute minimum. To promote a more free discussion, the instructor should require that each person post an introduction to the discussion board before any official discussion occurs, and should emphasize that this is a chance to really get to know each other. Distance classes make it difficult to learn who each person is, both because it is harder to communicate and because we lack visual and auditory cues during discussion.

Leading the Readings

Leaders generate a summary of one paragraph (minimum) of each reading's main ideas, concepts, and issues, etc., which they post to the discussion thread for that chapter on the date of the scheduled discussion. Because the leaders receive a group grade, they are encouraged to generate these summaries collaboratively, or to share and revise their summaries if they work on them individually. This ensures that they have synthesized the ideas in the readings. In addition, they generate at least one and no more than two questions per chapter that encourage meaningful discussion of the content, sharing and revising these prior to posting as described above. These questions **MUST** be posted by a specific time and day each week.

Leaders also are responsible for monitoring, responding to, and prompting additional posts throughout that week. It should be stressed that this is a facilitated discussion, not a lecture and not a free for all, so the leaders' job is to keep the conversation going and help the class process and think about the readings in different, meaningful ways. After the week's discussion is complete, leaders then generate an "optimal" answer to each of the questions posed for that week by synthesizing what the class responses were and supplementing that with contributions based on their more expert reading of the text. Leading the readings should be worth at least half of what the readings and participation requirement is worth (e.g., if participation is 40% of the course grade, leading the readings should be worth 20% of the course grade).

Participating in Discussion

Students not leading the readings **MUST** login and check the questions soon after the day and time that questions and the summary have been posted. They are required to make initial posts (of any kind) by a certain time (e.g., midnight of the day following the posts by the leaders). In addition, they are expected to comment and respond to questions throughout the rest of the week, in an equivalent manner to a discussion during a face-to-face classroom. A minimum of one comment **BEYOND** their responses to the questions and a minimum of three responses to their peers are also required. These requirements themselves do **NOT** establish meaningful discussion nor a sense of community, but rather ensure that there are a sufficient number of posts from each student for the instructor and class to respond to and evaluate early on. It is important also to emphasize that comments and responses are expected to be substantive and thoughtful (e.g., comments such as "yes, I agree" or "me too" or "good point" are **NOT** substantive, or thoughtful).

Those who are not leading the readings **MUST** complete all required postings by a specific day and time in order to give the leaders a chance to analyze and synthesize the overall class responses to each question. For example, if a class discussion begins (i.e., when the leaders post the summaries and questions) on Monday at 4 P.M., and initial posts are due by midnight on Tuesday, all required postings might then be due by midnight on Friday.

Second Day of Class (if not live, this can be done in the discussion board as well)

(the date by which all initial posts should have been made, but before discussion begins)

1. You should address any non-posters privately between the first class period and now so that everyone has a chance to respond.
2. Address any problems that came up
3. Discuss some of the diversity in the class in terms of experience, perspective, etc.
 - a. *The idea here is to extend the discussion and talk about how each person has something to share in terms of different perspectives.*
 - b. *The focus here is on socialization and building comfort-levels, not on content mastery.*

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4. Go over the procedure for leading and discussing the readings again
 - a. *Make sure to tie THIS discussion to the discussion that will be proceeding from this day forward (i.e., the topic and leaders for this week's discussion, which will begin at the end of this class session).*

Third Day of Class

(this is a synchronous discussion, regardless of whether the first two days have been synchronous or asynchronous)

1. Monitor the start of discussion
 - a. Did the leaders post on time?
 - b. Have the leaders followed the format and instruction (e.g., forum, thread, one thread per question/chapter)?
 - c. Has everyone responded within 24 hours?
2. Send off-list messages as needed
 - a. First, BE POSITIVE! Asynchronous communication is devoid of body language and other cues, and students will be pre-disposed to take any feedback and criticism. Find something positive to say about what they've done, be gentle in your reminders and prompts, and use emoticons :)
 - b. Privately contact leaders to correct errors as needed, within 2 hours of initial post requirement
3. Send broadcast messages within 24 hours
 - a. *Thank the leaders, express interest in the discussion, thank those who have responded, and REMIND everyone that this is when the discussion begins*
4. Contact anyone who has not responded within 48 hours off-list
 - a. *Remind them that they are required to post, that it is tied to their grades, and that you are looking forward to the perspective they will bring to the discussion.*
5. Respond positively to good posts in public (see below)
 - a. *You want to indicate SUBTLY what look to be good questions and posts*
 - b. *Find something positive to say about each person at SOME point during the discussion (don't overdo it, and don't be disingenuous, however!)*
6. DO NOT interject yourself in the discussion at this point!
 - a. *The instructor must NOT interject themselves too forcefully or too early in the discussion. Early participation in the discussion or corrective feedback will stifle conversation and make students more reluctant to contribute spontaneously.*

