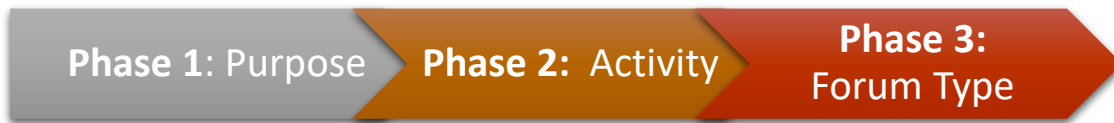


Designing Effective Discussion Forums



Phase 1: Plan the Purpose

Demonstration of Knowledge of key concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Big, main or important ideas•Discussion forums can help deepen learning
Community Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Sense of community helps keep students engaged•Some students may participate in ways they wouldn't in person
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Helps us understand the meaning of our experiences•Can lead to deep learning
Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Is about knowing how to think, not what to think

Choose a Purpose

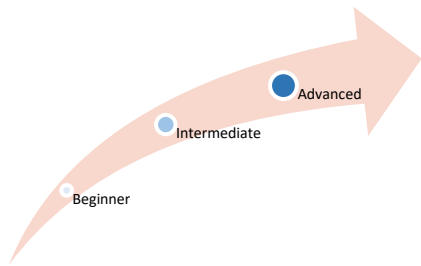
I want students to discuss the concept of war, to be able to discuss each major war, their causes, and their similarities and differences. I want students to analyze the role of propaganda in the nation's responses to each war, and to consider what it would be like to be a soldier and a civilian during those difficult times.

Demonstration of Knowledge of key concepts	
Community Building	
Reflection	
Critical Thinking	

Phase 2: Plan the Activity

Activity Levels

Each forum purpose has three corresponding activities from which to choose. The Key Concept, Community Building and Reflection categories are divided into Beginner Level, Intermediate Level and Advanced Level activities. The Critical Thinking category offers three Advanced Level activities due to the fact that thinking critically requires high level cognitive skills (as shown in the Overview table below).



Beginner Level – at this beginning level the student learns key terms and key concepts. Activities are basic, requiring low level thinking skills such as the ability to identify and classify information.

Intermediate Level – at this intermediate level the student learns to apply and analyze information. Activities require mid-level thinking skills such as the ability perform tasks and identify relationships between concepts.

Advanced Level – at this advanced level the student learns to synthesize information. Activities require high-level thinking skill such as the ability to evaluate and critique information. At this level, independent and original thinking occur.

Table 1. The cognitive processes dimension — categories, cognitive processes (and alternative names)

