THE K. PATRICIA CROSS ACADEMY

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Teaching Technique 08

Paper Seminar

ACTIVITY TYPE	TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED	LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL
• Active/Engaged Learning • Writing	• Surface Learning	• Application: Analysis & Critical Thinking • Foundational Knowledge • Integration & Synthesis

Paper Seminar

Paper Seminar provides a framework for meaningful discussion centered on student work.

1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for *Paper Seminar*

2 Identify the learning task's underlying problem and craft the prompt

3 Set assignment parameters for completing the prompts

4 Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading

5 Communicate assignment instructions to students

6 Implement the technique

7 Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

The *Paper Seminar*, involving group discussion and critique of the merits of a peer's written work, is a flexible technique. Because the paper assignment can be crafted in a way that is suited to a wide range of contexts, this technique is appropriate across disciplines and fields. Moreover, the "seminar" aspect of the technique can be used with assignments other than formal papers. It also mirrors the process used at many academic conferences.

The *Paper Seminar* technique allows students to achieve multiple learning goals. Writing the paper requires a display of foundational knowledge, integration and synthesis of ideas, and analysis and critical thinking. The technique also provides a framework for groups to engage in deep discussion and exchange and probe ideas that students have brought with them from their research and their individual readings of the paper.

Paper Seminars can provide a learning artifact that allows you to assess student learning and assign a grade. It also gives individual students focused attention and feedback on their work while avoiding having multiple student presentations to the entire class.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

The first step of this technique is to design the writing prompt. This prompt should have students engage in synthesis of existing work or alternately should prompt original research.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

- Plan to assign students to groups with 4-5 members. You will want to explain that each paper will have a formal respondent who will offer a critique of a paper and several informal respondents who will offer helpful suggestions for revision. Also, you will want to explain that all students will take turns in both roles.

- You will also want to describe the timeframes you envision for paper presentations and responses. You may choose to ask groups to create their own schedule.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

This technique can result in two learning artifacts: the original paper and the formal critique. You can also assess the process, from individual self-assessment to peer assessment of effort and value.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

A handout can be useful for this technique, explaining both the paper guidelines as well as the process. You may also want to include this information in your syllabus, particularly if you plan to grade the products.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Provide students with time to read papers and to prepare their critiques, questions, and suggestions.

- Give the first presenters time to present their papers to their groups.

- Allow time for formal respondents to offer their remarks.

- Give groups time to discuss the paper informally.

- Follow the same sequence of activities for the second presenters, and continue until all students have presented.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?

- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?

- Was it appropriate for the students?

- Did the technique keep the students engaged?

- Did it promote student learning?

- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique.

SAMPLE PEER REVIEW FORM & SAMPLE GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT RESPONSES

Consider the following sample handouts to help communicate assignment parameters to your students before they begin a *Paper Seminar*.

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

- Instead of writing a paper, have students read a collection of texts or journal articles. Ask each individual to prepare an oral presentation with their analysis or interpretation of one of the reading assignments for the seminar. The primary respondent can provide the initial feedback, and then the whole group can discuss the presenter's comments.

- Use this technique to provide students with feedback on other kinds of assignments, such as on drawings, paintings, and music compositions or performances.

- Combine this technique with *Case Studies* for a more extensive collaborative experience.

SAMPLE PEER REVIEW FORM

For Implementing *Paper Seminar in Your Class*

INSTRUCTIONS

Read the paper twice, once to get an overview of the paper, and a second time to provide constructive criticism for the author to use during revisions. Answer the questions below.

ORGANIZATION

1. Were the basic sections (Introduction, Body, Conclusion, References, etc.) included? If not, what is missing?

2. Did the author use subheadings to clarify the sections of the text? Could these be better? Explain how.

3. Did the author organize the paper in a way that was logical, clear, and easy to follow? Explain and offer any suggestions for improvement

CITATIONS

4. Did the author cite sources adequately and appropriately? Note any incorrect formatting that you see.

5. Were all the citations in the text listed in the References section? Were all references cited in the text? Note any discrepancies.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE

6. Were there any grammatical or spelling problems? Mark them on the original paper.

7. Was the author's writing style clear? Did the paragraphs connect? Were sentences cohesive?

CONTENT

8. Did the author have a strong argument? Explain.

9. Did the author use details and examples from appropriate sources? If no, what's missing?

10. Did the author make some contribution of thought to the paper, or merely summarize other publications? Explain your answer.

