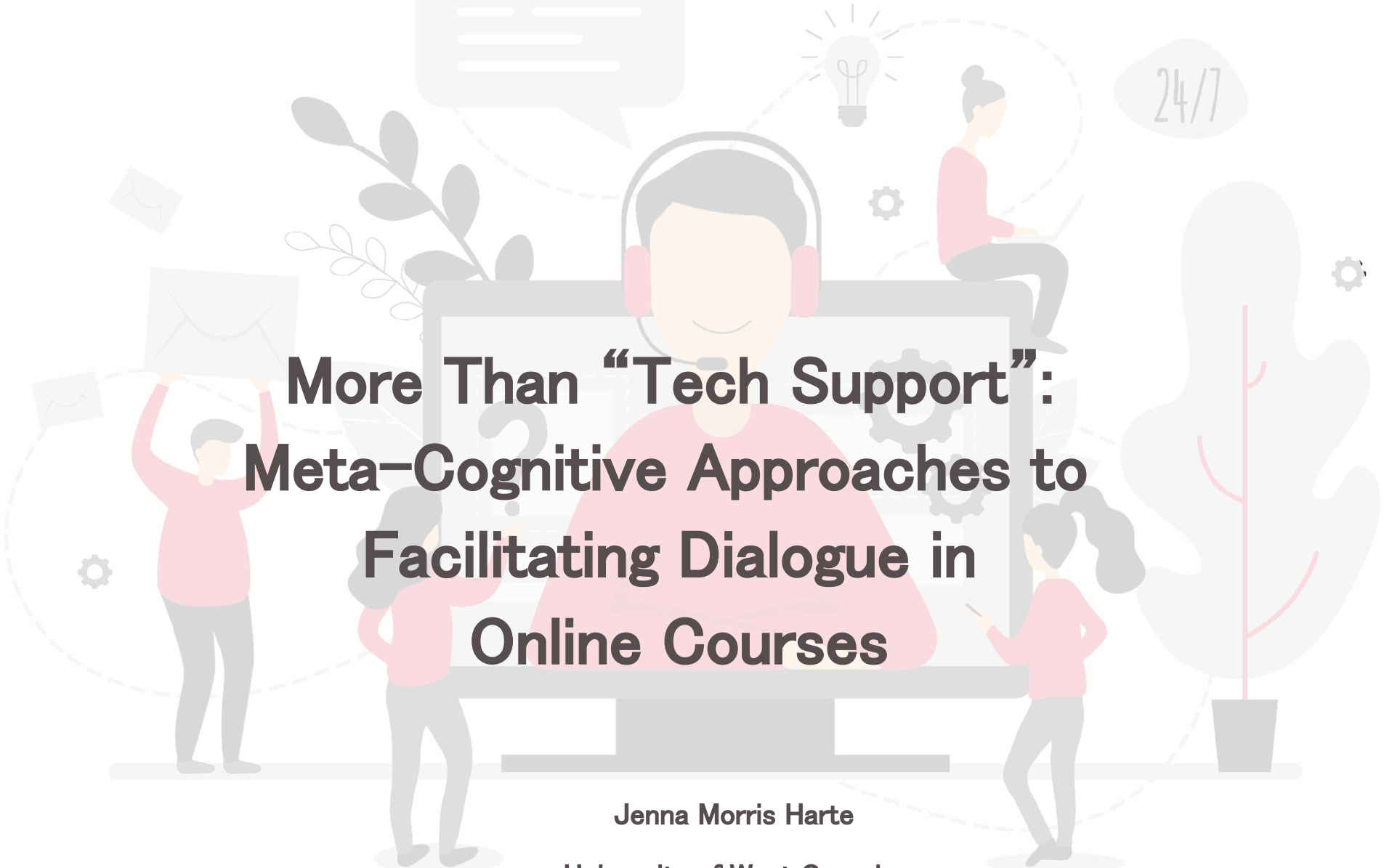




More Than “Tech Support”: Meta-Cognitive Approaches to Facilitating Dialogue in Online Courses

Jenna Morris Harte

University of West Georgia

Innovations in Pedagogy



Pandemic Pedagogy

Recent global events have required many of use to make use of our institutional Learning Management System (LMS) to teach our courses online.

In doing so, we must recognize that we are no longer teaching *just* our disciplines; in preparing content for online platforms, we are also accommodating students to new, online technologies.

Tech Support

Miles Kimball, technical writing scholar, points out that “technical writing accommodates users to technology.” We must consider that, in addition to teaching composition, we are also “accommodating” students to new, online technologies.