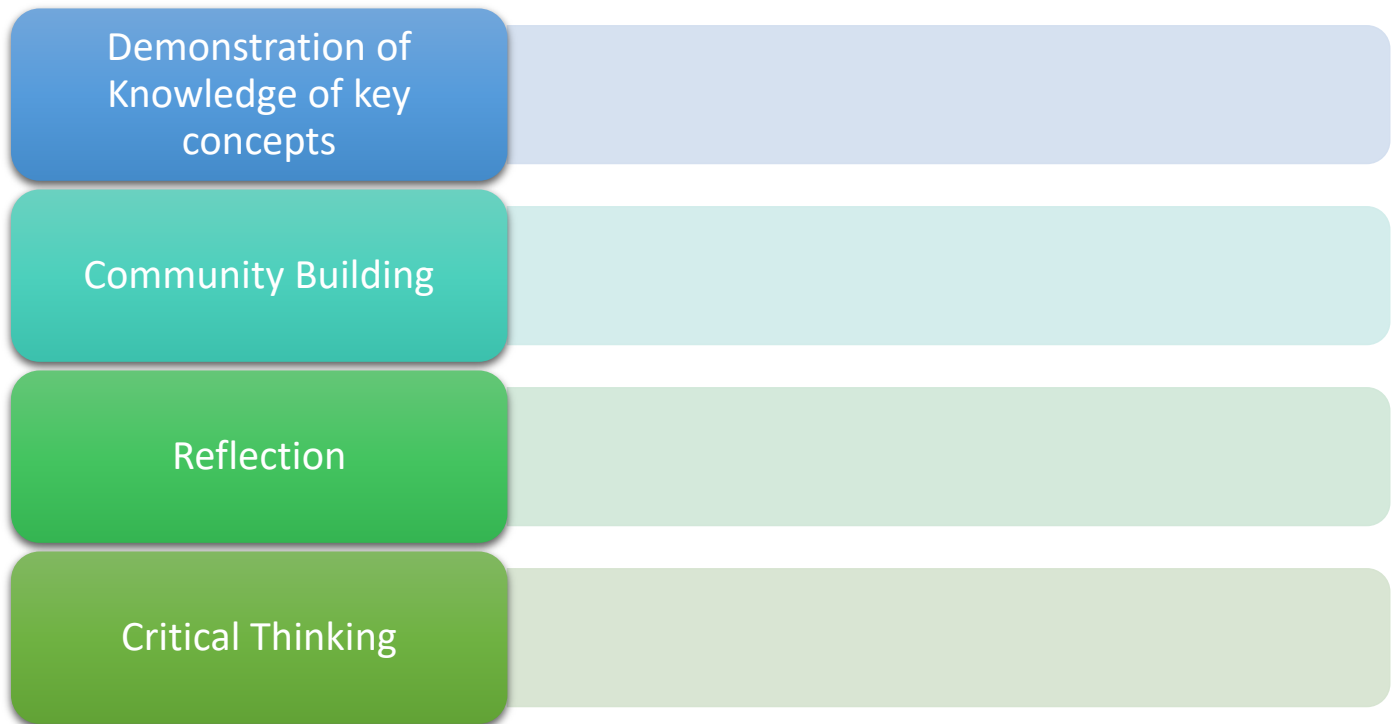
lower order thinking skills → higher order thinking skills					
remember	understand	apply	analyze	evaluate	create
recognizing (identifying)	interpreting (clarifying, paraphrasing, representing, translating)	executing (carrying out)	differentiating (discriminating, distinguishing, focusing, selecting)	checking (coordinating, detecting, monitoring, testing)	generating (hypothesizing)
recalling (retrieving)	exemplifying (illustrating, instantiating)	implementing (using)	organizing (finding coherence, integrating, outlining, parsing, structuring)	critiquing (judging)	planning (designing)
	classifying (categorizing, subsuming)		attributing (deconstructing)		producing (construct)
	summarizing (abstracting, generalizing)				
	inferring (concluding, extrapolating, interpolating, predicting)				
	comparing (contrasting, mapping, matching)				
	explaining (constructing models)				