Background and Rationale

Once discussion begins, it is critical to establish the discussion board as a risk-free zone. Those who have not responded by the required initial post should be contacted via email to remind them of the deadline and the connection to their grade. The instructor should respond to the posts in a positive fashion—it is usually possible to find something valuable in each response, and it is important to begin responses with this. Where there is a perceived need to provide corrective feedback or additional information, instructors should consider phrases that begin with “Yes AND,” instead of “Yes BUT” (e.g., “I like how you’ve identified _____ as a key concept, and I also think that _____ is important to this issue”). Instructors should also respond with questions and probes where possible (e.g., “You make a good point about _____. I wonder how the authors would say that _____ applies here; would that change this in any way?”). Whatever the response, it is important to make sure early on that it does not sound like there was no value in what the person contributed. For especially good, thoughtful, or strong responses, instructors can respond with strong praise (e.g., “Wow—you really put a lot of thought into that! I love how you point out _____, and your point about _____ is very insightful. Great post!). This helps to shape the responses that others make to the board as well as encourage these early performers to continue to make equivalent posts.

Those who are not making substantive or thoughtful comments, should be contacted off-list to let them know you would like to see more from them and to tell them to look at some of the better responses (to which you have replied) on the board. Make sure to assign participation points in the gradebook according to the overall discussion, Copyright, Richard Van Eck & Roberta Everson, 2015. May be distributed without modification or permission for educational purposes only.

deducting points for those who need to do more to participate. Doing this sends a message about expectations but does not unduly impact students' overall grades since it is only one week's worth of points. Finally, once the leaders have posted their synthesis of the class responses to the questions, it is important to respond publicly to what they have done so the next leaders have an idea what to do and not do. Again, it is critical to be supportive and to find the value in what students have done while also providing guidance for the future. It can be helpful to thank early leaders for being brave enough to tackle the first discussion, since they have the least amount of time to prepare and have no models to go on. The instructor should then highlight what students did well, and how it could be "even better in the future." Instructors should NOT deduct points for the first leaders (assuming they made a valid attempt), as they may not have lead such a discussion before and it can be difficult even for seasoned facilitators.

Second Week

(after the first discussion is over)

1. Start a New Thread About the Discussion

- a. *The second week, prior to the next discussion, you should start a new thread in which you facilitate a SHORT discussion about what made this week's discussion good, what makes a good question, what makes and good response, and how to improve the quality of the next discussion.*
- b. *It is a good idea to incorporate any ideas from the class, with modification if necessary, and give credit to those who contributed the ideas. This helps students feel engaged in the process and to take ownership and responsibility for ensuring a good discussion.*
- c. *Help THEM help YOU determine what is working and what is not. Avoid the temptation to lecture or tell them what was good or bad*
- d. *Be positive—the focus is on building community AND establishing guidelines here—if you are too direct before students have begun to trust that this is REALLY about ideas and not some secret agenda you have for "right" and "wrong" answers, you run the risk of killing the discussion before it really begins.*

Weeks 3 and Beyond

1. Continue to monitor and respond to discussion as above
2. GRADUALLY begin to be more a part of the discussion, but DO NOT give them "the answer"
 - a. Always couch your responses in terms of something you like about the post, and indicate that you wonder what ELSE might be true, or pose follow up questions that you genuinely think are interesting
 - b. Be careful not to take over the leading of the readings!
 - c. Watch for trends away from social posts to more substantive and expertise posts (see below)
3. Make off-list contacts as needed initially to get people to post frequently
4. Be lenient in weekly points grading initially, but make sure to grade stringently on those who do not post frequently.
 - a. *For non-substantive posts, contact them privately to discuss how to make their posts better, point them toward good posts, etc. HELP them initially rather than punishing them.*
 - b. *Consider also posting specific questions to them in response to their post to try to elicit more information and participation.*
 - c. *When you grade them at less than full points, make sure to contact them also to explain that and to offer to help them or meet with them to discuss it further. Make sure they know you believe they have the ability to contribute meaningfully, and that you want the class to benefit from their perspective.*

