

MARCH 2016

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 3

TIPS FROM THE PROS

## Three Common Mistakes to Avoid When Teaching Online

By John Orlando

**H**undreds of studies have demonstrated that there is no significant difference in learning outcomes between online and face-to-face courses. But many students still report having a bad experience with online education because their instructor makes some easily identified mistake when moving courses online.

### Bad content

Perhaps the biggest mistake online teachers make is crafting bad content. The most common forms of bad online content are long text passes on a webpage, videos of face-to-face lectures, and voice-over PowerPoints.

The web is a visual medium, and so nobody wants to scroll through long text blocks online. Instead, give students a PDF document that they can download to read later. Face-to-face lectures are made for a face-to-face audience, and merely putting a camera in the back of the lecture hall leads to videos with poor sound quality, content that is not directed to the viewer (such as announcements to the class), people standing up in front of the camera, etc. Finally, bullet-points

are for written reports, not presentations. The viewer can read bullet points themselves. Plus, reading text makes for a confusing presentation. The viewer is reading the text on the screen at one speed and listening

---

**The best discussion questions are easily answered by students and allow for a variety of responses.**

---

to the speaker at another. The message is disjointed, like hearing a song played at two speeds at once. If you are just displaying text with your audio, then you are better off providing it in a PDF for the students to read themselves.

The ideal content for an online course is a video that combines narration with imagery, like a documentary. The narration conveys the message, while the imagery amplifies it with a visual analog. A PBS documentary about whales does not display bullet points of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3 >>

## Problem-Based Learning for Heightened Student Engagement

By Suzanne Tapp, Andrea McCourt, and Jillian Yarbrough

**H**ow do you inspire your online students to move beyond making status quo postings in your discussion component and lackluster responses to their peers? Is there a way to get students engaged in meaningful group work in the online classroom? Consider using problem-based learning (PBL) to transform your discussions with either a low-risk, one-time implementation scenario (much like a case study) or a more in-depth group project that spans several weeks.

PBL is an active learning strategy in which students are presented with a “real life” problem and asked to present problem-solving solutions using a framework that asks them to examine what they know, what they need to know/research, and then what they recommend (Rico & Ertmer, 2015). There are a variety of ways to incorporate it into your online course.

Case studies are an excellent way to integrate PBL into online discussion. A case study requires

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5 >>

IN THIS ISSUE

2  
Web Annotations  
as an Alternative  
to Discussion Forums

4  
Getting Started with  
Adaptive Learning

6  
Screencasting Options  
for Teachers

8  
The Role of Questions  
in Online Teaching

President: William Haight  
 (whaight@magnapubs.com)

Publisher: David Burns  
 (dburns@magnapubs.com)

Managing Editor: John Orlando, PhD  
 (jorlando2001@gmail.com)

ADVISORY BOARD

**Randy Accetta, PhD**  
 Mentor-in-Residence, Communication  
 www.entrepreneurship.arizona.edu

**Toni Bellon, PhD**  
 Professor, Middle/Secondary Education  
 North Georgia College & State University  
 tbellon@northgeorgia.edu

**Jennifer E. Lerner, PhD**  
 Associate Vice President for e-Learning  
 Northern Virginia Community College  
 jlerner@nvcc.edu

**B. Jean Mandernach, PhD**  
 Professor & Senior Research Associate  
 Grand Canyon University  
 Jean.Mandernach@gcu.edu

**John Orlando, PhD**  
 jorlando2001@gmail.com

**Lawrence C. Ragan, PhD**  
 Director- Faculty Development  
 World Campus  
 Penn State University  
 lcr1@psu.edu

*Online Classroom* (ISSN 1546-2625) is published monthly by Magna Publications Inc., 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Phone 800-433-0499; Fax: 608-246-3597. Email: support@magnapubs.com. Website: www.magnapubs.com. One-year subscription: \$219 (Multiple print subscriptions and Group Online Subscriptions are available. Call Customer Service at 800-433-0499.) Photocopying or other reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to *Online Classroom*, 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Copyright ©2016, Magna Publications Inc.

Submissions to *Online Classroom* are welcome. Please review article submission guidelines located at www.magnapubs.com/catalog/online-classroom/

Authorization to photocopy or reuse content from *Online Classroom* is available for academic institutions, businesses, and individuals from the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC). To see a list of options available for you to reuse select content, visit www.copyright.com or use the QR code to the right. You can also call CCC at 978-750-8400 for more information.