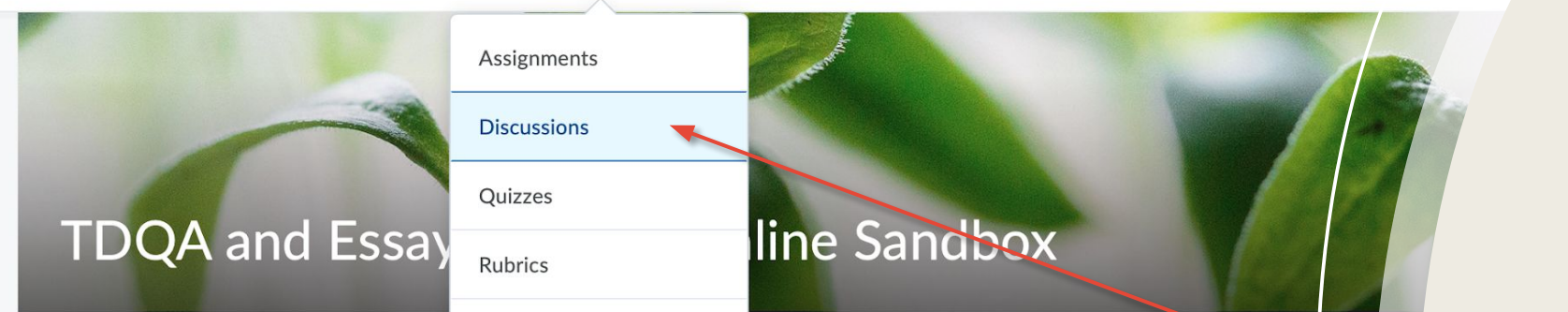
Instructors ought to provide online instruction that supports a students’ use of technology, bolstering a students’ ability to intuitively utilize software and metacognitively approach the genre of online conversations.

Digital Conversations

In an LMS based class, Discussion Board tasks generally take place of a live classroom setting, but face-to-face engagement can be difficult to replicate virtually.

To do this work successfully, we must first make sure that we ourselves are confident with making discussion boards that are visible and accessible to students.





Course Updates

✉ 10 New Emails

Calendar ▾

Sunday, October 4, 2020 ▶

Upcoming events ▼

There are no events to display. [Create an event.](#)

Welcome to Fall 2020 English 1101! ▾

Posted Jun 25, 2020 2:53 PM

Folks,

Welcome to English 1101 in Fall semester 2020 with Professor Harte.

Take a look around and see the features of the course. You'll see our syllabus along with content modules. Our first assignments are listed below.

- Unit 1 - Assessment 1.1
- Unit 1 - Discussion 1.2

You'll need to submit these prior to Friday, August 15 at noon in order to be considered "present" for roster verification.

Please let me know if you have any questions about our course; the best method to contact

Locating Discussions

In most LMS classes, you can find the Discussions linked under "Assessments."

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL `westga.view.usg.edu`. The page header includes a home icon, the CourseDen logo, and the course title "TDQA and Essay Building Online Sandbox". Navigation links include "Course Home", "Content", "Daily Login", "Assessments", "Communication", "Grades", "Resources / Tutoring", and "Course A". The main section is titled "Discussions" and has tabs for "Discussions List", "Subscriptions", "Group and Section Restrictions", and "Statistics". A "New" button with a dropdown arrow is visible, and its menu is open, showing "New Forum" and "New Topic". A red arrow points to the "New Forum" option. Below the menu, a message states: "You don't have any discussion topics available to post to. First create a forum by clicking New > Forum and then add topics by clicking New > Topic."

Creating a Forum

Start by creating a “Discussion Forum,” which is a place where you can house multiple Discussion Topics. Think about an online Forum in the same way as you might think about a “Unit” for an in-person course.

Creating a Topic

After titling the forum, click "Save and Add Topic"

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL `westga.view.usg.edu`. The page is titled "New Forum" and is part of a course named "TDQA and Essay Building Online Sandbox". The user is logged in as Jenna Ha.

The "New Forum" page has two tabs: "Properties" (selected) and "Restrictions". Under the "Properties" tab, the "New Forum Details" section is visible. It includes a "Title *" field with the text "Unit 1: Welcome to English 1101!". Below the title field is a checkbox labeled "Create a new topic in this forum with the same title" with a help icon. The "Description" field is empty and has a rich text editor toolbar above it. The toolbar includes icons for video, image, link, paragraph, bold, italic, underline, bulleted list, numbered list, font family, font size, background color, and table. At the bottom of the page, there are four buttons: "Save and Close", "Save and Add Topic", "Save", and "Cancel". A red arrow points from the text "Save and Add Topic" to the "Save and Add Topic" button.

New Topic

Properties

Restrictions

Assessment

Objectives

New Topic Details

Forum *

Unit 1: Welcome to English 1101! ▾

[\[New Forum\]](#) ?

