

**Midterm Reflection on Internship in  
EDUC 766 Instructional Strategies and Assessment Methods**

***The few who didn't follow instructions – Our fault or theirs?***

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## **Activating and Engaging**

### ***Contextual Information***

I am only two weeks into my internship with the students. For the three weeks prior to that, I spent time reviewing/updating the course content with my cooperating instructor looking at it from the perspectives of student and teacher.

The first week of the actual course included readings, introductions to the course topics, and icebreakers for the students to get to know one another. The second week of the course includes the first "real" discussion (activity) for the groups (this class has over 40 students broken down into four groups). The discussion activity/topic instructions for the four groups are identical.

### ***Information about the Event***

Though I am only officially responsible for one group this week (Group 1), I am also reviewing what the other three groups are doing as well. What I want to reflect on is the main activity of the week with my first group.

The first two Group 1 students who posted (on the first day) didn't follow the instructions and have what I consider sub-standard postings. I compared their postings to what the "early birds" in the other three groups did (there were at least two postings per group) and it looks like "my" students missed the mark.

By the second day, two additional Group 1 students posted and followed the instructions. At this point, about 24 students in total have completed their initial postings, and two failed to follow the instructions fully. By the third day, with about 32 initial posts, one additional post failed to meet the instructions. This was a member of another group.

### ***Presenting Issues/Concerns***

When thinking about this, several questions come to mind:

- Why have these three students failed to follow the instructions?
- Were the instructions not clear enough?
- Have they looked at their fellow students' posts to see what they have done?
- Has the instructor/instructional designer failed in some manner?
- Is this a problem of just a few students' comprehension?

### ***Perspectives and Perceptions***

I realize there are those (usually the Type A) who start things off and post early in the week. Then there are others that wait and put things off until the end. I have also

noticed (and experienced) that if some don't quite understand a questions/topic, that they wait for others to post in order to get a better idea. Not all students are comfortable with communicating with an instructor when they do not understand things. Sometimes when they see examples (such as another student's posting) it might make better sense to them.

One reason I am taking this kind of personally is that I did review and edit this activity. For the past 20 or so years my primary job has been one of a technical writer, and I do write/edit a lot of instructions. With all my writing, I keep my target audience in mind for the maximum amount of understanding. I am wondering if I missed something.

## **Exploring and Discovering**

### ***Weigh Priorities***

My thought is that we want to give students every opportunity to succeed. So is this a systemic problem, or just a few isolated cases? Were the activity's instructions written poorly, or just a few did not comprehend them. Were there external factors involved?

I have a couple of ideas of why this may have happened, but no solid proof. With it happening to only three so far, I will need a bit more information as I see how all 40+ students initially responded to this activity. But I felt I needed to do something in the interim so that those students got maximum benefit out of the activity regardless if the underlying cause was from the school-side or student-side.

### ***Search for Patterns***

A pattern I have observed, in classes where I have been an online student, is that many times the initial poster sets the "tone" of the discussion. In this class, I have the advantage of seeing four different groups who cannot see each other. So I can see four different initial postings for the same activity.

I am usually one of the students who posts early (first). I tend to "set the bar high" and not only meet expectations, but do my best to exceed them. I believe to an extent this "motivates" some students who follow me (if they look at my posting prior to doing theirs).

If my observations are accurate, could a marginal first posting cause others to marginally post? In the case of Group 1, the first and second to post were sub-standard, but the third and fourth to post in that group did quite well. However the third person with a sub-standard post (from another group) did it after seven others posted (properly) in that particular group.

### ***Compare/Contrast***

These groups were set up alphabetically and originally consisted of 10 or 11 students. So the backgrounds, education, and experiences of each group are purely random. These groups were not “balanced” in any way.

I believe if this had been a problem with a poorly worded or ambiguous question, I would see a lot more sub-standard postings. Or the instructor would have received questions/feedback from the students. I actually have had a couple of students ask me questions (on other topics) as the intern, rather than the instructor. The instructor let it be known that I was available and had been a former student in that very class. So being a former student puts me at a peer-level, and may alleviate some of the student's fears. However no student asked me about this particular activity.

With the small percentage of students with sub-standard postings for this activity, I believe this is more of an individual problem/misunderstanding and not one of the activity or the way it was written.

