Promoting Critical Thinking through Online Discussions:
Developing Questions and Managing Conversations
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(Please note that these materials were originally prepared by Christine Harrington & Maya Aloni
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Guiding Questions and Rubric for Creating Online Discussion Questions

Sample Discussion Prompts:
1. Do you think infant television programming is effective? Why or why not?
2. Read the 2 attached research articles on infant and children television programming. Describe one or two of the findings and make connections to the concepts in the text. Use your knowledge of developmental psychology to explain why the results were different for infants versus preschoolers.

	Not really	Somewhat	Definitely
Does this question directly relate to course learning outcomes?			
Do students have the background knowledge needed to answer this question?			
Can the question lead to integration of many theories/concepts?			
Does this question require students to reference the text and/or other resources?			
Will students need to explore outside resources to answer this question?			
Is there more than one answer to the question?			
Will this question invite the sharing of different perspectives?			
Is there room for further contribution if the first responder thoroughly answers the question?			

When and How should the Professor Intervene?

Question Prompt:

Let's have a debate! Choose one of these positions for your post: Are people's first impressions accurate? Are people good judges of each other?

Yes! - Let's pretend that you are a prosecutor in a trial and you want to argue that you can tell a lot about people based on the first couple of minutes of interacting with them. You are going to argue that it is possible to judge a book by its cover. Because you are a good lawyer you are going to provide evidence from the textbook with research which supports your claims. You can also provide examples from outside sources.

No! You want to argue that people are not good at judging others. In fact, people are actually really bad at judging others! Provide evidence from the textbook or outside sources to support your claims.

Sample Discussion

I do not believe that the general population is good at judging others based on first impressions. Many people act better than they usually are when meeting people for the first time. For example, when going on a job interview or on a first date, you are always told to be on your best behavior, act appropriately and to try to impress the other person. Also, as we learned, there are micro-expressions which normal people are not able to detect. The micro-expressions can tell us if people are lying but as we learned most people don't pick up on them and training is needed.

I agree! I do not think the general population is good at judging others when it comes to first impressions. Nowadays, everything is very competitive, and people tend to be a lot more judgmental - which usually leads to others exaggerating their personalities in efforts of succeeding or pleasing.

I do not agree, I think when a person has a gut feeling it is most likely to be true. They get physical, mental, and verbal cues that they may not be able to be verbalized. I am not saying that it is usable in court, but the micro-expressions will definitely help us at a gut level even if we cannot explain why we think what we do.

I do not believe that people are good judges of each other at all. For example, we could be biased by perceptual salience. Perceptual salience is when elements that capture our attention are more likely to be seen as potential causes, so things that stand out to us will more likely catch our attention and have more weight in the way that we perceive things.

I do not believe that people are good judges of each other at all. Just by a first impression it is so hard to tell what someone is really like. You may get a first impression of someone at a party, in a store, or through some other event. For example if it's at a party and a person there is so drunk they can't even manage to walk straight and they're being rude, pushing people, they're basically just downright trashed. You may think wow this person is an idiot, they don't know how to handle their alcohol, and they are just ruining the party because they don't know how to act appropriately. This is an example of internal attribution because you think this is how the person acts on a daily basis. You probably think they're really rude when they are sober too. Turns out they are actually the nicest person and they're friends with everyone on campus

I agree! I have a friend that gets pretty rude when she is drunk but when she is sober she is the nicest person.

Online Conversations

Online conversations foster learning by giving an opportunity to dive deeper into the course content. It will also give you a chance to "see" what others think and to provide and receive feedback from one another. This will help you achieve the course learning outcomes.

Before You Post

- Actively read/view (and take notes!) the material on the topic (textbook; Power Point; outside resources, etc.). You will need this background information to make significant contributions.
- Ask questions as needed regarding the background information or the task.
- Create a brief outline of what you want to say before you start typing out your response.
- Review what others have already contributed.

Tips for Contributing

- Participate early so others are able to read and respond to your contribution.
- Be sure to respond directly to the prompt/question.
- When stating an opinion, back it up with theory and research. Citations from the book and outside resources are strongly recommended. Use APA style for in-text citations and include the entire reference all sources with the exception of our textbook.
- Organize your response so it is easy for the reader to follow. Use bold, larger font, highlighting, and so forth to bring attention to key points.
- Add to what others have already said- remember it's a conversation not an individual assignment on the topic. No one wants to read the same thing over and over.
- Use writing skills that you would use in a research paper and proofread your work before you submit it. (Suggestion- write your response in a Word document and then copy and paste it so you don't lose your work if there is an internet connection problem)

Feedback to Peers

- The purpose of responding to peers is to further the conversation, helping all members of the class to explore the content more deeply and achieve the course learning outcomes. Respond to at least 2 peers for each message board.
- Responses should add to, clarify, or constructively challenge. They should also be specific in nature. You can respond to questions posed by me or any member of our class not just ones that are specific to your post.
- Here are some examples of questions (based on the work of Paul ,1990; and Strang, 2011) you might ask one another:

Learning Purpose	Socratic Questions
Clarifying Explanations	What do you mean by….? Provide an additional example of…. How does this compare and/or contrast to….? What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of… ?
Questioning Assumptions	What other explanations might account for this? What are the assumptions behind this statement?
Exploring Additional Evidence	How can we find out more about this topic? How does this connect to the concepts we've discussed previously? What additional evidence can you find to support or refute this idea?
Multiple Perspectives	What would someone who disagrees say? What are the cultural implications?
Real World Implications	What are potential consequences or implications of this? Provide a real world example of….
Self-Reflective Processes	Why should this issue matter? What is the importance of learning about this issue? What other questions do you now want to explore?

The Professor's Role

- You can expect that I will be reading ALL posts but I will not be responding to each post individually. Instead, I will be sharing information, making comments and asking questions that are directed at the class rather than individuals.
- At the "end" of each conversation, I will be posting a summary of the conversation.
- Using the provided rubric, I will be entering grades for your message board contributions at mid-semester and then again at the end of the semester.