

PowerPoint Slides

How Do I Create Engaging Threaded Discussion Questions?

Presented by:

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Presenter Bio:

John Orlando, Ph.D. is the instructional resource manager at the Norwich University School of Graduate Studies. He has been with the program for more than five years, helping steer it from 42 to more than 1,200 students. The school now offers more than 10 masters degrees delivered entirely online. John has delivered lectures on distance education administration and business continuity management for distance education at University Continuing Education Association conferences, at the University of Wisconsin Conference on Distance Education and Teaching, and through webcasts. He has also published in business continuity management for higher education.



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20 Minute Mentor

How Do I Create Engaging Threaded Discussion Questions?

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Purpose of Discussion

- Collaborative learning
 - Old view: Vessel theory of learning
 - New view: Constructivist (connectionist) theory of learning

Need Good Questions

- Students taught to be passive
- Bring themselves into the class
- Connect with prior experiences
- Develop knowledge

Avoid Repeat Back Questions

- “What are the three parts of a Business Impact Analysis?”
- All answer the same
- No student contribution

Use Application Questions

- “What are some of the challenges to doing a Business Impact Analysis in the workplace?”

Avoid Obvious Answers

- “Laptops don’t need to be closely guarded. They are perfectly safe being left out in an empty office. Do you agree or disagree?”

Create Controversy

- Reasonable positions on both sides of the issue.
- “Companies should instruct workers to take their laptops with them when they hear a fire alarm so that they can work elsewhere if they cannot return to work. Do you agree?”

Avoid Too Much Research

- “What are the major interpretations of Hamlet’s motivations and where do you stand on them?”
- Better left to research papers or presentations

Force Students to Think about the Material

- “Did Hamlet’s odd behavior help or hurt his cause, and why?”

Avoid Strictly Personal Questions

- “Describe a time when you were faced with a decision like the one Tom Sawyer faced with Jim”

Ask Students to Challenge the Material

- “Is that author right that a parent should always make medical decisions for a minor?”

Lead Discussion into General Points

- “What lessons was Mark Twain trying to teach with Tom Sawyer’s decision about Jim?”

Avoid Complex Questions

- “What are the most important information security policies for an organization? How do you teach people these policies? What are some obstacles to getting people to follow information security policies?”

Focus Questions on Single Topic

- “Why is it hard to get people to follow information security policies?”

Finding Good Discussion Questions

- Ask how a topic might be relevant to your students.
 - How might they apply a topic?
- Ask how a topic could be a launching pad for exploration of new topics.

Look for Cases

- Medical ethics case

Moderating Discussion

- Be engaged without monopolizing the discussion.
 - Don't answer every post
 - Suggest new directions
 - Don't fixate on a preconceived direction

Add Your Own Insights

- Don't just be a cheerleader
 - More than just "Good point."
- Be willing to express your own view
- Challenge your students
 - "How would you respond to ...?"
 - "But wouldn't that cause...?"

Discussion Tips

- Assign a moderator to jumpstart discussion
- Require both an original posting and one or more replies
- Require a first posting within a couple of days.
- Summarize main issues at the end
- Only grade responses with CONTENT, not “I agree” posts.

Discussion Tips

- Don't take over discussion. Make sure that students are talking to one another.
- Allow discussion to branch out into different directions.
- Don't allow discussion groups larger than 15 students.

Discussion Tips

- Encourage students to create their own discussion questions and threads.
- Establish rules against personal attacks and handle inappropriate behavior in private.
- Establish a strict cut-off for discussion so that students are not posting to old topics.
- Discussion is best graded with a rubric.

Thanks for your time

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