# Best Practices for Forums

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# Agenda

- **Why use discussion forums (*even in face-to-face classes*)?**

- **Instructor examples and guidelines:**

  - **How do you grade and evaluate student discussions?**

  - **What are good discussion questions?**

  - **How do you prepare your students?**

- **Technical Demonstrations:**

  - **Set up a forum topic in Sakai**

  - **Grade student topic posts**

# Why use discussion forums?

**Even in face-to-face classes?**

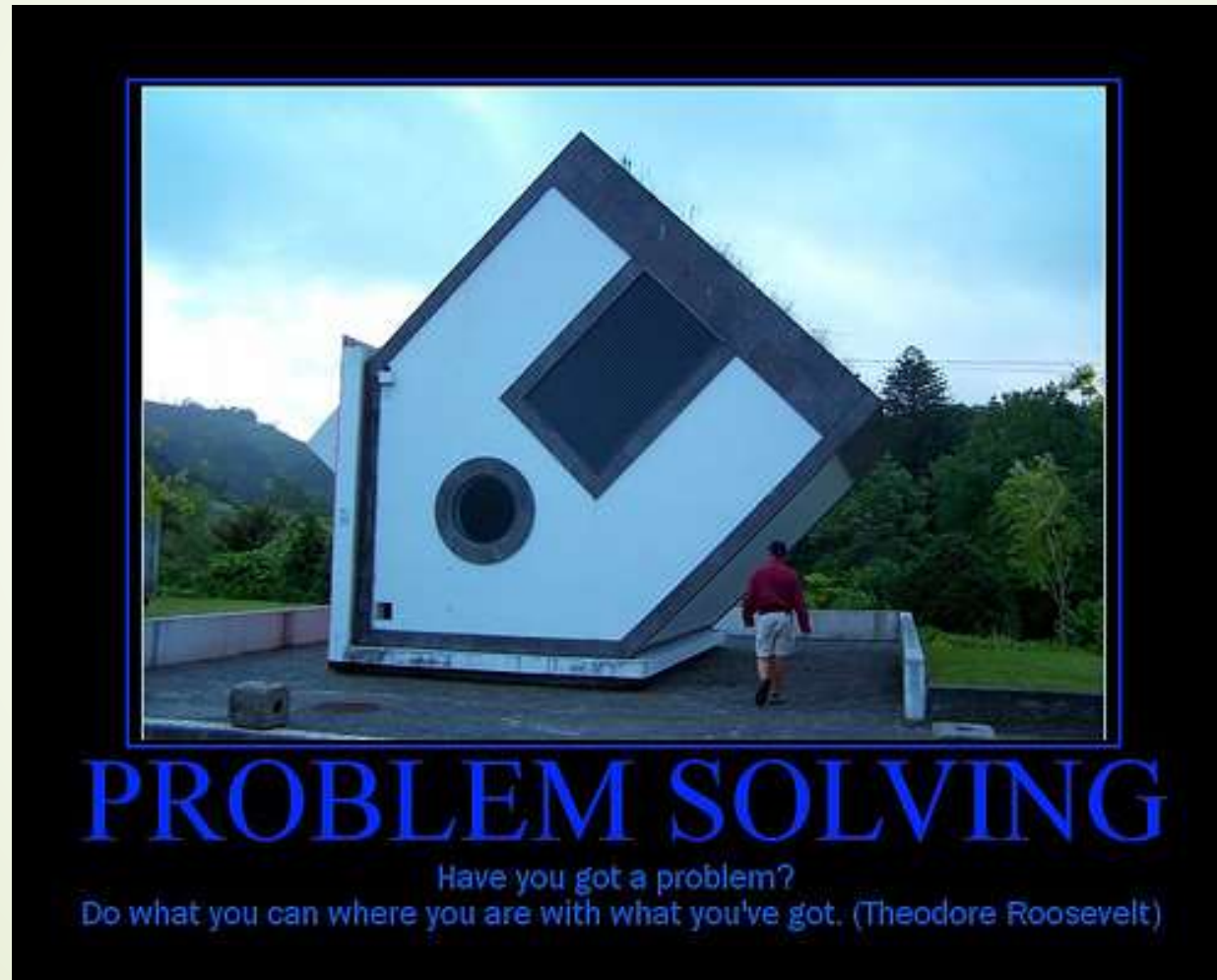# Increase Student Participation