## Web Annotations As an Alternative to Discussion Forums

By John Orlando

Online faculty often assume that all student collaboration should go through the LMS discussion board, but there are other methods of hosting discussion. Yanyan Sun of Ohio University and Fei Gao of Bowling Green State University experimented with Web annotations as an alternative to traditional online discussions. Instead of posting comments to a discussion board, students posted comments directly to the material they were discussing.

The researchers used Diigo to allow students to post comments directly to websites that were hosting course material. Diigo is a Web-based bookmarking tool that allows you to store your bookmarks in the cloud. This makes them available from any Internet-connected device in the world. Its real powers lie in the tagging function that allows for easy search for a site as well as the ability to share bookmarks in groups. Simply create a group and invite others with a Diigo account to join. Then when someone bookmarks a site, that person can also post it to the group to allow others to see it, too.

Diigo has gone a step further by adding an annotation function. When on a website, you can highlight text or add comments directly to that website. These annotations are saved as part of your bookmark, so when you or others with whom you share your bookmark click it, the annotations will appear right on the page in front of you. An instructor can create a group for the students in a course, bookmark course material for the group, and ask students to add comments as annotations to those sites.

The researchers found that switching to Web annotations caused students to feel slightly more engaged in the discussion than they did in a traditional LMS discussion forum, as reported on surveys. This was supported by the fact that the students made more postings to the Diigo-linked material than they did to the discussion forums. However, the length of postings was greater in the discussion forums.

The results suggest that Web annotations are preferable to LMS discussions when the goal is to

---

**If you want students to take apart a Shakespearian sonnet to identify underlying themes, it is better to have them post to the sonnet itself.**

---

analyze course content itself. If you want students to take apart a Shakespearian sonnet to identify underlying themes, it is better to have them post to the sonnet itself. This connects the posting to its subject, and students do not have to go back and forth between the subject and the discussion forum to make the posting.

But if the goal is to analyze a concept, such as how a certain theme plays out in different types of literature, then a discussion forum might be best. Without the content to which the forum refers, students can focus on the thoughts of others

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7 >>

---

---

## << FROM PAGE 1

facts about whales, it shows real whales. The images provide context, emotion, and focus to improve the spoken message.

One simple way to create decent online videos is to load images that correspond to your points onto blank PowerPoint slides (I like a black background), with one image per slide, and then run the show on your monitor while recording both the images and your voice using screencasting software such as Screencast-o-Matic. This has the advantage of requiring minimal technical sophistication. However, it also ties the images to the audio, meaning that if you want to swap out an image later, you have to rerecord the entire presentation.

A better method is to first record your narration with a free sound recorder like Audacity. Edit that narration to what you want, and then combine the audio with images using a video-creator such as WeVideo. This allows you to change the audio or swap out images later with ease. I don't even worry about the visuals when I record my narration. I simply record what I want to say, put it into my video-creator, and then find images to match my message using Google Advanced Image Search. I run the audio in my video-creator, stop when I need a new image, find that image on the web, and then place it into the video and move on. It is easier than you think. See a tutorial on how to make videos with WeVideo at <http://bit.ly/1KyXXHS>.

Whatever you do, make sure to express enthusiasm with your voice. I often see videos of instructors speaking in a monotone that makes them sound bored. If you sound bored, then your students will be bored as well. Use voice inflections for emphasis. Also try to speak

naturally, like the person is sitting next to you, in order to keep your audience's interest.

### **Bad discussion questions**

A second common mistake in online teaching is crafting bad discussion questions. Questions that ask students to simply regurgitate what was in the material only discourage them and lead to repetition of what others have said in order to meet the discussion

---

**Information is continually gathered by the system on how each student answers the questions to help determine that student's recommended path.**

---

requirements. A discussion is not an essay assignment, it is an online version of what would happen in a coffee house. Don't ask for research to answer a discussion question online, that makes it into an essay assignment. Ask for your students' thoughts just as if it were an informal discussion.

The best discussion questions are easily answered by students based on what they already know. A case study that presents the facts of a situation and asks students what should be done is ideal, but it should be one that allows for reasonable positions on both sides of the issue, not one where the faculty member is fishing for a particular response. Also make sure that the cases allow students to apply their own experience or prior knowledge to the situations, not just what was covered in the class.

This makes the cases more real and interesting to the students.

