



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Using the PMI+Q Method to Promote Critical Thinking in Online Discussion Forums

High school students now entering college are often referred to as digital natives. Digital natives are accustomed to a faster pace and more dynamic experiences than static textbooks can provide (Doll 2012). Consequently, 21st-century classrooms require faculty members to redefine and extend active-learning strategies to online platforms such as discussion forums. One way to make discussion forums engaging and impactful for students is for faculty members to use the PMI+Q Method, an active-learning strategy that promotes critical thinking.

Take a moment to reflect on your own course discussion forums. Are you receiving the comments and questions you desire from your posts? Can you tell when students are fully engaged? Do you look forward to grading discussion forums?

Good discussion forums incorporate Blooms Taxonomy’s higher-order thinking skills: Analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The question for faculty members to ponder is, “How can the assignment I post in the forum provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills?” In my experience, a typical student response in discussion forums is, “I agree with your post,” or, “I like your response.” However, these kinds of responses indicate students are not stretching their minds or using their mental capabilities to critique the course material.

I started a quest to discover and develop discussion forums that are engaging, reflective, and encourage critical thinking, which led me to the PMI+Q Method shown in **Figure 1**. The PMI+Q Method can be used with assigned readings and videos to help

students reflect on what they have read or viewed.

As shown in Figure 1, the “P” represents plus or positive comments made in the assignment. Students write in the *Plus* section all of the instances they think are positive and why they feel those instances are positive. The “M” represents a minus. In the *Minus* section, students write about the negative connotations or biases they find and why they feel those instances are negative. The “I” represents those items students find to be interesting. For example, students often write in the *Interesting* section an instance from the assignment that was surprising, but not necessarily negative or positive. It is important to note that for the first three letters of the method—PMI—students are required to explain why they select certain examples from the assignment. Requiring students to provide complete responses about why they choose their examples helps them develop critical-thinking skills. Finally, the “Q” represents a question. Students provide a question they would like to pose to the discussion forum author. Often, students design very thought-provoking questions.

To participate in the PMI+Q Method, students complete the chart for the assignment and then post their responses to the forum. Students are required to first post their responses in the course’s discussion board before they are allowed to read their peers’ posts. After making their initial individual posts, students then thoughtfully comment and pose questions about their peers’ initial posts and follow-up wherever they feel necessary. To receive credit, I require students to provide substantial comments about their peers’ posts instead of empty statements like, “I agree with your post.” Having students complete the PMI+Q Method before engaging in discussion forums ensures that students have formed well-established opinions and are able to thoughtfully participate with their peers. I also participate in the discussions and enjoy reading the responses.

After implementing the PMI+Q Method in the course discussion forums, I now look forward to grading and commenting on students’ posts to see if students are diving deep into assignments and exhibiting higher-order thinking. A student’s comment on an end-of-the-year course evaluation stated, “I really enjoyed the weekly online discussion posts. The discussion posts were not only interesting, but they allowed me to gain more information about a given topic.”

Conclusion

By using the PMI+Q Method, I can truly tell that students are not only more engaged with the course material, but they have also developed the skills necessary to critically assess different types of text. Building

	PMI+Q Chart
Plus (positive): What did you find positive in the text? Explain why.	
Minus (negative): What did you find negative in the text? Explain why.	
Interesting: Write one point from the text that was interesting. Explain why it was interesting.	
Question: Write one question you have for the author of the text.	

Figure 1. PMI+Q Method

students' critical-thinking skills in any class requires a great deal of effort by faculty members. I am motivated to continue my quest to develop more active online discussion forums not only to keep me more engaged, but more importantly, to also motivate and inspire students as they progress along their learning journeys.

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Work Cited:

Doll, J. (2012). Keeping pace with the 'Digital Natives' in your classroom (p. 1). *Nova.desk.com*