SAMPLE GUIDELINES

For Student *Paper Seminar* Responses

- Read the document all the way through.

- Point out the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the document.

- Offer suggestions, not commands.

- Editorial comments should be appropriate and constructive.
  Be respectful and considerate of the writer's feelings and phrase it
  in a way that will encourage the author to listen.

- Be sure that your comments are clear and text-specific (for example,
  terms such as "unclear" or "vague" are too general to be helpful).
  You need to tell the author exactly what you mean.

- Raise questions that cross your mind as you read.

- Try not to overwhelm your peer with too much commentary.
  Follow the feedback form.

- Be careful not to let your own opinions bias your review.

- Reread your comments before passing them on to your peer.
  Make sure all your comments make sense and are easy to follow.

- Avoid turning your peer's paper into your paper.

Online Adaptation

This section is intended to help you with the process of implementing and assessing *Paper Seminar* in your online class.

HOW TO START

- Form groups of four to five students and have them share their project with group members as an email attachment or in a discussion forum.

- Designate a formal respondent who will offer a critique and act as a facilitator during follow-up group discussion.

- Assign several informal respondents who will offer suggestions for revision. Explain that all students will take turns in both roles.

- Provide guidance to students on how to read critically and offer formal remarks.

- Use the breakout room function in a videoconference for best results, and give each group their own space to take turns presenting and discussing each member's project.

- Move around the rooms to check in on students, offer comments or answer questions.

FOR USE IN AN ASYNCHRONOUS SESSION

- Create a private discussion forum for each group.

- Establish a timeframe in which each group member is responsible for posting their paper along with an introduction that provides context.

- The formal respondent then provides comments, followed by other group members contributing feedback for each project.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how a Professor adapted *Paper Seminar* in their course, *Principles of Marketing*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample *Paper Seminar* Completed Technique Template: Content from *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*

Principles of Marketing

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

> This is an undergradaute course taught at a large state school.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

> The Professor wanted students to explore in-depth a market planning strategy. She used Paper Seminar to give students an assignment that had real-world applicability.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

She asked students to identify product lines to market (for example, furniture, apparel, cooking equipment, and so forth). As students generated ideas, she wrote the ideas on the board. She then invited students to choose a product for which they were most interested in serving as a marketing consultant, and organized students into pairs or triads accordingly.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

The Professor followed the steps for implementing the technique. She varied it in that students wrote a memo instead of a formal paper and took on roles during the seminar analyzing and critiquing the memos.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

> She decided to formally grade the memos and to do group assessment of the collaboration during the seminar.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

> The Professor gave students information about the Paper Seminar in a handout that gave details about the paper assignment and that outlined the timeframe for the seminar.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

The Professor assigned each group to research the advantages and disadvantages of online distribution for their chosen product. As students conducted their research, they were asked to consider the following:

- The cost of designing and maintaining a Web site
- The likelihood that target consumers are Internet shoppers
- The industry trends in that product area: for example, are other businesses selling similar products online, and how successful are they?
- The opportunity to expand inventory without increasing the cost of retail space, catalogue production, or mailing
- The opportunity to have a store that never closes
- The lack of trust about credit card purchasing on the Web
- The difficulty that shoppers have in finding a Web site when they do not know the store's name and URL
- Potential customer frustration and waste of time conducting Web searches
- The certainty that the site will not reach customers who do not use computers or shop on the Internet.

Based on their findings from the research/questions, she asked students to write a persuasive memo to the company's owner stating their position about expanding to an online distribution system. She told students to include in the memo information that would counter expected objections.