### **Poor use of in-class time**

Many students report mixed feelings about hybrid classes because the instructor made poor use of in-class time. The fundamental idea behind hybrid learning is that the act of pushing content out to the student is moved online, and in-class time is used to allow students to engage the material. But many instructors have trouble creating engaging activities, and merely fall back onto lecturing in class.

One way to use in-class time is to put students into small groups to work out case studies. Hall and Villareal found that students liked role-playing scenarios that involved situations that they would likely encounter in their professions. I did the same in my medical ethics course. The students got the basic principles online, and then applied them to real and hypothetical cases in class that were similar to what they would encounter as clinicians.

Students also like starting the class with a question-and-answer session about the material. By allowing the session to be driven by the students' questions, the instructor goes into the material in a way that is different from how it was presented online. This approach helps students who had trouble with the material the first time, and provides helpful reinforcement from a different perspective for the others.

Avoiding these common pitfalls will make you a much better online or hybrid instructor.

Hall, S. & Villareal, D. (2015). The Hybrid Advantage: Graduate Student Perspectives of Hybrid Education Courses, *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, v. 27, n. 1, 69-80. @

## Getting Started with Adaptive Learning

By Kathleen Bastedo

**A**daptive learning has drawn growing interest in education. The premise makes perfect sense. Instead of giving students of all knowledge and abilities the same content, the student is first assessed on his or her knowledge, then provided the appropriate content. The student does not have to sit through content he or she already knows and receives a customized education.

The University of Central Florida (UCF) recently started experimenting with adaptive learning. After reviewing a number of products, faculty overwhelmingly chose Realizeit from CCKF. The main benefit is that the platform is content agnostic (it can accept any course material, including text, videos, and graphics). This system provides the infrastructure for supporting your own content.

Faculty also liked the fact that both the content and the assessments are adaptive. The student watches the content and then does the assessment. If the student excels in the assessment, the system will move him or her ahead to more advanced content and more advanced questions. If a student is not doing well in a particular area, the system will recommend that he or she repeat content areas, with the questions decreasing in difficulty.

UCF piloted two courses in fall 2014 using Realizeit: Nursing Pathophysiology and General Psychology. The pathophysiology instructor was intrigued by the case study capabilities of the system. She created three case studies for the fall semester, each with a full description of the particular case, including the age, sex, basic medical history, and current lab information on the patient. Each

case study included the same underlying condition like diabetes or poor glucose management, but also included variable information that could modify each case, such as different lab result ranges and various diagnoses. The patient could have high glucose levels but be okay, while low or high levels on other lab results could radically change a diagnosis. This type of scenario means that different students could arrive at different answers concerning each case.

The content in the psychology course consisted of PowerPoint presentations, PDF documents, and some basic content pages. The content was moved into the Realizeit system and tweaked into smaller learning chunks. For instance, the PowerPoint presentation slides were divided into small learning pieces and, using formative assessment, questions related to each section were created or appropriately linked to the content.

### Student experience

At the beginning of each module in Realizeit, students complete a “Determine Knowledge” formative assessment where they rate how much they already know about a specific area of content. The system then tests the student’s knowledge based on his or her ranking. If a student does well on the questions, he or she is moved forward so the student doesn’t have to relearn a familiar topic. If a student scores low in an area, he or she is moved back to review the content. Once the system has determined where the student should begin, a learning path is created.

### Instructor role

The instructor role in adaptive learning changes from lecturer to facilitator. The system allows

the instructor to quickly identify students who need more assistance, and where they need it. For example, when an instructor logs in, Realizeit provides a class update about who has not yet started the module, which students are working behind the rest of the section, and how many (and which) students have finished the module. Data is provided on each question as well, such as how many (and which) students answered each question correctly, how many students answered incorrectly, and how much time it took each student to answer a question. This information is especially crucial for large online classes because it allows the instructor to quickly identify and reach out to a struggling student.

### Content

Instructors are encouraged to put their content into small learning modules, which could be a few paragraphs of text along with a video, an image, or a graphic. They may also add content-related questions to a summative assessment that usually occurs during a weekly quiz, a midterm, or a final exam period.

