

**Engaging Online Course Activities**  
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**Online Ice Breaker Activities**

- **Lost in Space** –Sometimes, we learn more about people through their priorities than their standard introductions. Here are the directions for this assignment:
  - Direct the student “to imagine they have been living on the space station for one year. Suddenly, the computers malfunction, and you have fifteen minutes to evacuate to a space shuttle before all life support systems fail. You will be allowed to take five items with you” (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004, p. 52).

The student should type their name as quickly as they can, followed by the five items in a discussion board posting. This is not a time for reflection, just a quick response. The class will then review the lists and inquire of various students as to why the students chose what they did (from *Engaging the Online Learner* by Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson).
- **Classmate Quiz** – During the first week of class, we typically ask our students to post introductions. Direct the students to read all class introductions in preparation for a quiz, worth Bonus Points, in Session 2. You can do this by email or by creating a matching or multiple choice quiz in Blackboard. Ask questions like “Who lives in Boston?” or “Who has the pet monkey?” Give them three days to respond. This builds learning community in the class, which promotes learning according to the literature (from *Engaging the Online Learner* by Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson).
- **One Word** – Students would think of a word that best describes them or their life. They would post their word as the subject of the discussion board posting and then explain why they chose that word in the body of the posting. After all have posted, students would review and find someone whose word resonates with them. They would reply and try to find at least two additional nouns that the two of them have in common (from *Engaging the Online Learner* by Rita-Marie Conrad and J. Ana Donaldson).
- **Two Truths and a Lie** - Have participants post two truths and a lie in a threaded discussion (either whole class or in smaller virtual teams). Have the other learners respond with their guess of the lie (from Events of Instruction in *Advanced Methods in Distance Education* by K. Dooley, J. Lindner, and L. Dooley).
- **Costume Party** – For initial student introductions, have each student choose a costume to represent a personality trait. They can take a digital picture and send it to the other learners with a description (from Events of Instruction in *Advanced Methods in Distance Education* by K. Dooley, J. Lindner, and L. Dooley).
- **Pass It On** - Each participant will develop a question to pass on to the next participant (e.g., “Where was the tallest tree you have ever climbed?”). The participant then e-mails the question to another participant. The second participant answers the question and then e-mails the response along with the original question on to the next person. The process is repeated until

everyone has had a chance to answer. Then the responses are returned to the originator of the question (from Events of Instruction in *Advanced Methods in Distance Education* by K. Dooley, J. Lindner, and L. Dooley).

- **Name Game** - Have each learner create a mnemonic of their first name and use that to describe themselves. Here's an example. My name is Corky and I have a crazy sense of humor and love to have fun. My hobby is amateur radio. My wife is much younger than I and we have a 4-year-old. I teach freshman "Orientation to College" course, and as an "old" guy (compared to my students) I enjoy the company of youngsters. **So his mnemonic would be...[C] Crazy- [O] Old- [R] Radio ham- [K] Knows- [Y] Youngsters** (from Events of Instruction in *Advanced Methods in Distance Education* by K. Dooley, J. Lindner, and L. Dooley).

### **Online Assignments/Assessment**

- **Check Points for Long Range Assignments**  
Online students will procrastinate! Long range assignments such as projects, presentations, or papers will need to be duplicated throughout the course as check points will create session reminders. Check point examples can be submitting paper topic choices, draft outlines, or preliminary peer reviews. These can be created in your courseware management assignment tool for complete/incomplete settings, so grades are not necessary.
- **Discussion Board Makeup Assignment:** If students fail to post in the class discussion but truly need/want to receive credit, have the student create a summary of the entire discussion and submit via email for credit. This assures you they have read and understood the discussion even though they were unable to participate. You may still assess a late penalty as described in your syllabus but this gives them an opportunity to make it up.
- **AHA! Assignment:** Ask students to keep a journal of Aha! or epiphany moments they experience during the course. Encourage them to share these moments in a discussion board at some point during the course or on an ongoing basis. It can really enrich the course.
- **Focused Listing** - After reading the text or lecture material, have the student recall the most important points related to a particular topic. These could be posted in the journal or blog tool and may help prepare the student for an exam (*Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross).
- **Empty Outlines** – Provide the student with an empty or partially completed outline of lecture material or a reading assignment and direct them to fill in the blanks. This could be completed in a Word document and courseware assignment feature, the quiz tool, or submitted to an online journal or blog tool (*Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross).
- **One-Minute Paper** – Students could create a one-minute paper in the essay function of the quiz tool with the timer set to one minute. This is a good way to assess new information presented in the session (*Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross).
- **Muddiest Point** – After students complete a lesson or module, in the Discussion Board, ask the students, "What was the muddiest point?" discuss it as a class. This could yield content clarification and participation credit (*Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross). It also provides feedback for the instructor if re-teaching is necessary.