What to Expect, in General

Based on the analysis from our implementation of this strategy, instructors should expect to find that the number of posts begins to exceed the minimum requirements, that the length and quality of those posts increases, and that the

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number of “community” posts (e.g., sharing, opinion, humor) gradually becomes supplanted by expertise posts (e.g., referencing and quoting; corrective and elaborative feedback between students, help requests and responses, clarification). During those first 1/5 to 1/3 of the class, it is therefore important to look for signs that students are making comments that extend or go beyond the content, including humor, shared stories, pats on the back for good responses, questions and advice off topic, etc. This is an indicator that students are comfortable with the discussion medium. Instructors can then begin to ask more challenging questions, and watch for signs that community posts begin to be accompanied by expertise markers as well, adapting instructor interventions accordingly. The middle 1/3 should be a transition zone from community to community and expertise, and the final third should be characterized more by expertise markers along with some social and community posts. The leaders should still take the lead, however, and instructors should only where and when there’s real need or teachable moments. The instructor should find that, over time, s/he can respond less frequently as an instructor, and more as a peer or colleague.

Challenges

This is a time-intensive process that you CANNOT put on autopilot. Instructors need to understand that they will be frequent and regular readers, if not always responders. You also have to be sure to monitor frequency and timing of posts, especially in the beginning, to encourage full participation. There is the potential that students will see this as a way for the instructor to “get out” of reading and responding, so it is important to discuss the rationale for this approach. Another potential challenge is that students are not used to the strategy, nor to having an in-depth discussion where everyone participates. The discussion can end up being shallow and can wander off topic. Instructors have to resist the temptation to “correct” this with corrections, public chastisement, or judgement. The formula of saying something positive about a response followed up with a query for more information (e.g., “I like how you are confident about stating you don’t know what this means—it is a complicated concept! What do you think it might mean if....”) almost always works. And because there is a very good chance that there will be one or two great responses or examples, you can always single those out for praise, indicating that contributions like that are what really make a great discussion. Ultimately, however, you have to be prepared for things not to work perfectly, which is why the public discussion during the second or third week should focus on what worked, what didn’t and what THEY think can be done to improve.

Final Notes

You can adapt this strategy in many ways, including the use of a Wiki instead of a discussion board (see sample at the end of this document). You can also use this strategy even when meeting face-to-face, so that class time is more productive. You can also have students work in their own groups in Blackboard, with their own discussion boards, by requiring synthesis of group responses to the initial questions within 48 hours, and then have the GROUPS post their group response to main forum where everyone then comments and responds to those during the rest of the week. This is useful with the discussion gets to be too hard to handle due to class size or number of posts. However, it should be emphasized that in week where you do not meet face-to-face, a three-credit class should require 3 hours (to replace contact time) AND 6 hours (homework time estimates of 2 hours per contact hour), so requiring 2 hours per day devoted to discussion and reading is NOT unreasonable, even if it IS challenging.

Sample “Leading the Readings” Sign-up Sheet

CLASS DATE	TOPIC	DISCUSSION LEADER(S)
September 10	Topic 1: Foundations of HPT	
September 17	Topic 1: Foundations of HPT	
September 24	Topic 2: The HPT Process	
October 1	Topic 2: The HPT Process	
October 8	Topic 2: The HPT Process	
October 15	Topic 3: Worker-Level Interventions	
October 22	Topic 3: Worker-Level Interventions	
October 29	Topic 3 & 4: Worker-Level Interventions & Workplace-Level Interventions	
November 5	Topic 5: HPT Measurement & Assessment	
November 12	Topic 5: HPT Measurement & Assessment	
November 19	Topic 6 & 7: HPT In Action & Future of HPT	
December 3	Topic 7: Future of HPT	

Sample Assignment Sheet for “Leading the Readings” Using a Discussion Board

Objective

The student will demonstrate synthesis skills by facilitating discussion of a series of readings in class and generating a summary of the major concepts and ideas for those readings and of the facilitated discussion.

Total Points


This assignment is worth 20 points.

