

# USING BLOGS IN ONLINE LEARNING COURSES

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**CAHEA 2016 Conference**

**Dr. Lisa Stewart**



**WELCOME**

# Concurrent Session Objectives

- How to utilize blogs in online learning
- How to engage students in completing the reading assignment
- Review comparisons of discussion forums vs a blog
- Review students comments

# Concurrent Session Question for Attendees

**What methods do you use in your online course to engage students in active learning?**

**Begin describing my experience  
with using discussion forums!**

# Discussion Forum Guidelines

- Threaded discussion represents the facilitation portion of a traditional classroom.
- The instructor will ask a profound question drawn from the weekly reading.
- Students respond with an initial response by submitting a posting (between 150 - 200 words) that answers the question(s).
- Initial post should reference a theory or concept supported in the reading assignment for the week. Student may include a practical real-life experience, if applicable.
- End the initial posts with a leading question for a classmate to address.

# Discussion Forum Guidelines

- Provide a response to the leading question for two classmates (between 150 - 200 words).
- Responses to classmates must begin by naming the individual to whose post you are responding, along with one sentence that summarizes his/her point. This way, a person reading your post will understand to whom you are responding.
- All postings should demonstrate critical thinking by identifying the relevance and importance of the topic.
- All postings should include the reference source at the end of the post.

# Grading Discussion Forum

- All students must submit a post (a written response) a minimum of three times that is between 150 – 200 words. **(Initial post and a response to 2 classmates)**
- Each post must demonstrate critical thinking by identifying the relevance and importance of the topic, include support from the readings, or outside material. May also include workplace experience.
- Each post must conclude with a leading question that prompts another thread and include reference source
- Meet the discussion forum guidelines
- Students must submit initial postings and response postings by requested deadlines.

# Concurrent Session Question for Attendees

**Does anyone have different guidelines or grading requirements for discussion forums?**

# Discussion Question Instructions

After you complete the reading assignment you should read and respond to the weekly discussion forum question(s). In addition to the discussion forum guidelines remember, your responses should be well written, demonstrate critical thinking by identifying the relevance and importance of the topic, have between 150-200 words or more, and include material from the textbook to support your comments. You should also end your response with a leading question, which will be answered by one of your classmates. Remember to properly cite the source of comments from the textbook, or other sources, using APA in-text citations. Read and reply with your initial response by Thursday (day 4) and to the leading questions for two classmates by Saturday (day 6).

# Discussion Question Example

## Discussion Question(s):

1. Why should you begin a case analysis with a financial analysis?
2. When are other approaches appropriate?

# Example of Student's Initial Response

- 1. Why should you begin a case analysis with a financial analysis?** Because it helps identify all the strength and the weakness of the company. It also review the historical income statements and balance sheet and compare historical statements over time with calculate changes that occur in individual categories form year to year. This is also a time that you adjust for inflation and determine the changes as a percentage.
- 2. When are other approaches appropriate?** When there are problems to identify or want to consider other approaches such as measuring alternatives against key decision criteria or comparing financial ratio data from different years.

**Leading Question:** When was the last time you reviewed your company statements to see what you can come up with?

# What was Missing from the Response?

- Theory reference or concept supported in the reading assignment for the week
- Only 86 words; requirement was between 150-200
- Demonstration of critical thinking; merely answered the question
- No reference source

## Example of Student's Response to Classmate

**When researching financial statements, what are some of the most important financial ratios listed?**

One of the important is to make sure that you have the proper information and the right resources and data to be able to gain the information that is needed. Another items is to understand the company financial statements and able to interpreter what they have produced and what the company is heading to. Have you had difficult in reading a financial statements from a company?

**(Missing name, summary, critical thinking, incomplete sentences, vague content, typos, and does not address the question at all)**

# An Idea



- Provide an example of an initial discussion posting for students
- Provide an example of a response to a class mate for students
- They will understand better the expectations

# Initial Response Example Provided to Students

**Dr. Stewart, you asked, “How can procrastination impact your ability with balancing home, work, and school responsibilities”? In the reading assignment, Beale (2007) shared “Procrastination means putting off doing something unpleasant or burdensome until a future time” (p.105).** If you have a tight schedule, like many adult students do, procrastination can make things like going to bed on time, or getting together with friends more attractive. However, when you wake up or return from being with your friends, you still have to face the consequences of the task you have not completed, such as the unfinished laundry or housework. If you don't do your homework you will not make good grades, which will impact your ability to be successful in school. If you procrastinate with completing your assigned duties at work you could get fired. **Procrastination can also have a negative effect on you mentally too.** If you decide to hang out with friends instead of completing a school assignment you might spend time worrying about what you need to do instead of enjoying yourself with your friends. I believe the easiest thing to do is to don't procrastinate.