# Promote Student-to-Student Learning

# Practice Different Skills

# Apply Knowledge: Right vs Wrong?

**"** Researchers Nathan and Petrosino (2003) warn that: "Higher education has focused for too long on inculcating and assessing those cognitive skills that are relatively easy to acquire—remembering, understanding, and applying—rather than the arguably more important skills of *analyzing, evaluating, and creating.*" **"**

Present real world problems, with no right or wrong

- **Design Questions**
- **Pose Problems**
- **Present scenarios relating to the real-world**

# Apply Email skills ➔
# Discussion forum posting
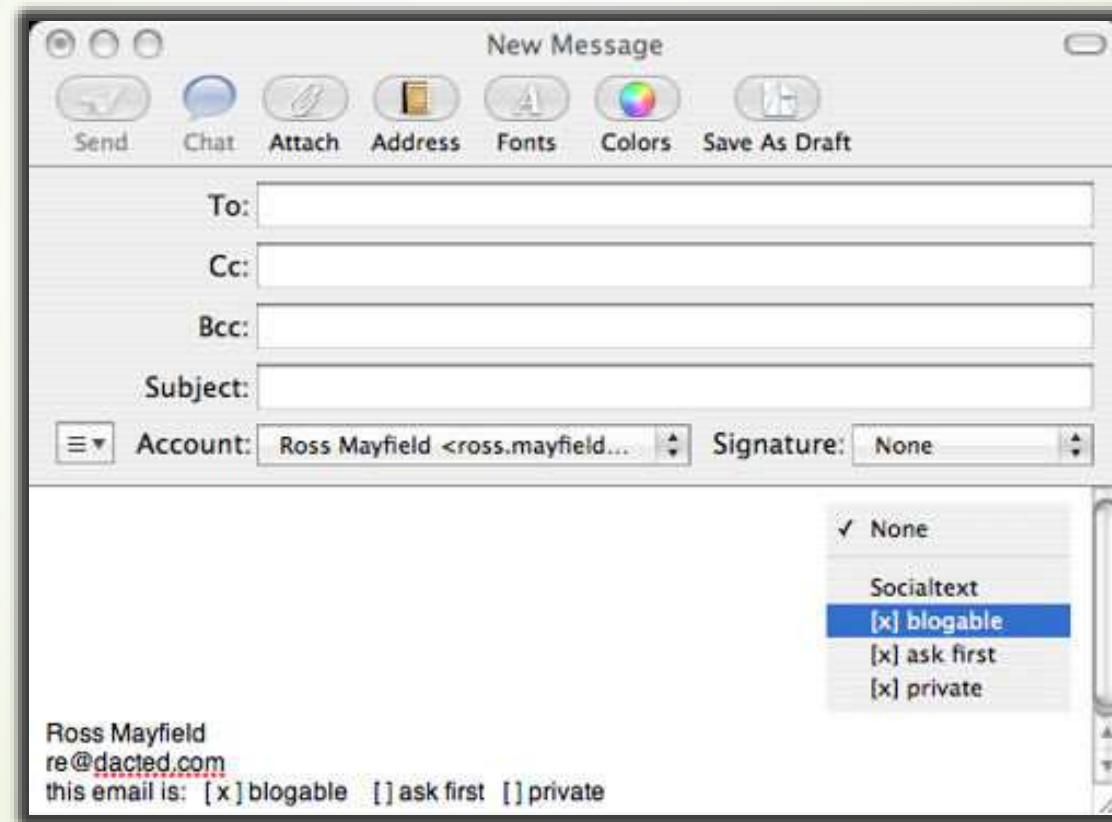
# Instructor examples and guidelines

1) How will you grade and evaluate student discussions?