Title *

Discussion 1.1: Introductions

Description

   ▾ Paragraph ▾ **B** *I* U ▾    ▾ Font Family ▾ Fo

For this discussion post, you will make an original post and respond to two classmates. The purpose of this is to share your thoughts with your classmates, and it helps me get to know you as well! This is a pass/fail assignment.

1) If you haven't already, watch my About Me video and view my Prezi. (You may have to create a Prezi account to view it.)

Options

☐ Allow anonymous posts ?

☐ A moderator must approve individual posts before they display in the topic ?

Save and Close

Save and New

Save

Cancel ?

Creating Discussion Content

Here, you'll title the discussion and also write out the description of the assignment for your students. After clicking "Save and Close," the discussion Forum and Topic will be visible for you and your students.

Course Home Content Daily Login Assessments Communication Grades Resources / Tutoring

Edit Announcement - Welcome to Fall 2020 English 1101

General

Headline *

Welcome to Fall 2020 English 1101!

Content *

Welcome to English 1101 in Fall semester 2020 with Professor Harte.

Take a look around and see the features of the course. You'll see our syllabus and schedule, along with content more below.

- Unit 1 - Discussion 1.1: Introductions

You'll need to submit these prior to Friday, October 9th at 11:59 PM in order to be considered "present" for roster.

Please let me know if you have any questions about our course; the best method to contact me is through our online @westga.edu account. Good luck with the course!

☐ Major edit - send a notification and restore it for those who dismissed it

Availability

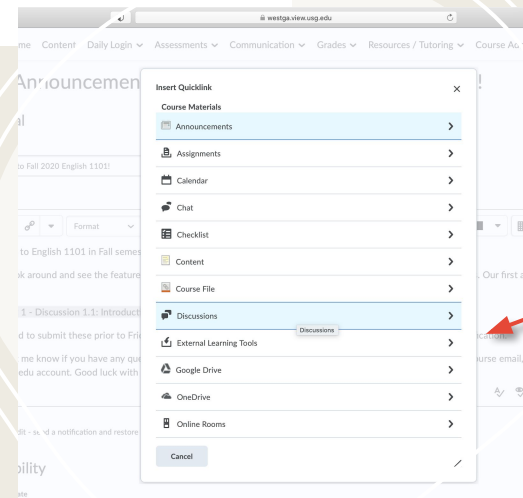
Update Cancel

Linking Discussion Boards to the Class Home Page

Students often have a difficult time finding the discussion post they need to complete for the week; I always create an announcement on the homepage of my course and link the discussion board directly there, so it's the first thing students see.

First, highlight the text you want to link, and click the "Insert QuickLink" icon, which will produce a pop-up screen of your course Content.

Select the appropriate Discussion.



Homepage

Your homepage will now welcome students to complete the appropriate assignment as soon as they access your course.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a Blackboard course homepage. The browser's address bar shows 'blackboard.vccet.edu'. The page features a header banner with a green plant image and the text 'TDQA and Essay Building Online Sandbox'. Below the banner, there are several sections: 'Course Updates' with a '10 New Emails' notification, a 'Calendar' section showing 'Sunday, October 4, 2020' and an 'Upcoming events' table, and a 'Get Help' section. On the right side, there is an 'Announcements' section titled 'Welcome to Fall 2020 English 1101!' with a close button (X). The announcement text includes a welcome message from Professor Harte, a list of course features, and a link to 'Unit 1 - Discussion 1.1: Introductions'. A red arrow points from the text on the left to this link. The announcement also includes a submission deadline and contact information for Professor Harte.

Course Updates
10 New Emails

Calendar

Sunday, October 4, 2020

Upcoming events

OCT 16	11:59 PM	Discussion 1.1: Introductions - Availability Ends
--------	----------	---

Get Help

Announcements

Welcome to Fall 2020 English 1101!

Posted Jun 25, 2020 1:11 PM

Folks,

Welcome to English 1101 in Fall semester 2020 with Professor Harte.

Take a look around and see the features of the course. You'll see our syllabus and schedule, along with content modules. Our first assignment is listed below.

- [Unit 1 - Discussion 1.1: Introductions](#)

You'll need to submit these prior to Friday, October 9th at 11:59 PM in order to be considered "present" for roster verification.

Please let me know if you have any questions about our course; the best method to contact me is through our online course email, rather than the @westga.edu account. Good luck with the course!

- Harte

[Show All Announcements](#)



Writing Good Instructions

Now that we have discussed the mechanics of setting up the Discussion Post itself, and making it accessible to students, we now must consider the content of these posts.

What follows are the instructions for the first discussion post I have my students complete in online classes.