**Leading question:** What are some of the concepts you learned from the reading assignment that you will implement to avoid procrastination?

**Source:** Beale, A. M. (2007). Success Skills: Strategies for Study and Lifelong Learning. Mason OH: South-Western Cengage Learning

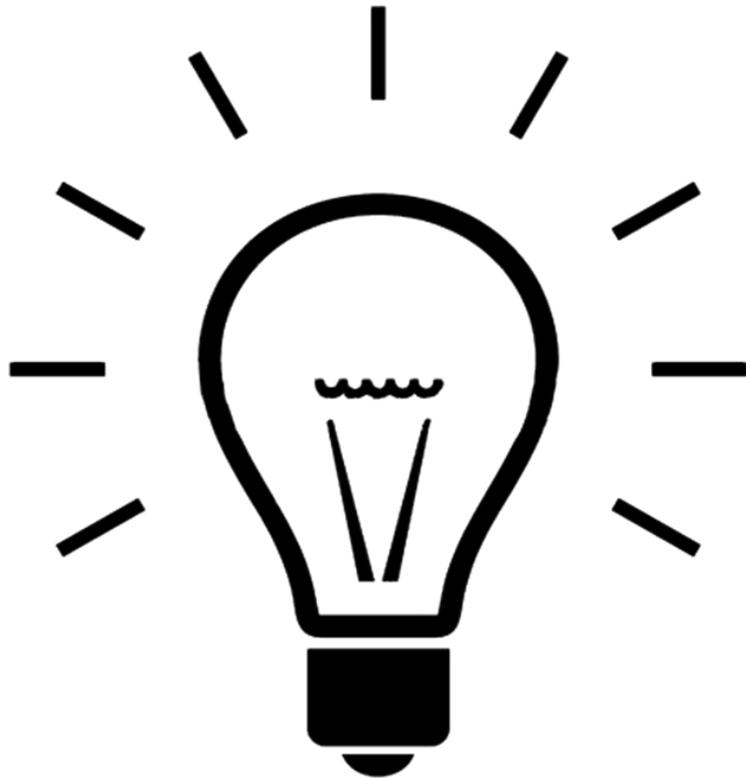
# Response to a classmate Example Provided to Students

Hi Susie,

You asked “Do you procrastinate when it comes to school assignments”? I don’t consider myself a procrastinator. Actually, I’m just the opposite. I become stressed when I have an incomplete project on my plate, including school assignments. When I read my assignments, or have something pending at work I think it about it constantly, until it is completed. Our reading assignment this week described many different ways that you can reduce procrastination. Beale (2007) says, “Start small, realize how miserable you’ll feel until the work is done, tell yourself you are wasting time, be accountable to someone else, add variety, remember how good it feels when you are done, and promise yourself a reward” (p.106). The concept I learned from this week’s reading assignment to help me avoid procrastination is to “plan my work today and every day then work my plan” (Beale, 2007, p. 107). I will also utilize the weekly project planner to help organize my daily tasks, and assignments. Finally, another concept I learned this week, using a learning goal, will help me divide my assignments into doable segments. By working on my homework a little each day allows me to still have time for my family and me. What concepts have you learned this week that you will help you avoid procrastination?

**Reference:** Beale, A.M. (2007). Success skills: Strategies for study and lifelong learning. (3rd ed.) Mason, OH: Cengage.