# Plan how you will evaluate forums

- Student participation depends (in part) on it "counting" toward their grade

- Consider making it a substantial part of the overall grade (25% or more)

- Provide clear, specific info up front about how forum participation is graded

- Also provide guidelines or ground rules for expected forum behavior

# One instructor's grading rubric

**Your discussion board grade will depend on the how well you do the following:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Address all parts of the question thoroughly and accurately and adhere to any instructions provided | **COMPLETENESS & ACCURACY** | 2 pts |
| Express yourself clearly using your own words, with minimal spelling or grammar mistakes | **WRITING & MECHANICS** | 2 pts |
| Include specific, relevant details from readings or other course material and demonstrate an understanding of course material | **EVIDENCE & ANALYSIS** | 2 pts |
| Show original thought by presenting facts and ideas that do not restate what others have said | **INDEPENDENCE OF THOUGHT** | 2 pts |
| Include at least two replies to classmates that extend the conversation by adding substantive information or insights | **INTERACTIVITY** | 2 pts |

# Applying the rubric

10.0

Great work. Your post was cleanly written, included many specific details from the film and the text, and showed a clear understanding of Scientific Management.

8.0

Your post discussed some concepts from the text, but you needed to relate those more directly to the film Modern Times. There were quite a few misspellings and typos. I encourage you to pay careful attention to the questions and to proofread more carefully before posting.

# Example guidelines / ground rules

### HUM-110 (McPhaul)

All responses must be expressed using clear, grammatically correct, professional, and respectful language.

### CTR-120 (Ockert)

**Online and Email Etiquette:** Please show respect for your classmates and instructors in your discussion forum postings/e-mails at all times. **I expect all communication to be on the same professional level you would use in the clinical research business setting.** Do not use slang or text messaging abbreviations, and be sure to proofread for spelling and typographical errors. Frequent errors may cause points to be deducted from your forum grade.

# Instructor examples and guidelines

## 2) What are good discussion questions?

# Writing effective prompts

- Ask yourself: What is most important for students to know and understand?

- Avoid yes/no questions or ones with a factual answer.

- Require students to explain or justify their answers.

- Tell students that they must provide specific details or examples to support their statements or opinions.

# One example (HUM-110)



If you had to choose one concept from the textbook to describe the film *Modern Times*, what would it be?

In a paragraph of 6 to 8 sentences, explain your answer.

Your answer should provide specific examples from the film and relate them to concepts from the textbook.

# Another example (PHI-215)

"…Both your initial posting and your response must include references to the readings that explain why you think the way you do."

# Prompts for different modes of thinking

➡ **Convergent Thinking**

   ➡ Use facts and reasoning to reach a conclusion
*(Why? How?)*

➡ **Divergent Thinking**

   ➡ Project out, generate creative ideas
*(What if? Think of examples of…)*

➡ **Evaluative Thinking**

   ➡ Take a stand and support it
*(Justify. Defend.)*
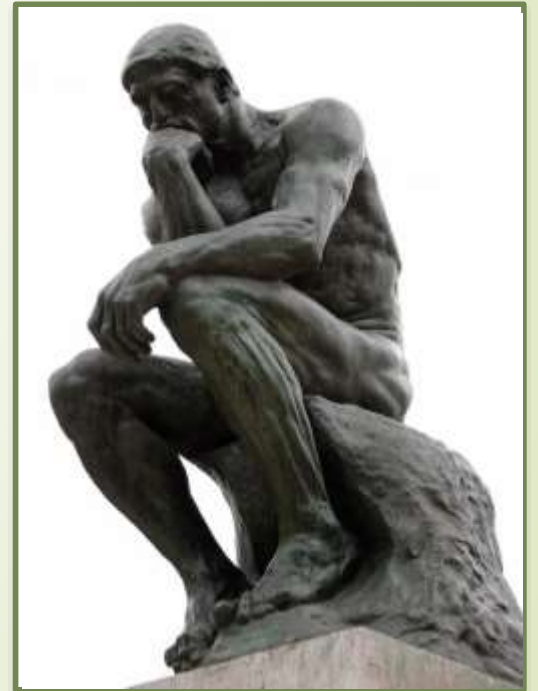
# A Sampling of Forum Questions
## used by Durham Tech Instructors

# Apply course material to students' lives



**ACA-122:**

Which of the students in the video can you relate to? Why?