Due Date

The week you have signed up to facilitate the readings

Assignment Details

1. You and one other person will sign up to lead a week’s discussion of the readings. During that week, you will be jointly responsible for:
 - Generating one question per chapter that will encourage meaningful discussion of the content for each chapter. If you do not feel you have a good question, or one that you think will be interesting enough to you or the class, you may choose from the Knowledge and Comprehension questions in the textbook for each chapter. You will post these questions in Blackboard under the FORUM for the current week (see syllabus and schedule). **You must do this by the start of class time on the day of our scheduled class session, which in this case is Monday at 4pm.**
 - Monitoring, responding to, and prompting additional posts to the main forum from Friday through the next scheduled official class day and time. You will help facilitate our discussion of these ideas and issues by calling our attention to them, posing a new or refining an additional question that extends our conversation in a meaningful way. The goal is to figure out what the whole class consensus is in response to these questions and the given topic summary. Your job is to facilitate, NOT lecture, nor should you overwhelm us with lots of questions or posts--just help us all keep focused on making something interesting out of the individual posted responses.
 - As the leader for a weeks readings (topic) you will **begin** a thread by clicking the New Thread button:



 within the forum for that week's readings. You will do this **once** for **each chapter** with your discussion question for that chapter, titling each reply by the chapter number and "question" (e.g., Chapter 7 Question). If there are 3 chapters for that week, you will generate 3 threads in that week’s forum, each with a discussion question for that chapter.
 - Your goal, beginning on or after Friday at midnight, is to examine the summaries and responses to your questions as well as the discussion that has ensued. Look for areas of similarity, difference, and potential interest for further discussion. On the next week's scheduled class session (in this case, Monday at 4pm), you will THEN post an overall summary of the public discussion that attempts to synthesize what the class as a whole believes regarding the questions and the topic. You will want to be inclusive, but concise, so pull in key ideas and quotes (please attribute them) as you see them, and try to shoot for the equivalent of a minimum of one typed single-space page.

Sample Assignment Sheet for “Readings Discussion” Using a Discussion Board

Objective

Given one or more discussion questions for each weekly reading topic, the student will demonstrate conceptual knowledge of the topic by discussing the topic, responding to questions, posting comments, and responding to other posted comments using Blackboard according to the criteria listed below.

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Total Points

This assignment is worth 40 points.

Due Date

Every week EXCEPT when you are signed up to lead the readings

Assignment Details

Every week you will do readings in the Trends and Issues book. The posting requirements are outlined below:

- Every week that there are assigned readings in the Trends and Issues book, the leaders for that week will post one discussion question per chapter to the main forum by the scheduled date of class (the day and time according to the UND registrar, regardless of whether class meets live that week or not). Those questions may be original, from the suggested questions in the text, or both.
- You will spend the time between the scheduled time and day of class and Friday (as late as midnight if desired) discussing these questions in the discussion board thread in Blackboard. You should respond to the questions the leader has posed, to other questions and comments your peers have made, and in other ways engage in a discussion equivalent to a face-to-face discussion.
- The purpose is to extend and refine our thinking about these questions and topics. The leaders for that week's readings (the ones who generated the questions initially) will make posts and responses as needed to help facilitate our shared conversation and understanding about the questions and readings (e.g., by posting one additional question that helps us explore connections between group responses and/or identifying new or refining existing questions that seem to be the most interesting for further discussion).
- Minimal responses (e.g., "I agree!" or "Good Point") are perfectly fine to post, as they are a part of any discussion. However, ALONE, they will not count for meaningful discussion. They should accompany thoughtful responses that show you have taken the time to consider the material and question carefully (as opposed to logging on one day and posting one, one-sentence answer to each question).
- You should log on regularly during the week—our discussion should be more like a bee hive than a tennis match!

In all the discussion posts you do for this class, please change the subject line to reflect the basic "essence" your post rather than preserving the exact subject line of the previous post. This will make it easier to differentiate the post topics and to find ones that we are interested in a second time.

Keep in mind that this is where we actually LEARN this material, NOT demonstrate it, necessarily, so don't feel you have to "have the right answer" or not ask "stupid" questions. To get the most out of this class, you should ask any question you have, make whatever connections you can to your experience, etc. This is what we mean by negotiated meaning and learning as a social practice!

Finally, remember that while you can earn full credit for the participation by meeting the minimums listed above, the more you put into this class discussion, the more you AND your classmates get out of it. Also, for anyone "on the bubble" between grades (a B and an A, for instance), I will consider your level of participation in the discussion as the "tie breaker", so your participation here will not only help you learn, it may also improve your grade (nice when those things are connected, isn't it?)

Sample Assignment Sheet for “Leading the Readings” Using a Wiki Instead of Discussion Board

Objective

The student will demonstrate synthesis skills by facilitating discussion of a series of readings in class and generating a summary of the major concepts and ideas for those readings and of the facilitated discussion.