### ***Analyze Cause-Effect Relationships***

When I saw that my first two students didn't follow the instructions, my thought was to write these two students behind-the-scenes and gently point out that they are missing part of the activity and suggest they re-post to meet the requirements before the due-date (Wednesday evening). I shared this idea with my cooperating instructor, and she agreed I could do it. Here is the e-mail I sent to the students:

**Subject:** Module 2 Activity 2 Suggestion

Hi Xxxxx,

I am monitoring Group 1 discussions this week and came across your posting for Activity 2.

In the instructions, it states:

"Research at least one resource that defines (and potentially discusses) instructional strategies and post the citation (title, URL, and brief summary) to the discussion forum. If you choose not to use a website, that's fine, but include the citation (title, source, and brief summary)."

I noticed you have a link and a source, but I didn't see a brief summary. I would suggest going back and editing your post with a brief summary for two reasons: 1) To get full credit for the activity; 2) Your group partners can get an

idea of the Instructional Strategy to see if it is one they may want to compare and contrast to without having to go to the source and reading it entirely (they may if it is of interest afterwards).

Bob @ Palatine, IL  
Intern

My two students seemed to take this e-mail well and have updated their postings to reflect what was asked for in the instructions. My cooperating instructor (who I had included as a blind copied to the e-mails) asked me to send a similar e-mail to the one sub-standard poster in the other group.

## **Organizing and Integrating**

### ***Connections***

As I have stated before, I believe in giving students every opportunity to succeed and learn. This has been true no matter what the training/learning environment I have been associated with (corporate, government, academic). The main difference between my previous experience in a face-to-face (f2f) environment compared to my online internship (and eventual online teaching) is one of communication. My experience as an online student and intern shows me there is more communication between students and instructors (student-instructor and student-student) in an online course than in a traditional f2f course.

This increase communication can provide even more opportunities to the students and instructors. In a traditional f2f class, an opportunity to see a student's response to an activity generally is not seen until it is turned-in (many times at the next meeting of the class). An online activity such as the one in Module 2 of this course gives an opportunity for the instructor (intern) to help guide those students prior to the formal due date. Of course that is contingent on the student not waiting until the absolute last minute to post.

Now that is not to say we are to hand-hold or babysit all the students all the time. There are expectations of the students we teach. In the case of adults, especially those with degrees/advanced degrees, it is a higher level.

However if a pattern of a greater percentage of students are not following the instructions, the instructions themselves may need to be examined and rewritten if necessary.

## **Generalizations**

I would say that in the first week or two of an online course, we as instructors can be a bit more lenient with our students and help them get into a “rhythm.” If a few look like they are not getting the instructions, a little prodding or clarification before the due date can go a long way.

I am not saying this should happen throughout the entire course. If one or a few students just don’t seem to get it every week, there are other reasons and those need to be addressed appropriately.

If we as instructors (or instructional designers) see a greater number students “not getting it,” we need to examine the course content and ourselves to see if we may be causing the problem or ambiguity.

## **Applications**

I am noticing that I can apply many of the techniques (e.g., communication skills) I have developed over the years as a technical writer to online teaching. This is not only in the development and delivery of the instruction, but with working with the students. I have had to work with a wide audience (customers, engineers, managers, end-users, etc.) and level of understanding in the various fields I have worked. Communicating and “getting through” is not the same with everyone, and to be successful requires me to adapt to those I am working with.

My students are another audience. And even within the context of being a student, there will be varying degrees of backgrounds and levels of understanding. I believe my adaptability will make me a more effective instructor.

## **Personal Learning**

*People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.*

*- Isaac Asimov*

With that being said, I want to make it clear that I do not know-it-all. However, much of what I have learned and experienced as a f2f instructor does translate into the online world...with some modifications. Some of my training and experience as a technical writer is quite complementary to online teaching as well.

My master’s degree is in adult and higher education. This certificate program, and the one I completed in Instructional Design, not only have expanded my knowledge in those subject areas, but have introduced me to other adult learners who are in education (higher education, K-12, corporate trainers, instructional designers, etc.). Sharing their experiences, successes and failures, can help to make me a more effective instructor.