# Observation of my Idea



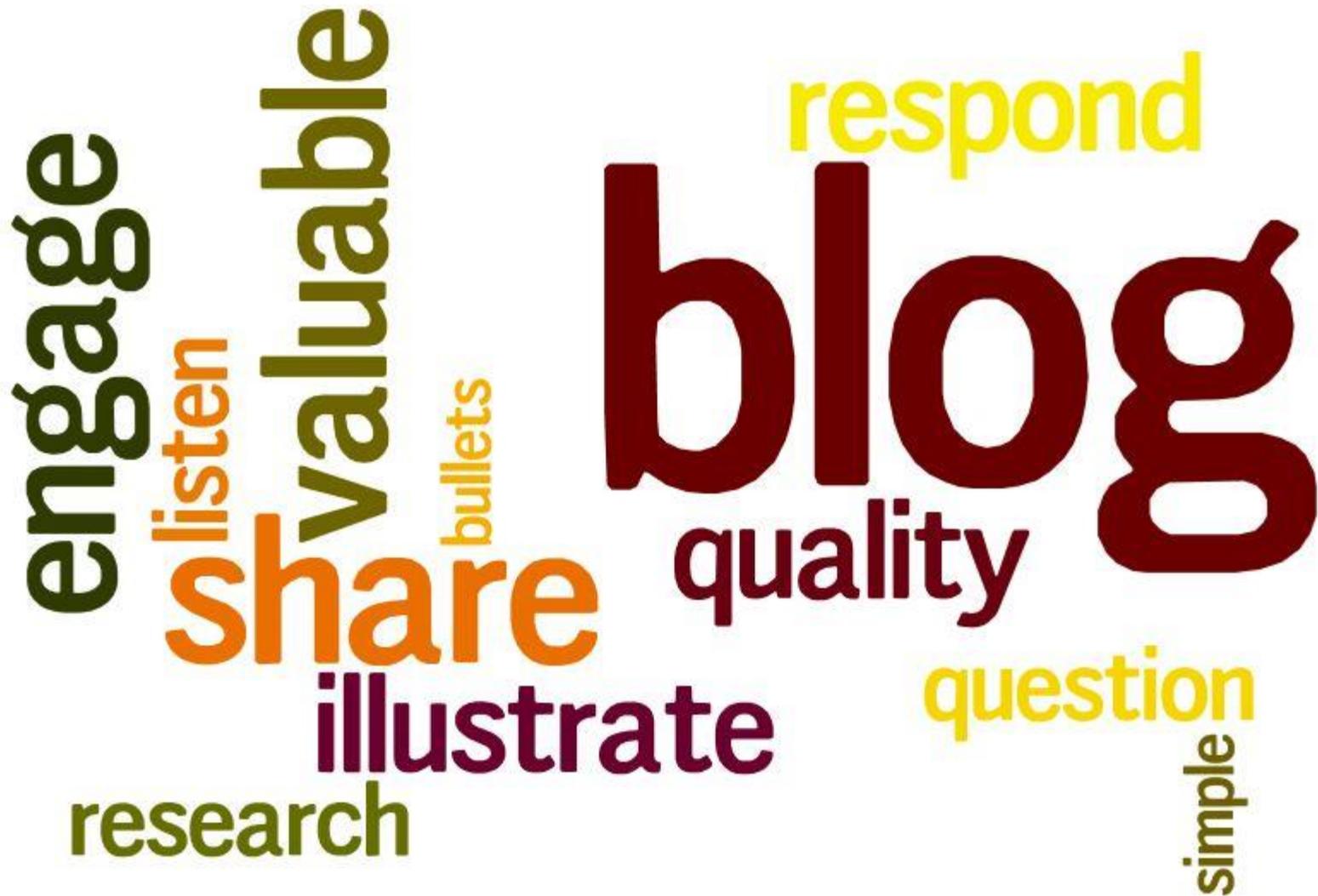
- Observed some improvements in weeks 1 and 2
- By weeks 3, 4, and/or 5 students were back to old habits

# What are Learning Objectives for Student Discussion Forums

- Students complete the reading assignment
- Engage students in active learning
- Students can effectively communicate knowledge of the discussion questions topics

**HOW?**

## Another Idea – Using Blogs





# Concurrent Session Question for Attendees

**How many of you blog, read,  
or follow a blog?**

# Blog Instructions for students

- During this course we will utilize blog postings instead of regular discussion forums.
- Your assignment for week one is to post a blog message discussing **”Why you begin a case analysis with a financial analysis”**.
- In your blog posting you should include the following elements:
  - A title
  - Specific details relevant to the discussion topic above
  - A discussion about the content of a financial analysis
- Your blog posting should be 200-250 words or more.
- It should include in-text citations in APA format.
- A list of your references should be at the end of the post.
- You **do not** need to end with a leading question

# Examples of Student Blog Submission

**Example 1 – Blog submission**

**Example 2- Blog submission highlighted to show student included required elements**

## Why You Begin a Case Analysis with a Financial Analysis (example 1)

So why is it helpful to start a case analysis out with a financial analysis? Well, a financial analysis helps paint a picture of a company's financial condition. Having a solid understanding of the company's financial condition helps build the foundation of the analysis. A financial analysis will give you a good understanding of the organizations current performance. Is the company profitable? Is the company performing above industry trends? According to Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, and Bamford, looking at a company's financial ratio's will help assess the overall situation and pinpoint areas of concern (2015, pg. 335). The financial ratios will help identify strengths and weaknesses of the organization. When comparing to competitors, knowing an company's strengths can help portfolio managers when making investments decisions.