Describe a strategy that works well for you in balancing your studies with family responsibilities.

What advice would you give to a new student who has to care for family while attending college?

# Apply course material to students' lives

**CIS-110:**

Use the Occupational Outlook Handbook web site to research information about the career you are preparing to enter.

Did you learn anything new about the field? What characteristics listed match with your interests and traits?

What is the current outlook for growth in the field? Is the salary range what you expected?

Do you need to pursue an advanced degree to move up in the field?
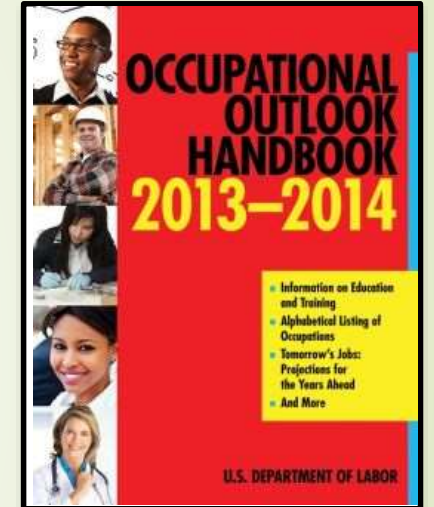
# Relate course material to current events

**REL-110:**

Find a news article that has something to do with one of the world religions we have studied this semester… and **explain the relevance of the article to our course**.

# Research and report back

**ANT-210:**

WITHOUT REPEATING another student's choice, **pick one** primate species, and tell the class three really interesting facts about it.

You may use the web links in the notes for Weeks 3 & 4 (or an equally scholarly web link).

Share specific information that stood out to you as you took notes or looked around these sites. Get us interested in the wonders of the variety of primates in the world. You could focus on something about diet or reproduction or an environmental fact.

# Research and report back

**SPA-111:**

Language teachers often get complaints that what is learned in the classroom is not "real" or not the way the language is actually spoken.

**Search the internet** for a way to say "hello" or "how are you" that is NOT given in the textbook. Is it formal or informal / from a certain region?

Why do you think there may be a disconnect between the Spanish you learn in SPA 111 and what you might hear at a restaurant or a soccer game? In what ways can students work to bridge this gap?

# **Adapt questions from the textbook**

**BUS-153:**

Two weeks ago Maria Shriver delivered the "Shriver Report" to President Obama, which focuses on the pay gap between men and women. (view the report)

If you were an HR manager and an employee came to you expressing concern about pay inequities in your organization, what are some of the first actions you would take? What might be some questions you would ask or consider?

# Explore ethical questions
## (in a technical class)



**BIO-271:**

A couple's decision to conceive a child knowing that both sides of the family carry a gene for a life-threatening disease must be devastating. There are many decisions to be made… whether to be screened themselves, whether to go ahead with a pregnancy knowing the risks, whether to have the fetus screened and if a positive test is identified, what then? We have the technology to screen fertilized eggs and implant only the 'good' eggs. At what point do we say 'enough' and let Mother Nature do her job? Or should we take full advantage of the technology we have developed and avoid bringing babies into the world with inevitable defects?

# A quote as springboard to discussion

**SPA-111:**

"*Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.*"
*– Rita Mae Brown*

What is culture?  Why is it important when learning a language?  Can you think of any examples in English when culture might play a key role in communication?