In this system, a detailed course map is created based on the course objectives, including what the faculty determines to be the prerequisite skills a student will need to be successful in. Along with the learning module, the instructor creates formative questions related to the content. These questions can be marked as easy, medium, or difficult. However, based on the data gathered by the system as students answer questions, the system itself determines the difficulty parameters (how many students answer a question correctly, how long it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7 >>

## << FROM PAGE 1

students to analyze a discipline-based situation as well as the context of that situation in order to generate workable solutions. Students are then asked to support those solutions with theories, logic, and/or facts. Case studies allow students to apply class topics and materials to real-world scenarios by using critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Many case studies can be simplified to make them appropriate for online discussion. For example, rather than requiring students to provide a full case study analysis, consider asking just one discussion question that focuses on a single step in the case study process. This might involve asking students to (1) discuss one of the major problems related to the case, (2) identify tools that professionals might use to solve the problem, (3) generate a list of what they already know about the topic and/or need to know in order to solve the problem, (4) analyze statistics related to the case, or (5) generate and defend a viable solution to the case.

The team component of PBL can also be incorporated into online classes. One team PBL activity we successfully adapted for the online classroom is a “negotiation simulation” for a class on employee and labor relations. This assignment required teams of students to adopt differing perspectives (labor union versus organization management) about priorities for an employment contract. Each team member was asked to develop an initial contract offer that matched his or her team’s assigned perspective. Teams then incorporated all of their individual assignments into a single document that represented their team’s initial contract offer.

This process was conducted through team discussion boards. To add another element of negotiation to this assignment, we created an all-class discussion board where all teams posted their final contract offers. The students were asked to review and comment on at least two contracts posted by an “opposing” team (e.g., a member of a union team might make recommendations to a management team for how to make their offer more appealing to a union). While

---

### **To help avoid miscommunication about workload, consider assigning roles to group members.**

---

the contract component of this assignment is discipline-specific, this process could be used to have students debate a wide variety of topics in other classes.

While students like PBL in general, educators and students alike realize that group work comes with challenges. Provide as much structure and direction to students as possible, particularly the first time that a PBL strategy is introduced. We recommend that students be graded as groups and individually for their contributions, and that groups organize their work on a system that the instructor can monitor, such as a Google Doc. Students often appreciate the input of the instructor if the group dynamics go awry.

To help avoid miscommunication about workload, consider assigning roles to group members,

such as the group leader, the recorder, the person who submits the final product on behalf of the group, and so on. It may also be a good idea to assign individual “prework” regarding the problem prior to the first group meeting so each person brings some thought and there are clear expectations for the first discussion.

For instructors adopting a PBL strategy for the first time, we recommend starting small and beginning with one discussion question before working up to higher-risk, more involved PBL activities. Try using concrete, real-world problems that are easy to understand so that students have a positive first experience with dynamic contributions from classmates. Students will also adapt more easily to a new technique if they understand the expectations and assessments ahead of time, so be certain to provide the assessment criteria and/or rubric prior to the beginning of the activity. And perhaps the most important piece of advice for PBL: Remember that there will not be one perfect answer! Allow for individuality and innovation—and even failure—in the answers that your students provide.

Rico, R. & Ertmer, P. (2015). Examining the Role of the Instructor in Problem-centered Instruction. *Techtrends: Linking Research & Practice to Improve Learning*, 59(4), 96-103.

*Suzanne Tapp is the director of the Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development Center; Andrea McCourt is the program director for human resource development; and Jillian Yarbrough is an instructor of university studies at Texas Tech University. @*

## Screencasting Options for Teachers

By John Orlando

**S**creencasting is one of the most important tools in my inventory as an online teacher. I am constantly making screencast tutorials to teach students processes, such as how to send large files, how to develop course content, and the like. It takes as little as a few minutes to make a screencast, and with it I can avoid typing out the answer to the same question from multiple students, as well as avoid the delays that come when students find that they do not understand something right before it is due. Plus, screencasts are a far more effective way to teach a process than a text description. In fact, I expect that when I am having trouble with a process in some outside system, the support section will have a screencast tutorial on that process. A simple text tutorial makes a system look amateurish.

Screencasts are also excellent for providing feedback on student work. As discussed in an earlier article (April 2014), screencasts allow an instructor to provide feedback to a student as he or she would if the student were sitting next to the instructor in his or her office. The instructor pulls up the student's work, starts the screencast, and talks about what he or she sees. The voice inflections improve the student's understanding of nuance in the feedback, and the instructor can highlight sections, move text around to illustrate better organizational methods, and in general explain points far better than is normally done with text feedback. The instructor uploads the screencast to a hosting site and sends the student a link to it to watch on his or her own time.