Forum Purposes and their Activities – Overview

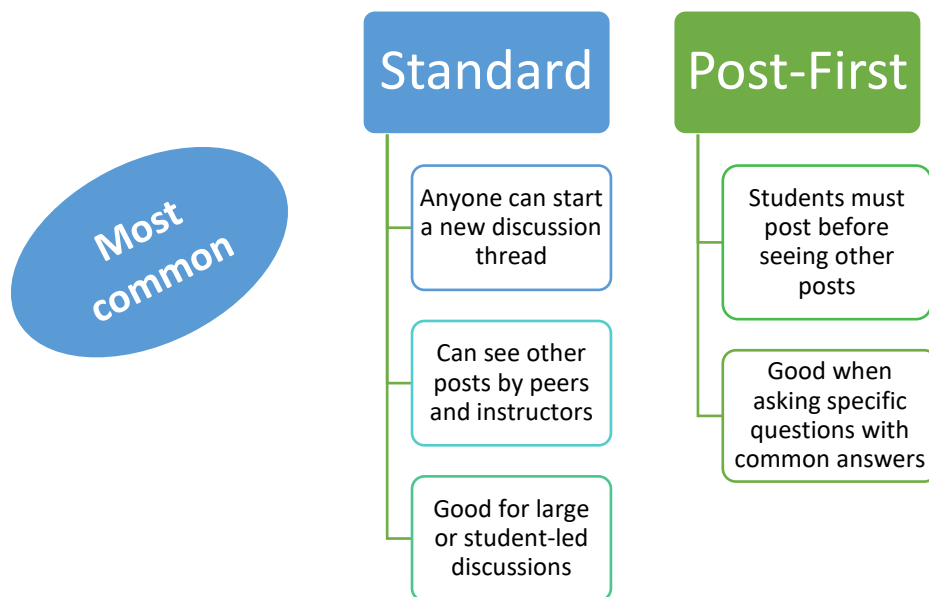
Purpose	Activities	Level of thinking skills needed
Demonstration of knowledge of key concepts	Comprehension Q&A	Beginner
	Research and Share/Virtual Field Trips	Intermediate
	Key concept synthesis	Advanced
Community Building	Ice breakers	Beginner
	Role Play	Intermediate
	Cooperative Debate	Advanced
Reflection	Sentence Stems	Beginner
	Reflective Q&A	Intermediate
	What? / So What?/ Now What?	Advanced
Critical Thinking	Use the forum as a resource for assignments	Advanced
	Force Field Analysis	Advanced
	Open-ended Q&A	Advanced

Choose an Activity

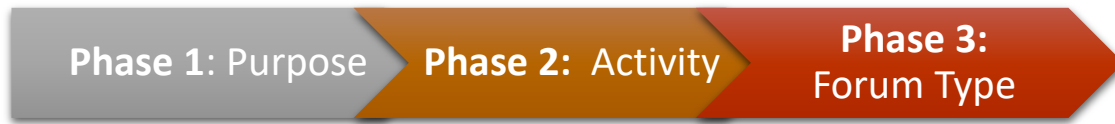
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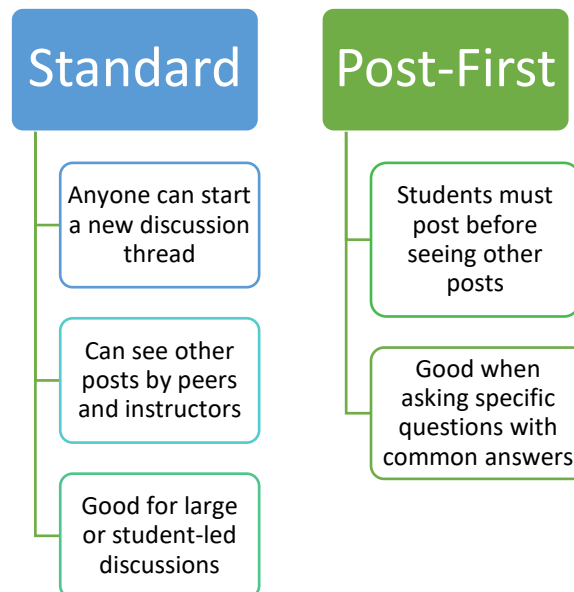
Phase 3: Choose the Forum Type



Bringing it All Together



Purpose	Activities	Level of thinking skills needed
Demonstration of knowledge of key concepts	Comprehension Q&A	Beginner
	Research and Share/Virtual Field Trips	Intermediate
	Key concept synthesis	Advanced
Community Building	Ice breakers	Beginner
	Role Play	Intermediate
	Cooperative Debate	Advanced
Reflection	Sentence Stems	Beginner
	Reflective Q&A	Intermediate
	What? / So What?/ Now What?	Advanced
Critical Thinking	Use the forum as a resource for assignments	Advanced
	Force Field Analysis	Advanced
	Open-ended Q&A	Advanced



See the *Guide to Designing Instructional Discussion Forums* by Chris Gonnella for more details.