- **What, How, and Why Outline** – In this exercise, have the student analyze a particular type of content (reading, case study, literature, etc.) and write brief notes answering the what, how, and why questions in outline format. This can be submitted to the Assignment feature in the courseware management system and quickly read and assessed (*Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross).
- **Annotated Bibliography** - An assignment for an annotated bibliography is a good idea as well. Students perform web searches for a particular course topic and created an annotated list. The list should have quality sites as defined by you and the annotations that describe the sites should be well written, detailed, and inviting. Each learner should have a different topic or this could be a group exercise. Even better, would be to require them to find a learning object, content that could be used to teach students in future classes. I use this to also teach APA style format and for the doctoral students to begin searching the literature for their research topic.
- **Discussion Board Quiz** - For this assignment, after course content has been presented, have the students go to the discussion board for the assignment. Instead of asking for their answers, have them create a question based upon the content just studied but do not post the answer. The second part of the assignment is to have students post an answer to one of the questions posted by their classmates, then use the content of the forum to create a follow-up quiz or test.
- **I Didn't Know That** - For a reflective exercise at the middle of the course or specific unit, use the discussion board and have students post something new that they have learned this week, either from another student, from the text, or from class discussion. They should also indicate how they will use the new information or skill. You would want to be sure to title the Discussion Forum - I DIDN'T KNOW THAT so students will know where to post in the discussion board for this assignment.
- **Antagonistic Arguments** - Present two credible but antagonistic arguments. Challenge learners to understand both sides by having them post a response to support one of the arguments. Then, ask learners to reply to others who took the opposite side and refute their arguments (Stavredes & Herder, 2014).
- **Problem-Based Learning** - Problem based learning is great because online references can be placed in Blackboard to solve a course related problem. Students can either work collaboratively or apart to solve the case. They will need to identify, collect, integrate, synthesize, and apply learning resources related to the problem to find a resolution. This can take place in either the discussion board with one student posting each step, group analysis with separate discussion boards, or you can have each student solve the case and submit it via email or the assignment tool.

For example: Tomorrow, 500 convention guests will arrive at 9:00am and plan to check into the Goldstone, a large downtown convention hotel, to begin their week of meetings. Mr. Regis, the general manager, has just learned that the local hotel and restaurant worker's union has called a strike and all member employees will support it. In just one hour, all servers, cooks, dishwashers, bell attendants, and housekeepers will leave the premises. It is too late to cancel the convention as many of the guests are already in transit. Other hotels in the city are also affected by the strike, so walking guests is not an option. If you are Mr. Regis, what would you do?

- **Response Journals** - Use response journals where there are extensive reading assignments. Ask them to write a one or two paragraph response to each reading assignment. The response is to include several sentences about what they felt was the main idea of the reading and several sentences of their reaction to the reading. Ask if there was any part they could identify with or that touched them or if there was any part that confused them. Have them submit the journals (or

just Word docs) a day before you discuss the reading in the class or virtually. When you review the journal entries, you will know what issues to address and what areas need to be clarified. The journals can count 10-20% of their course grade, and can be loosely graded with a scale of 1-4, with 4 being the highest.

- **Analytic Memo** – Require students to write a one—two page analysis of a specific problem or issue. The person for whom the memo is being written is usually identified as an employer, client, or a stakeholder who needs the analysis to inform decision making (*Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross). This can be good for authentic assessment and critical thinking.
- **WebQuest Activity**  
A WebQuest is an organized assignment activity using the Internet. All information gathered by the students is drawn from the Web. These activities can provide opportunities for students to think using levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. San Diego State University hosts a website devoted to WebQuests located at <http://webquest.org>.
- **MiniQuest**  
This is a web-based assignment that directs students to find accurate (factual) information and then critically think through the development of a response or project. A scenario is provided for context that includes a structured task that guides students to find the facts necessary. Offer students choice in how they develop the response. A quick Google search on miniquest will provide lots of ideas (Shank, 2007).

### **Other Resources**

- Richard Paul and Linda Elder provide a comprehensive list of questions that may be used in the discussion boards to support critical thinking and stronger discussion - <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1067269.pdf>

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