# **Problem:**
# Students waiting until deadline to post

- Set a mid-week deadline for initial post, and a later deadline for responses
- Offer extra credit to students who post by a certain date
- Don't make the deadline on a Sunday!
- Consider the "two-week forum" idea
  - In first week, students post initial answer
  - In second week, they reply to classmates

# Instructor examples and guidelines

## 3) How do you prepare your students?

# Show and Tell

**Require students use the resources in:**
**Sakai Help for Students**

# First Post: Ice-breaker

# Start on the right foot: Provide Specific Feedback

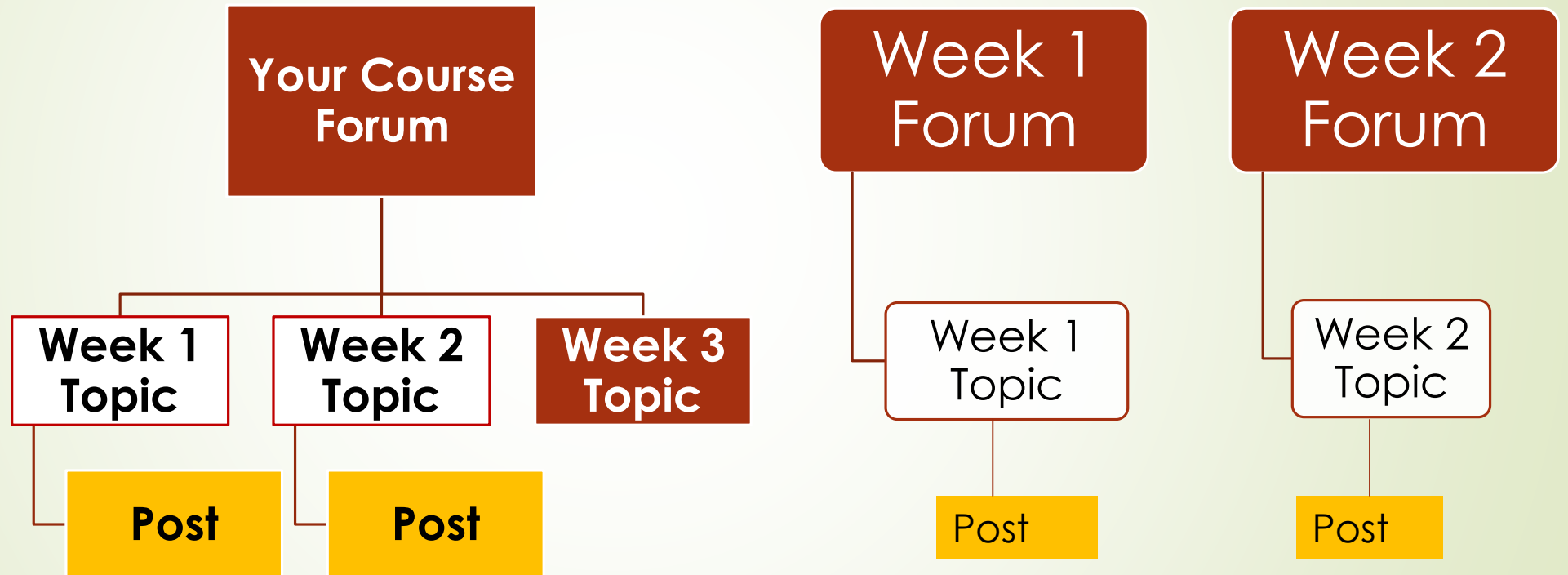- You answered the question, but you need to provide more details.

- Your answer was very general. It's good you're interested in learning more about computers, but you were given a list of different computer topics to choose from. For at least one topic, you were suppose to explain why it interested you.

- For example, if you're interested in blogs, what kind of blog do you want to create ? If you've created a blog, what is it about, and what do you want to learn about blogs now?