There are a number of excellent screencasting software options for

teachers. Not surprisingly, functionality is generally proportional to cost. This allows you to choose the cheapest option that fulfills your need. You may also find that you start at the cheap end, but as you become more comfortable with screencasting and want to do more, you start moving up in functionality and price. Here are my favorites, ranked by cost.

---

### **Screencasts are a far more effective way to teach a process than a text description.**

---

**Jing** is a free browser add-on from the good people at TechSmith, who produce a number of excellent pieces of software directed toward education. Jing allows you to take screen captures (still images) or screencasts (videos) of up to five minutes long. The screen captures allow for some simple edits, such as adding text, boxes, or arrows, but you can add nothing to the screencasts. You can download the result to your computer or upload it to the screencast.com hosting site for sharing, which provides two GB of storage and two GB of bandwidth for free.

**Google Hangouts on Air** is a feature of Google+ that allows users to host live video sessions. It is excellent for hosting live sessions in an online course, as you can have an unlimited number of participants in the session. Hangouts on Air automatically saves the session as a video to your YouTube account. Since you can broadcast your desktop, this is an excellent way to make screencasts for free. Simply start a session, invite only yourself,

display your screen, and record your screencast. When you are done, you can go into the YouTube editor to make a few simple edits such as trimming out the beginning or end. However, there is no way to define a smaller area of your screen for the screencast or to zoom and pan, so you are left with a recording of your entire screen.

**Screencast-o-matic** is a popular screencasting system that allows users to make screencasts either through the website, without having to download any software, or using a downloaded app. The download is free and makes screencasting faster, and I would recommend it if there is nothing to prevent downloads on your computer. The free version allows for screencasts up to 15 minutes long that can be uploaded to the hosting site, while the paid version allows for unlimited video length and is well worth the \$15-per-year cost. Plus, the paid version allows you to add a webcam shot in the corner of the screencast, as well as make some other edits. Webcam shots are a good addition to your screencast as a face provides a sense of social presence and helps keep the viewer's attention.

**SnagIt** is TechSmith's paid screen capture and photo editing software that is my go-to system for working with photos. It provides nearly everything you need for photo editing, including a resizing feature, which can reduce photos to a workable size for the Web. But TechSmith recently added a screencasting feature as well with some basic editing functions. This makes SnagIt an option for doing both screen captures and screencasts with the same system.

**Camtasia Studio** is TechSmith's paid screencasting and video-editing

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7 >>

---

---

## << FROM PAGE 6

software, and what I use to make my own screencasts. Because it integrates screencasting with video editing, it is very convenient for making and working with screencasts. You simply record your screencast, and when saved it will automatically be imported and open in the video editor. From here you can do a number of edits, from trimming out parts to zooming, adding text, images, and boxes. You can also export it in a variety of video formats and resolutions, including directly to your YouTube channel. I use it for all my video

production and editing needs.

**Articulate Reply** is a new screencasting product that comes free with the purchase of Articulate Storyline. Storyline is a wonderful product for making interactive, self-contained eLearning modules that include such things as videos, imagery, quizzes, and animations. While the sophistication of the product does bring a learning curve, and the product is the most expensive on this list, it is well worth looking into if you want to produce really powerful learning modules online. If you do go with it, you will also be given Reply, which integrates the webcam shot

with the desktop shot much better than other systems. Whereas the other systems allow only for a small webcam image that can come in or out of the screencast only once during the video, Reply allows for switching between webcam and desktop as many times as you like, as well as smooth transitions. Take a look at the overview here: <http://bit.ly/1JIDZ8B>.

The range of systems to suit different needs and levels of technical sophistication makes screencasting accessible to any online instructor or instructional developer. Consider how to add screencasting to your courses. @

---

## << FROM PAGE 2

and develop a thread around the concept.

The same principle of shared annotations can work with material that is not on the Web. If you have a particular document that you want students to discuss, then you can post it to Google Drive and share it with students for

commenting. If you want students to comment on a video, then you can use tools such as VideoAnt or VideoNotes to allow students to post comments to different locations within a video.

Take a look at this tutorial on how to use Diggo for collective web annotations (<http://bit.ly/1jOeAbK>), and consider how you might use Web annotations as an alternative

to traditional discussion forums in your classes.

### Reference

Sun, Y., & Gao, F. (2014). Web annotation and threaded forum: How did learners use the two environments in an online discussion? *Journal of Information Technology Education: Innovations in Practice*, 13, 69-88. @

---

## << FROM PAGE 4

takes for each student to answer a question, etc.) for each question.

