

Name of Assignment: Wiki Glossary Challenge
Name of Course: Communication Theory, All Humanities
John Radwan, Seton Hall University

I. LOC:

LOC #2: Employ Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts

- Explain Communication theories, perspectives, principles, and concepts

II. Assignment Rationale: A rich and varied vocabulary is essential for reading comprehension and articulate expression in all fields, and humanities disciplines in particular ask undergraduates to learn and correctly use a range of terms that reaches far beyond the level of most high school students. In addition, many Communication Theory oriented courses ask students to use their existing vocabulary terms in multiple discipline-specific senses. For instance, “sign” is an average English word but in Suzanne Langer’s philosophy of meaning “sign” refers to an indicator of past, present or future conditions, while in Ferdinand de Saussure’s approach to linguistics “sign” refers to the combination of signifier and signified. Learning the definitions of key disciplinary terms and then going on to develop a sensitivity to the shades of meaning that each different usage confers is fundamental. As LOC #2 makes clear, understanding and then using specialized jargon is the only way to enter scholarly fields of knowledge.

This entry describes how to use a Wiki to encourage student vocabulary development. The activity challenges students to post definitions of key terms before their peers, rewarding not only timely homework but also careful research. Wikis are collaboratively authored web pages offered as a feature of most common course management platforms (Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, etc.) and are also available through generic web services like <http://wiki.com/>. The steps below follow Blackboard’s protocol; most wikis use similar procedures.

III. Length of Assignment: Instructor’s choice. Per unit or entire semester.

IV: Materials needed: Computer access, reliable internet access, course reading assignments, course management platform (Blackboard, etc.)

V. Instructions:

1. Creation: Open a new wiki. Steps may vary with different course management platforms. In Blackboard the Instructor logs into their course and selects Tools -> Wikis -> Create Wiki. Name the wiki after your course, such as “Communication Theory Glossary” or “Interpersonal Communication Lexicon.” In the Instruction field type parameters for students. A simple approach might say “As you read your homework assignments you will encounter unfamiliar

words, and you will also encounter familiar words used in senses that are new to you. To earn X points, look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary and post a definition in our wiki under the proper letter by clicking Edit Wiki Content. In addition, when our authors define a familiar term in a way that is new to you, quote the term and their definition in our wiki under the proper letter. If a peer has already posted a definition you may not repeat it. However, many terms have multiple definitions so you may repeat a peer's word but post an alternate definition. Provide a basic citation for all entries and be sure to click Submit when you are done." More advanced Instructions might grant additional points for definitions from course authors and primary texts. In addition, a research oriented class might require a complete citation in a disciplinary bibliography format. Ensure that the wiki is available and open to editing then click Submit.

2. Setup: Now that the wiki has been created, select it, and you will see an empty field titled Wiki Page Content. To create an empty glossary type each letter of the alphabet in order, each one on a new line, and click Submit. Now that there is content in the wiki click Edit Wiki Content to provide a sample entry to demonstrate your preferred entry and cite format. Be sure to click Submit when you are done.

VI. Debriefing: When vocabulary terms from course readings are addressed in class, the instructor should not begin by defining them. Instead make a reference to the Wiki and invite responses. For example, "'Sign' is a major vocabulary term in today's reading from Langer. Who posted her definition in our Wiki and can share it with the class?"

VII. Rubric or Scoring Guide: See Instructions. Once it is set up a Wiki glossary can be incorporated into a syllabus in a variety of ways. The most basic way is to let it run all semester and grade it before the final exam. Alternatives are to grade it before each major exam or after each major homework reading. In Blackboard, Instructors can click Participation Summary on the Wiki Content screen to view usage statistics for each student. It is possible for novices to accidentally erase portions of the wiki or alter entries. However, this is easy for the Instructor to fix via Page History. Simply delete the most recent corrupted version and the wiki will revert to the previous version. For this function and advanced grading options in Blackboard see https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/9.1_Older_Versions/9.1_2014_and_2015/Instructor/080_Collaboration/020_Wikis/040_Grading_Wikis

VIII. Notes: General outcomes for vocabulary development are well established in pedagogical literature. An extensive vocabulary aids in reading comprehension and lends both facility and precision to expression. Use of disciplinary terms is required for entry into specialized fields. Specific outcomes will vary depending upon which particular course employs a Wiki Glossary. For instance, mastering vocabulary terms in a research methods class can enable the student to classify different types of scholarly articles according to their approach to answering a research question, and mastering vocabulary in a history course can help the student associate authors with the correct historical period.

IX. References: n/a