# Technical Demonstrations

## 1) Set up a forum topic in Sakai

# One vs Many Forums

# Full vs Short Description

# New Topic Posting feature

**Topic Posting**

☐ Lock Topic (Disable topic postings)

☐ Moderate Topic

☑ Require users to post before reading

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⇄ My Practice Course-1-31: Forums

Start a New Conversation    Display Message Content    🖨
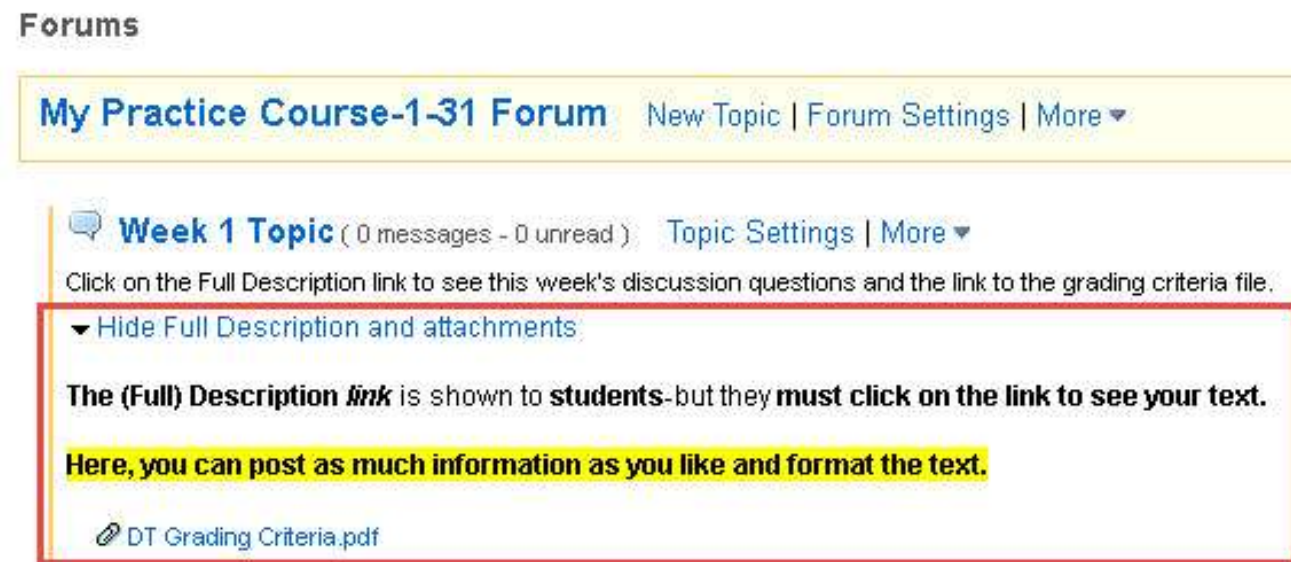
**Forums / My Practice Course-1-31 Forum / Week 1 Topic** 🗨

**Week 1 Topic** ( 0 messages - 0 unread )

Click on the Full Description link to see this week's discussion questions and the link to the grading criteria file.

▸ View Full Description and attachments

🛈 You must post to this topic before you can view any messages

# After Grading: How make posts visible without allowing new posting?

# Technical Demonstrations

## 2) Grade Student Topic Posts

# Resources

- **Lesson Path/Mentor mob: Best Practices for Forums**: A set of helpful links http://www.lessonpaths.com/learn/i/best-practices-for-forums/infographic-checklist-why-arent-your-students-participating-on-the-discussion-board

- **Sakai Help for Students: Communicating with your instructor and classmates in Sakai**: http://courses.durhamtech.edu/wiki/index.php/Sakai_Help_for_Students

- **Sakai Resources for Instructors: Tools, Communication Tools** http://courses.durhamtech.edu/wiki/index.php/Sakai:_Communication_Tools

- Plus: We'll add this PowerPoint and resources to the Instructor Resources area

# References

- *Generating and Facilitating Engaging and Effective Online Discussions* (page 5), from the Teaching Effectiveness Program at the University of Oregon: http://tep.uoregon.edu/technology/blackboard/docs/discussionboard.pdf

- Lombardi, Marilyn M (2007). *EDUCAUSE Authentic Learning for the 21st Century: An Overview.* Retrieved 2/6/14 at: http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eli3009.pdf

- Nathan, M. J., & Petrosino, A. J. (2003). *Expert blind spot among preservice teachers.* American Educational Research Journal. 40(4), 905–928.

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