

## Exam Question Assignment Intro to Communication Studies

**Date Due:** You have been assigned a week (based on your last name) during the semester. See page 4 for your due date. Your question must be posted on the questions discussion board by 5pm on Friday of that week. It may be posted early. This assignment may not be made up.

**Purpose:** For you to 1) demonstrate an understanding of key concepts from a reading or lecture; 2) gain a better understanding of how the test questions on the final exam work, and 3) to generate part of the final based on student feedback.

### **Product:**

1. Once during the term, you will produce a single multiple-choice question, based on a concept from lecture or from a reading in your assigned week. Your question should follow the formatting guidelines on the next page. Keep electronic and paper backup copies of your question for your records.
2. **You must post an electronic version of your question on the “exam question nest” discussion board, under the topic for your assigned week. It can either be cut-and-pasted or posted as a document in a standard file format (.doc,.rtf but not .pdf). If you post an attachment, make sure autoformatting is turned off, and make sure it works and is virus-free (McGill provides free antivirus software –use it). Please note that if we cannot open or read your posted file, it is as if it was never posted.**

**YOUR TASK** is to write an original multiple-choice exam question consisting of a question stem and 4 possible answers (only one of which is correct), with an accompanying explanation, following the guidelines below.

1. The question should address an important concept, fact or example covered in lecture or readings. We don't want to test on trivialities. The question should have a single, clear, correct answer.
2. You may use reading questions as the basis of your question stem if you like, or come up with your own.

The question stem should do most of the work, most of the time. Most of the ideas in the question should be contained in the stem, so that students can easily compare the different answers and judge for themselves. A good question stem always explicitly attributes ideas to a source, either an author by last name (“According to Hall,”) or the lecture (“According to lecture.”). All question stems should begin with “According to”

The answers should all be roughly of the same length.

The right answer should be clearly right. Usually it is best to use the exact same terminology as the reading or lecture so there is no confusion. For the purposes of the assignment, always make the right answer option A. If we use your question, we will scramble the answers.

A good exam question tests for comprehension, not recognition. A bad exam question can be answered simply by recognition (where the right answer is something you've seen or heard before and the wrong answers are obviously wrong).

Explain why your right answer is right and your wrong answers are wrong (see example on the next page).

Some sources for wrong answers:

- an argument the author rehearses and then dismisses
- a claim that is the opposite of what the author argues
- a claim made by a different author on a related topic
- a true statement from the reading, but one irrelevant to the question

Each answer must be unique and there can only be one right answer. You are not allowed to use “all of the above” or “none of the above” or other similar answers for your question.

### **Why it works this way:**

In the humanities and interpretive social sciences, our currency is ideas and debate. Therefore it is important to understand who made what argument, how it relates to other arguments that author made, and how that author’s line or argument relates to what others have said on the same issue.

**Limited Duplication:** In any given week, only three students may ask questions based on the same reading question or concept from lecture. Questions on the same topic may not use identical language and must have different wrong answers. Precedent shall be established by the time-stamp on your post. (So if you post your question at 3:15, someone posting at 3:17 no longer can use the wording as you have it set out. If someone else posts on that same topic at 4:00, a person posting at 4:15 will have to ask a question on a different topic.

### **The anatomy of a question**

According to lecture (and Peters), what motivates the drive toward communication?

- a. Miscommunication.
- b. The drive for profit.
- c. Encoding and decoding.
- d. Cute puppies.

The question stem begins with “according to” and clearly attributes the idea.

“A” is correct. “Miscommunication is the scandal that motivates the very concept communication in the first place.” (Peters, p. 6). Also the lecture refers to the technical and therapeutic discourses of communication, where communication is both the problem and the solution. The prof’s Jean Charest and Twitter example illustrated this point.

B is wrong because Peters doesn’t really talk about the profit motive (though it’s a great wrong answer because later in the term, several other authors will discuss it).

C refers to concepts in the Hall reading.

D is *hilarious*, but an example of a bad wrong answer, because it is too obviously wrong. It comes as a non sequitur. But it also illustrates why multiple-choice exams can’t be tests of opinion. In *your* life, puppies may drive you to communicate (and therefore the example may be experientially true), they weren’t mentioned in lecture or in the Peters reading as a reason for communication.

If you have a really hilarious wrong answer, include it as answer “e” and we may choose to use it if we agree that you’re really clever.

**Another example, this time formatted exactly like you will post yours:**

According to lecture, ideology can best be defined as

- a. the intersection of belief systems, and political, economic or cultural power.
- b. any system of ideas propagated by electronic media.
- c. strongly held personal beliefs regarding politics and religion.
- d. official doctrines of countries, religions and political organizations.

A is the correct answer because this is exactly the definition from lecture.

B is half right, in that ideologies can be propagated by electronic media, but not all ideas in the media are ideologies.

C was explicitly discussed as incorrect in the lecture.

D was used as an archaic meaning of the term, but not the one used in the class or in the readings.

**Grading:**

100: question and answers are correct, well-phrased, follow the assignment, require minimal editing and are properly formatted.

50: “Correct” answer is in fact wrong; or repeats another question already posted but is otherwise correct; formatting or other basic issues.

10: Thanks for playing

**Good luck and have fun!**

**Week Of: Range of Last Names Begins With**

24 Sept:

1 Oct:

8 Oct:

15 Oct:

22 Oct:

29 Oct:

5 Nov:

12 Nov:

19 Nov:

26 Nov:

NOTE: If you have multiple or hyphenated last name, consider yourself alphabetized by whatever letters your "last name" starts with in Minera.