Total Points

This assignment is worth 30 points.

Due Date

The two different weeks that you have signed up to lead the readings

Assignment Details

All leading of discussion will occur in Blackboard using the Wiki labelled "HHPT Discussion".

You and one to three other people will sign up to lead a discussion of the readings for two separate weeks during the semester. There will be 1 or 2 chapters in general each week, which together comprise a "Topic". During these two separate weeks, you will be jointly responsible for:

- Generating a brief (one paragraph or so) summary/overview of each individual chapter
- Generating an overall synthesis of the TOPIC for that week, incorporating each of the chapters assigned and the individual summaries generated for those chapters (see above).
- Generating three questions based on the topic for the week that will encourage meaningful discussion of the content. These questions should be a logical outgrowth of the topic summary/synthesis mentioned above, and should be designed to get us to think about the over-arching themes and ideas raised by the authors. The rest of the class will respond to whichever of the questions they are most interested in.

All of the above should be posted to the class Wiki site in Blackboard (online.und.edu) in a page which you create for that week's topic (please name the page for the week's topic, e.g., "Topic One: Chapters 1-3"). I suggest you coordinate your efforts as leaders and divide up the workload as you see fit, but be aware that you are responsible for all content for that week, and that your grade for leading the discussion will be a group grade, so review each other's work prior to 4pm on the scheduled class day of the week that you are leading the readings to make sure you all agree that it is free from errors of content, typography, etc. You will be able to accomplish this by editing the page as a group, but I recommend that you discuss changes prior to implementing them to make sure you are in agreement.

In addition, you will be responsible for:

- Monitoring, responding to, and prompting additional comments to the questions you posted for that week, from Wednesday through Sunday at noon. You will help facilitate our discussion of these ideas and issues by calling our attention to them, posing a new or refining an additional question (note the singular, please!) that extends our conversation in a meaningful way. The goal is to figure out what the whole class consensus is in response to these questions and the given topic summary. Your job is to facilitate, NOT lecture, nor should you overwhelm us with lots of questions or posts--just help us all keep focused on making something interesting out of the individual posted responses.
- Beginning Sunday at noon, AS A GROUP you will examine the responses to your questions throughout the week, looking for areas of similarity, difference, and potential interest. Together, you will post one final Wiki entry that encapsulates the class responses to your questions in the class Wiki page. In so doing, please remember that your job is to synthesize, not list what each person said. Strive for what could be taken as the ideal answer to each question (again, you may want to divide up the work in your group for this, but remember to share and approve the work as a group before posting). This summary posting should be done by 4pm on the following Wednesday (at which point, the next week's discussion begins).

Sample Assignment Sheet for “Readings Discussion Participation” Using a Wiki Instead of Discussion Board

Objective

Given one or more discussion questions for each weekly reading topic, the student will demonstrate conceptual knowledge of the topic by discussing the topic, responding to questions, posting comments, and responding to other posted comments using Blackboard according to the criteria listed below.

Total Points

This assignment is worth 40 points.

Due Date

Every week EXCEPT when you are signed up to lead the readings (you do NOT need to participate as outlined below during the week that you lead readings).

Assignment Details

All discussion will occur as part of the Wiki in the Blackboard portion of this class (online.und.edu).

Every week that there are assigned readings in the Handbook of Human Performance Technology book, the leaders for that week will generate a new page in the course Wiki (in Blackboard, under HHPT Discussion) by the scheduled date of class (the day and time according to the UND registrar, regardless of whether class meets live that week or not) unless otherwise indicated in the syllabus schedule or communications from me. They will post summaries and pose questions about that week's Topic (see the assignment sheet for leading the readings for full details of that process).

You will spend the time between Wednesday at 4pm and noon on Sunday responding to these questions and commenting on your peers' ideas and posts. Your posts should be substantive, thoughtful, and occur over the course of several times during the week.

Keep in mind that this is where we actually LEARN this material, NOT demonstrate it, necessarily, so don't feel you have to "have the right answer" or not ask "stupid" questions. To get the most out of this class, you should ask any question you have, make whatever connections you can to your experience, etc. This is what we mean by negotiated meaning and learning as a social practice!

Finally, remember that the more you put into this class discussion, the more you AND your classmates get out of it. Also, for anyone "on the bubble" between grades (a B and an A, for instance), I will consider your level of participation in the discussion as the "tie breaker", so your participation here will not only help you learn, it may also improve your grade (nice when those things are connected, isn't it?)