For the Seminar, she told students to present their memos as if they were consultants hired by the business's owner. She assigned two respondents for each analytic memo, one responding from the perspective of the business owner, and another from the perspective of the chief financial officer or accountant. The entire group discussed the analysis and proposal and attempted to determine an effective marketing decision based on the memo.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

She thought the activity went well and determined to use it again going forward.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement *Paper Seminar* in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

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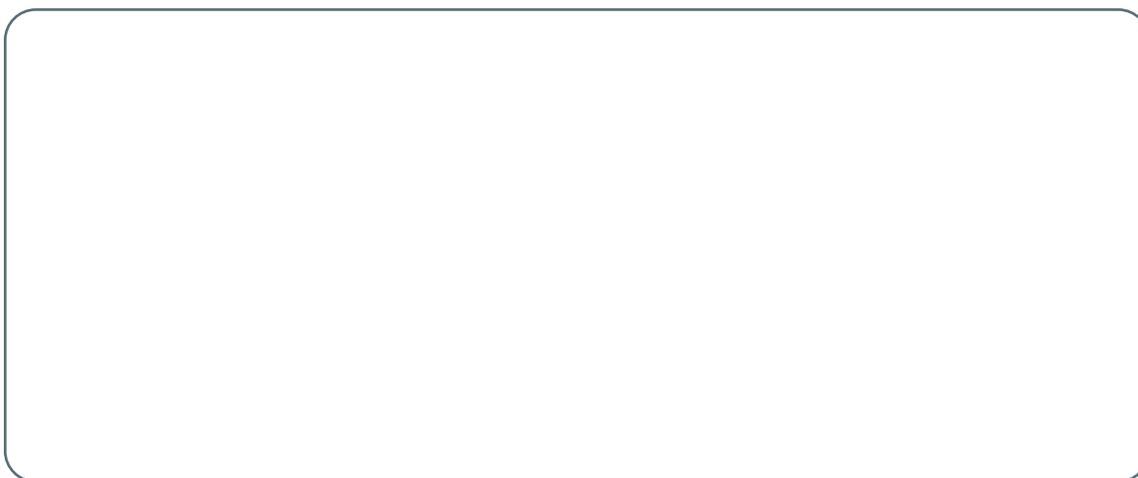
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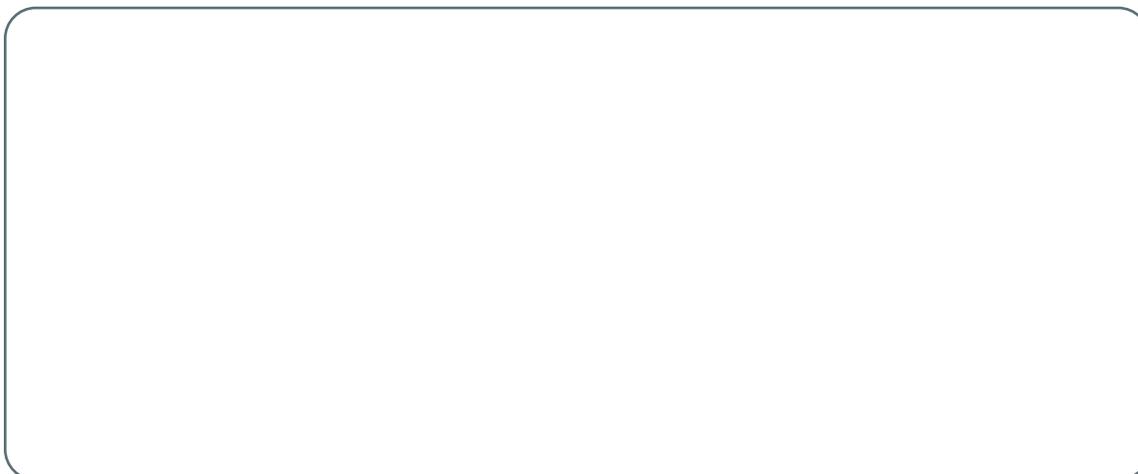
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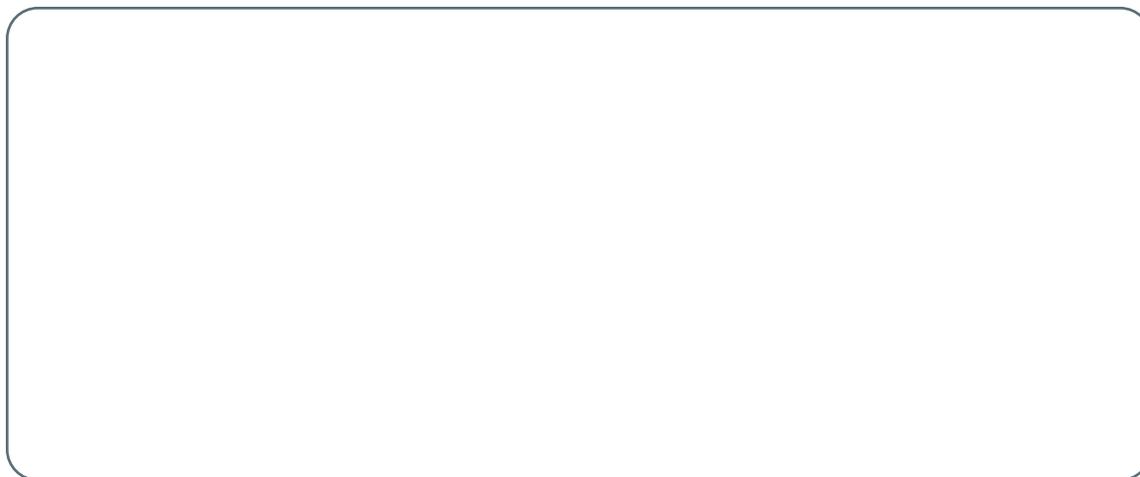
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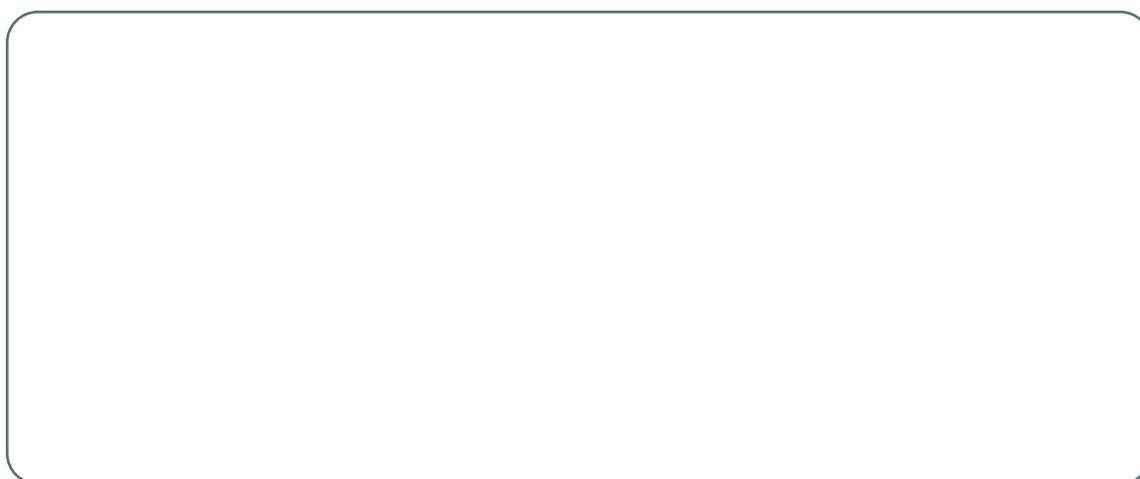
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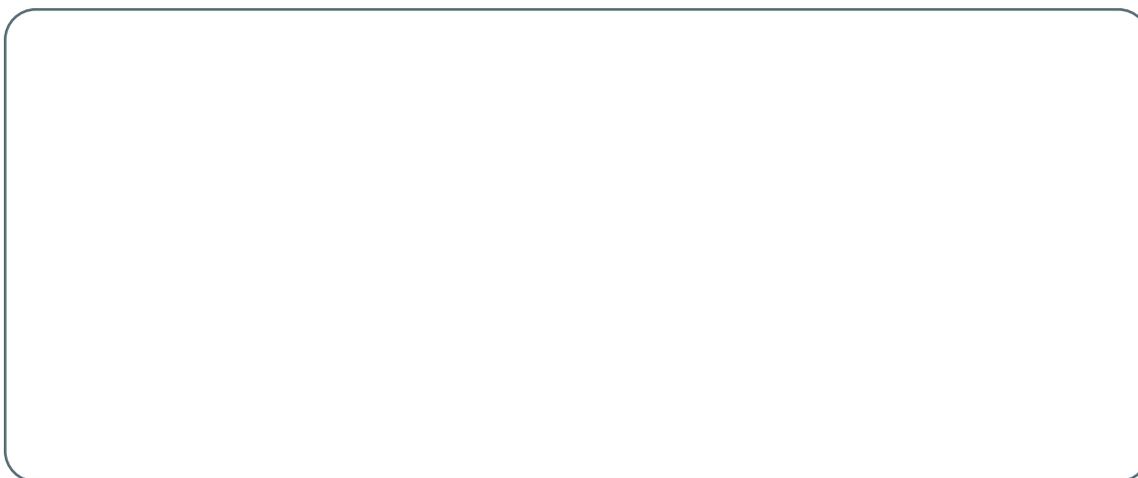
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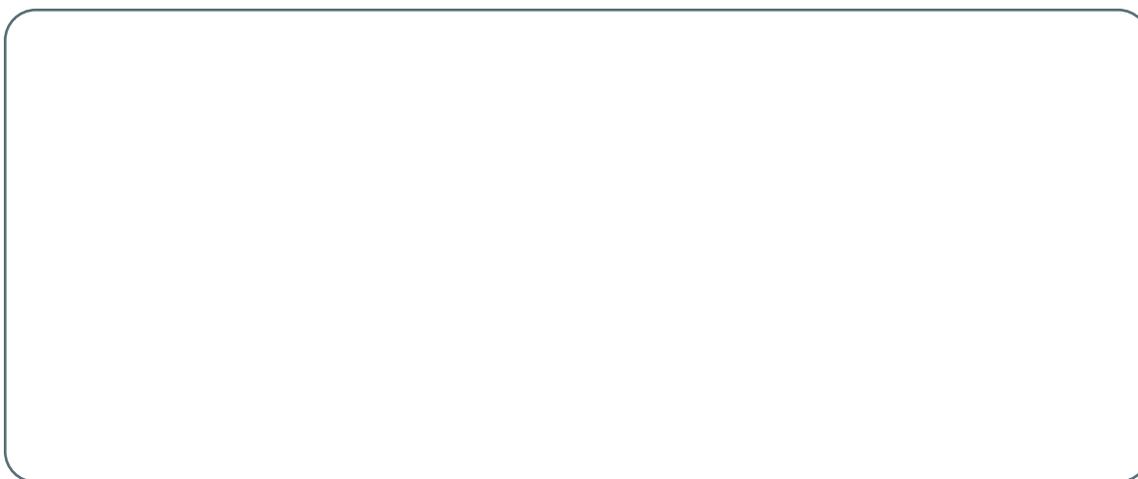
References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from "Collaborative Learning Technique 30: Paper Seminar" in *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley, Major, & Cross, 2014), pp. 324-329. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H., & Cross, K. P. (2014). *Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Habeshaw, S., Habeshaw, T., & Gibbs, G. (1984). *53 interesting things to do in your seminars and tutorials.* Bristol, UK: technical & Educational Studies Ltd.

- Harnish, J. (1995, December). What's in a seminar? Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education. Retrieved April 20, 2003, from http://facweb.northseattle.edu/jreis/Seminars/what's_in_a_seminar.pdf

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