

Student Perspectives on Writing in Asynchronous Learning Environments

- Dan Driscoll,
English and Philosophy
- Dustin Ingram,
*Computer Science/
Mathematics*
- Elizabeth Schol,
Psychology
- Heather Schwartz,
Psychology
- Gillian Skorka,
Teacher Education
- Scott Warnock,
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Asynchronous tools in online writing environments

- Tools for students who don't all have to be in one "place" at the same time
 - Blogs
 - Wikis
 - Shared document spaces (Google Docs)
 - Email
 - Message boards—our focus



Message boards

- Internet discussion forums
- Students post on their own time
- *Threads*
 - Subject
 - Time of post
 - Poster

Message boards and learning

- Message boards can help teachers “clarify and extend the thinking” of students (Collison et al. 104-5)
- Social learning: Instead of “Cartesian premise of ‘*I think, therefore I am*’ ... ‘*We participate, therefore we are*’” (Seely Brown and Adler)
- Students can take risks through smaller assignments that serve as the foundation for formal projects



Message board pedagogy

- Instructor creates several open-ended prompts each week
- Students choose among these prompts
 - Posting deadlines: two or more “layers”
- Conversation is a primary goal
- Clear guidelines help tremendously: length, use of evidence, etc.

Course Tools

- Course Content
- Announcements
- Assessments
- Assignments
- Chat
- Discussions
- Web Links

(H) = Hidden

Instructor Tools

- Manage Course
- Assessment Manager
- Assignment Dropbox
- Grade Book
- Grading Forms
- Group Manager
- Tracking
- Selective Release

Week 6

- Logical fallacies (25 Messages)
- My favorite post (7 Messages)
- More on cloning and genetics (23 Messages)
- Digital divide? (19 Messages)
- Too many choices? (19 Messages)

Week 5

Don't forget that you are required to include material from the Discussions as sources for Project 2.

- Your tech use (33 Messages)
- Toulmin and Super Bowl ads (9 Messages)
- Chimeras and hybrids (29 Messages)
- Proof for the stem cell argument (9 Messages)
- Project 2 drafts (37 Messages)

Thread starters: Keep it simple

- Thoughts and conversations about readings
 - *Hi everyone,
Timpane makes the argument that we massively downplay the effects of depression on our society. He describes the results by using a slew of statistics.*

*Do you agree that mental health disorders are an out-of-bounds topic in many aspects of our culture? Why?
Be good to yourselves,
Prof. Warnock*
 - *Folks,
Simple question: What did you think of Kennedy's address?
Let us know,
Prof. Warnock*



Example of a thread

Student panelists

- Dustin Ingram,
*Computer Science/
Mathematics*
- Elizabeth Schol,
Psychology
- Heather Schwartz,
Psychology
- Gillian Skorka,
Teacher Education





Potential of message boards: Thoughts from those in the know

- How did you feel about conducting conversations in a written environment? What were the conversations like?
- Did the time to reflect and revise affect your contribution to the class dialogue? Were the opportunities for practice helpful?
- How did you feel about being in a “constant feedback loop” with your colleagues and the instructor?
- What was the quality of the class community?
- How would you compare conversations among online, hybrid, and onsite courses?



And some challenges

- Did you feel your colleagues read the posts? How could the class insure that students stay on top of the conversation?
- What was the workload like? What amount of time did you invest?
- How were you graded? Was this a good way to be assessed for this work?
- Were the rules of the message board clear?
- Did you have any technology issues? How could the Discussion application be better?



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