Key financial ratios include liquidity ratios, leverage ratios, profitability ratios, and activity ratios. Liquidity ratios include the current ratio. The current ratio includes a short-term indicator of the company's ability to pay short-term liabilities to short-term assets. The Profitability Ratios look at areas such as net profit and gross profit margins. The net profit shows how much after-tax profits are generated by each dollar of sales (Wheelen, et al. pg. 336). Leverage ratios look at important comparisons such as debt-to-equity ratio. This looks at the percentage of funds provided by creditors versus the funds provided by owners. A high debt ratio could tell us the company has been aggressive in financing its growth with debt.

The financial ratio's help identify developing trends. According to Wheelen, the financial analysis should include scrutinizing income statements and balance sheets, compare historical statements over time, calculate changes that occur in individual categories year over year, and looking at the change as a percentage as well as an absolute amount (et al., 338). Financial statements can be difficult to interpret. The ratios help tell a story and are a good predictor of how the business is trending.

I like to think of the initial question like this. Would you buy a new car without knowing the price, fuel economy, transmission type, contract details, or warranty details? My guess is the answer to that question is typically no. In order to have an understanding of whether or not you are making a good investment, you want to know how that vehicle is going to perform when you drive it off the lot. You want to know how the vehicle compares to similar models. You are going to want to know if your return on your investment is worth while? In similar regard, you are going to do a financial analysis to help you make a decision on whether or not you want to go with the Toyota sedan or Honda coupe.

Wheelen, T. L., Hunger, J. D., Hoffman, A. N., & Bamford, C. E. (2015). *Strategic Management and Business Policy Globalization, Innovation, and Sustainability* (14th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

## Why You Begin a Case Analysis with a Financial Analysis (example 2)

So why is it helpful to start a case analysis out with a financial analysis? Well, a financial analysis helps paint a picture of a company's financial condition. Having a solid understanding of the company's financial condition helps build the foundation of the analysis. A financial analysis will give you a good understanding of the organizations current performance. Is the company profitable? Is the company performing above industry trends? According to Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, and Bamford, looking at a company's financial ratio's will help assess the overall situation and pinpoint areas of concern (2015, pg. 335). The financial ratios will help identify strengths and weaknesses of the organization. When comparing to competitors, knowing an company's strengths can help portfolio managers when making investments decisions.

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# How do you utilize blogs in online learning?

- Replace your discussion forums with a blog assignment
- Replace a written assignment with a blog assignment
- Be Creative!



# How do you engage students in completing the reading assignment?

- **Require** them to write a blog and share information about a specific concept or topic from the reading assignment
- **Ask** students to identify 2-3 concepts from the reading assignment and be prepared to discuss in a blog posting
- **Be clear** in the instructions about what the blog should include



# Comparison of discussion forums vs a blogs

## (From my Perspective)

### Discussion Forums

- Common in most online courses
- No room for creativity
- Same routine requirements
- No motivation to complete accurately as assigned
- Students cannot see the value of this assignment

### Blogs

- Something new/different
- Provides for creativity
- Helps improve writing skills
- Confidence builder
- Empowers students to recognize the value of clarity and what makes for strong and engaging blog post

# Student's comments on course evaluations

- I enjoyed doing the blogs because they were **something different** besides the same old discussion forums.
- Dr. Stewart had us to create blog entries but they were specific and had requirements. It wasn't just **a random blog** that you could submit about your own ideas, you had to do some **research and have some understanding of the topic** in order to communicate with clarity and understanding. **This required us to know the weekly reading material.**
- For the **first time I had to read** and not skim through the reading assignments in order to prepare a blog. I have never written a blog before, but after the first two weeks I prefer writing blogs over the discussion forum format.

# Tips for Using Blogs in Online Learning

- Provide clear guidelines and expectations
- Coach students to take this assignment seriously and professionally
- Encourage them to consider blogging within their profession and/or at work
- Create a blog site for your course and have students post on different topics, thus expanding blogging outside the course room

**Any Questions**



Thank  
You