# The Digital Communication Journal:
## Building an Online COMMunity for Student Dialogue

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The digital communication journal assignment challenges students to write and respond to online posts that examine the connections between course concepts and their own academic, personal, and professional experiences.*

## RATIONALE

Many communication instructors are interested in making written assignments more relevant to their students' lives. Rather than tweaking the prompts, however, instructors should tweak the format. The emergence of digital tools has given birth to a generation of students that interact with one another and with the world in very different ways. Instructors can no longer rely on traditional approaches to connect with the "digital generation." Instead, instructors have the opportunity (and responsibility) to align assignments with their students' digital communication behaviors.

Although course syllabi often include traditional writing assignments (e.g., the group project reflection paper), students often complain that these assignments are "abstract" or "uninteresting." Unlike typical written assignments, the digital communication journal assignment offers students a structured opportunity to connect what they are learning in the course with their out-of-class experiences. It

allows students to react and reflect, rather than simply memorize and recall course concepts. Indeed, the digital communication journal assignment provides students with the space to ask themselves, "What am I learning? Of what value is this? How did I learn best, most comfortably, with difficulty? What else do I need to learn?" (Fink, 2003, p. 116).

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Demonstrate an understanding of the role of oral communication in academic, social, and professional endeavors.
- Demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively with others in virtual contexts.

## DESCRIPTION

The digital communication journal assignment is designed to help students use course concepts to understand their academic, personal, and professional experiences. Although the assignment specifies different "entry" types, the guidelines are not overly restrictive. The idea is not to force students to write about a specific course concept, but rather to give them the freedom to engage in an online dialogue with their instructor and their peers about what they are learning and why it matters. This dialogue-based approach helps students make meaning of the readings, lectures, and class activities. In other words, it encourages students to "pull [the] original meaning [of course concepts] up to the conscious level and reflect on what new meaning [they] want those ideas or experiences to have" (Fink, 2003, p. 116).

## STUDENT-ORIENTED INSTRUCTIONS

The major components of this course include an interview assignment, a group work experience, an informative briefing, and a persuasive speech. You are expected to post a 400-word journal entry on the course blog after you complete each of these components (for a total of four journal entries).

- The *interview entry* should explore your interview experience. You should analyze your own communication behaviors and the interviewee's communication behaviors, and discuss what you have learned about the interview process. (Due: *Date*)

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