True adaptive learning uses a formative assessment strategy because it provides the system with immediate feedback on how each student is performing. Information is continually gathered by the system on how each student answers the questions to help determine that student's recommended path. At any point, students are able to revise and/or practice learning bits in order to improve their grades.

Even though there has been a considerable learning curve related to the use of this product, faculty

feel that the advantages outweigh the challenges. We've hired course builders to provide the content creation while faculty provide valuable input as the subject matter experts. Plus, open educational resources (OER) such as Openstax College now offer introductory courses that have already been developed using the Realizeit platform, which may entice other UCF faculty to use the platform. We plan to continue to work with faculty to create courses on this platform in the foreseeable future.

*Kathleen Bastedo is an instructional designer at the University of Central Florida. @*

## NEXT MONTH'S TOPICS

The Benefits of Tweeting in an Online Course

Digital Content Curation

Incorporating Pinterest into Your Teaching

What Influences Student Discussion Participation?

The Why and Hows of ePortfolios

How to Create Interactive Self-Checks For Students

## The Role of Questions in Online Teaching

By John Orlando

One of the most common mistakes I see among online faculty is to misuse questions under the guise of teaching by “Socratic dialogue.” Faculty will drop comments such as “Why did the author take this position?” into the margins of a student’s assignment thinking that it will get the student to contemplate it. But the student is not clear as to how to interpret the comment. Does the instructor expect the student to answer the question? If so, then where is the student to answer, since the assignment is already done? Maybe the student’s work is so interesting that it has raised a question in the instructor’s mind about the issue, and the instructor is just expressing it? In this case the question does not invite an answer.

Often faculty use questions as comments to point out an oversight in a student’s work. The question “Why did the author take this position?” is really a statement meant to tell the student that he or she should have covered the issue. But the student may not be able to tell whether it is a question or a statement posed as a question, and so misses the whole point.

Faculty often ask questions fishing for a particular answer that leave students playing a game of “read the instructor’s mind.” Because students don’t want to get it wrong in front of their peers, they just defer to that student who always seems to answer the instructor’s questions. After all, why try to answer if the right answer will just come out one way or another?

Socratic dialogue was never designed for an asynchronous environment because Socrates asked questions with the expecta-

tion of getting an immediate answer. He would then reply to the answer, leading to a back-and-forth inquiry into an issue. In this way Socrates knew how the student interpreted the question, and could lead the discussion based on the student’s thinking. The concept of a written dialogue would make no sense to Socrates because a dialogue is fundamentally a live back and forth session.

---

**Genuine questions  
interest students the  
most because they show  
respect for students as  
coinvestigators**

---

Despite the limitations of the asynchronous environment, there is a place for questions in online teaching if the instructor follows a few simple principles:

### Just say it

Socratic dialogue is not “teaching by reading my mind.” Teaching is about producing enlightenment, and often the fastest way to enlightenment is just stating your point. If a batter is missing balls because she is dropping her elbow, a good coach tells her that she is dropping her elbow. Thus, don’t make comments in the form of questions. If you want to tell the student that he or she missed something, then just say it. Now the student can reply with his own clarifying question: “But weren’t we supposed to...?” This provides you with insight into the student’s thinking and what sent him astray. From here you can provide an answer that clarifies what the student should do and

that helps him avoid the same error in the future.

### Questions should be answered

Only ask questions in situations where students can answer. You don’t know how a student interprets a question, or even if the student tried to answer it, when you drop it on an assignment that does not require response. If you want the student to actually reflect on the question, then you should ask the student to resubmit the assignment with the question answered, or perhaps answer it in the next assignment. But either way, questions should be asked in situations where you can get an answer and respond to it.

Of course, discussion is a more suitable vehicle for asking questions. But make sure that they are not just “final thoughts” or “wrap up” posts that do not invite response. Ask questions with the intension of getting answers.

### Ask genuine questions

The best questions are genuine questions—the ones where we are puzzled about something and looking for an answer. We have a variety of questions about the ideas and authors that our courses study, but we often do not express them to students because we do not want to appear to not have an answer about something in our field.

But genuine questions interest students the most because they show respect for students as coinvestigators. Maybe something in an author’s work has always puzzled you. In that case, state why you are puzzled and ask what the students think. Asking students questions about things that genuinely interest you starts a much richer dialogue with your students than you might have thought possible. @