Sample Instructions

Unit 1: Welcome to English 1101! ▾

Topic	Threads	Posts	Last Post
<u>Discussion 1.1: Introductions</u> ▾			
 Available until Friday, October 16, 2020 11:59 PM EDT			
For this discussion post, you will make an original post and respond to two classmates. This is a pass/fail assignment.			
1) If you haven't already, watch my About Me video and view my Prezi. (You may have to create a Prezi account to view this, and the account should be free).			
2) Next, please post a short (1-2 minute) YouTube video introduction of yourself OR create a Prezi introduction. You should be able to create a free account to create the Prezi. In your post, you can answer the following questions, or tell us anything else about yourself that you would like for us to know.			
• What's your name? • Where are you from? • What's your (planned) major? • Do you play any sports or musical instruments? • When you were a little kid, what did you want to be when you grew up? Why?			
3) Finally, after posting your introduction, you'll respond to at least two classmates by replying to their individual discussion board thread.			
Try to see what you've got in common. Our classwork operates at its best when we have the opportunity to get to know others in the (virtual) classroom.			

Assumptions

These instructions assume many things at once:

- They assume my students know where my “About Me video” is located
- They assume my students know how to respond to the discussion board
- They assume my students know how to create a YouTube video and/or use Prezi software
- They assume my students will inherently understand why I asked them to complete this specific task.

What I was quick to discover, after assigning this “simple” discussion board task, was that my students needed support to be able to use the technology involved in the task.



For this discussion post, you will make an original post and respond to two classmates. The purpose of this assignment is the familiarize yourself with your classmates, and it helps me get to know you as well! Not only will we get to know each other as you work here, but also you will get experience with communicating in a few specific genres: 1) either a YouTube video or a Prezi and 2) replying in writing to your classmates on a discussion board.

Why is it important to learn either of these things? Well, more classes are being offered online; you are going to be expected to communicate in new ways and with new technologies throughout your college career, and in your work after college. Since English 1101 is a composition course, this is the place where you get to practice acquainting yourself with these new ways of "composing."

Directions:

- 1) If you haven't already, watch my [About Me video](#) and view my [Prezi](#). (content is now linked here)
- 2) Next, click **START A NEW THREAD** below. There, you can post a link to a (1-2 minute) YouTube video introduction of yourself OR create a Prezi introduction. In your post, you can answer the following questions, or tell us anything else about yourself that you would like for us to know.

- What's your name?
- Where are you from?
- What's your (planned) major?
- Do you play any sports or musical instruments?
- When you were a little kid, what did you want to be when you grew up? Why?

Before writing, think about the genre you are choosing. What makes a good YouTube Video? What makes a good Prezi? Consider these sources below if you need technical support in using either of these platforms.

<https://youtube.com/howtomakeanduploadayoutubevideo>

<https://prezi.com/5w17ge2jovyu/how-to-make-a-prezi-presentation/>

- 3) Finally, after posting your introduction, you'll **respond** to at least two classmates by replying to their individual discussion board thread.

Think about the way you respond to your classmates; remember that online discussions take the place of regular face-to-face contact, so consider your tone and the way you approach the response. A good response will refer to a couple of very specific pieces of your classmates YouTube video or Prezi, just to really emphasize that you were considerate enough to view their work and be interested in them as a person.

Instructions Revised

The new instruction—with changes in red—explain the purpose and genre of the writing tasks, and also provide external links to guide students through their work with the technology.

Also of note, I've taken a metacognitive approach in including the supporting links for YouTube and Prezi as each platform is used to explain itself.



Revisions

- 1) Technically describe the process of responding to these forums to students.
- 2) Provide links to additional tech support and examples
- 3) Metacognition: With just a few quick sentences, explain to students why they need to learn these digital conversation skills for the class and beyond.

Conclusion



To more clearly articulate prompts for these forums, we ought to be thinking about how technical writers communicate, with clarity, organization, and user accessibility at the forefront of our written instructions.

Scholars of online teaching note that students are indeed unfamiliar with Discussion Boards, but “when instructors clearly communicate the rationale for using online discussions as a learning tool and the goal of each discussion, students will be more motivated to engage in the dialogue” (Aloni 272).

If we familiarize ourselves with how to use an LMS to our advantage, we can empower students to utilize technology in considering the conventions of an unfamiliar genre.

Works Cited

Aloni, Maya, and Christine Harrington. “Research Based Practices for Improving the Effectiveness of Asynchronous Online Discussion Boards.” *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, vol. 4, no. 4, Dec. 2018.

Kimball, Miles A. “The Golden Age of Technical Communication.” *Journal of Technical Writing & Communication*, vol. 47, no. 3, July 2017.