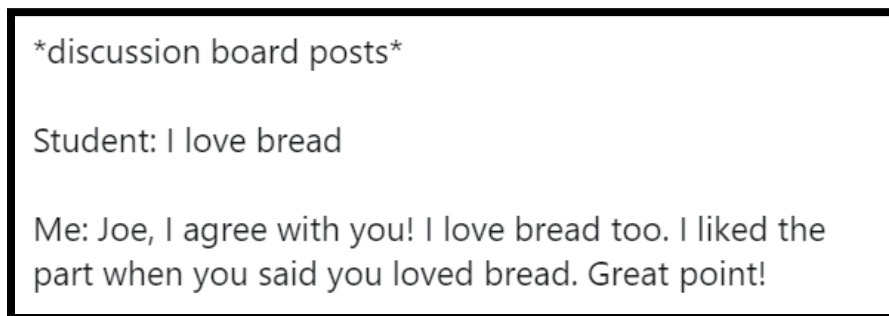


Shelli's Blog Post #4

Going Virtual Quickly: Thinking Outside the Forum Box

The purpose of this blog is to share some ideas of how you can move away from the traditional “post once, reply twice” discussion forum format. Students *often* express boredom with the traditional style of posting an answer to a question and then replying to two of their peers. And faculty *often* express frustration over the type of answers they get from students on these traditional forums. If the image below represents the type of answers you get from students in your forums, then this blog is for you!



Alternative Types of Discussion Forums

I'm sharing two of my favorite alternative types of discussion boards. You are welcome to use, modify, or build on them to “shake things up” in your course's forums. I believe they will also elicit higher levels of critical thinking in student replies. Note: What makes discussion forums “exciting” is to use various types of forums over the course of the semester, thus I'm not advocating you use any of these types exclusively, but rather vary the types of forums you have during the semester. And there is NO rule that you need to have a forum discussion every week! Try spreading them out across the semester for better engagement.

Video/Article Debate Challenge

Overview: For this type of discussion forum, choose a controversial topic in your field (one that does not have a clear “correct” answer) and provide students with either two short online articles/blogs or two short YouTube videos presenting two different perspectives on the topic. Present the students with a series of open-ended questions that have them thinking through both sides of the argument but force them to ultimately decide on where they stand and explain why. Then have them respond to one peer who chose the opposite side and have them challenge with a counterargument and a posed question.



Figure 1 Traditional vs Flipped Classroom

Example: In my one of my courses, I gave students this challenge: “To Flip or Not to Flip,” and the prompt asked them to watch two short videos, one presenting reasons why a flipped classroom is effective, and another presenting why traditional lecture is effective. The videos were followed with a series of open-ended questions:

- In your opinion, what do you think would be the pros and cons of teaching with a flipped classroom model rather than the traditional model? Make sure you address at least two pros and two cons in your answer and explain your reasoning behind your opinions.
- Overall, do you think flipped teaching is better than traditional lecture? Why? Give at least two reasons to back up your opinion.
- Would your opinion change if you were answering this question for elementary school, middle school, high school, or college students? Why?

This debate challenge forum was set up in a [Q & A style on TITANium](#), which meant each student had to post their response to the series of questions BEFORE they could see other students’ responses. This forum also had three timelines: *Week 1* - They were required to post their response to the questions, *Week 2* – They were asked to reply to one peer who took the opposite opinion they did in one of the question areas, and “challenge” their opinion by providing a counter-argument that included one question for their peer to think about, and *Week 3* – They were asked to take the “challenge” they received and answer the question posed to them in the counterargument. Of course, I ensured that [“netiquette”](#) was addressed in the course syllabus, and I provided students a rubric on how they would be graded for the debate challenge forum (e.g., original post must answer all parts of all questions, meet a minimum word count, and include at least one reference to our course’s reading material). But the overall results of using this type of discussion forum have been positive: I’ve seen “evidence” of higher critical thinking in their responses, and the students express enjoying these types of forums.

Simplified “PhotoVoice”



Figure 2 A picture is worth a thousand words

Overview: For this type of discussion forum, the focus is on students using photography to tell their individual stories and share their lived experiences. [PhotoVoice](#) is a method for empowering student voices because they choose where to point the camera and what story to tell. The use of this method is modified and simplified for an alternative type of forum discussion. Although a discussion forum in TITANium could be used, I recommend Google Slides for this type of forum because it works well for both asynchronous and synchronous engagement, and it is quick and easy to add comments to each person’s slides!

Example:

Below are instructions I would place on Slide 1 in a [Google Slides presentation I created and shared with my class](#).

1. Take a picture to answer this discussion prompt: **What factors in your home “office” or “study area” contribute to your success? What factors create potential barriers?**
2. Email the picture to yourself (or airdrop it or whatever makes it easy) so you can upload it in this presentation.
3. [Insert a new slide](#).
4. [Insert the picture](#) into your slide.
5. Type a description to give the picture context. (See my example on Slide 2)
6. [Comment](#) on at least two pictures shared by your peers.

This type of forum could be completed in a synchronous session, by posting the link to the Google Slides presentation in the chat of Zoom and giving the students “X” minutes to complete it (fill in X with number of minutes you think makes sense). And then you could share a few slides live with the whole the class and discuss them. Or you could do it asynchronously and give one due date for Steps 1-5, and another due date for Step 6 (two comments to peer slides). You can also easily apply this type of forum to a multitude of discipline areas, like “Find Math in Action: Take a picture that represents or demonstrates the “X” math concept/principle you learned last week in class,” or “Biology in the Real World: Where is the most contaminated area in your home?” I’m sure you can think of innovative

ideas for your field - Feel free to share your PhotoVoice Discussion Prompt ideas with others by [adding a comment](#) to the [Google Slides PhotoVoice presentation example](#)!

Hopefully you've enjoyed reading about these two alternative options for designing a different kind of discussion forum. The idea for this blog topic was inspired from my recent attendance at the wonderful [Quality Matters virtual conference](#). At this conference I was introduced to the PhotoVoice method from Amy May, a professor at Shippensburg University. Additionally, another presentation I saw by Kidder and Cooper, instructional designers from Idaho State University, included [a fantastic collection of alternative discussion forums](#) that I encourage you to explore for even more ideas! And, if you want to get really creative, you can try this twist of [using "Superheroes" in your online discussion forums](#).

Until Blog #5,

Shelli