

**Writing a synopsis**  
**Dr. Brian J Maguire**

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**Why do we do a synopsis?**

For most of you, for most of the rest of your professional careers, you will be writing synopses. When you want to convince your boss of the importance of a new piece of equipment, when you want the city council to support a new procedure, or when you are writing academic papers, the synopsis will be an integral, and critical, piece of your work. One of the most common reasons that students fail comprehensive exams, or have to rewrite a thesis, is because of the synopsis. Writing a synopsis, just like writing in general, is not a skill you were born with; it requires much practice to develop proficiency. If you want to be a good manager, if you want to be a good administrator, if you want to complete your master's degree, it is a skill you must develop. Now is the time to practice the skill of writing a synopsis.

**What is a synopsis?**

One of the exciting and unique opportunities afforded by the distance education environment is that it allows, and even promotes, very thoughtful interactions. Although such interactions may be common in doctoral level seminars, they can be less common in even master's level classes due to time constraints or the class size in on-campus courses.

In our unique environment we have the opportunity to give a topic a great deal of thought. We also have a unique student body in that many participants have years of work experience. These two factors contribute to the potential for a tremendous synergy in the "classroom". One of the purposes of the synopsis is to encourage this synergy.

There would be little benefit if everyone simply posted a "Reader's Digest" version of the readings; nor is there much value in reading extensive quotes from the assignments. Instead, the weekly synopsis is an approximately 500 word melding of what you learned from the lectures and the readings for that unit, combined with your experiences, your research and your personal knowledge. You can address your opinions of the readings and lectures (perhaps points you agreed or disagreed with), other questions that were raised for you, or how leaders might apply the lessons you learned.

The same considerations apply for the interactive posts. What did you learn from the other person's post? What questions did it raise, how might you apply the concepts presented?

We must also consider timing. If everyone waited until Sunday night to post their responses, the value of the dialogue would be limited. Instead, the synopsis should be posted earlier in the week and then discussion can take place later in the week.

Each of you has a unique set of perspectives, knowledge and experience. By "percolating" the topics through those perspectives and knowledge and experience you not only gain a much fuller appreciation for the material but the milieu becomes richer for everyone.

Brian

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Brian J. Maguire, Dr.PH, MSA, EMT-P  
2009 Senior Fulbright Scholar  
Clinical Associate Professor  
Associate Graduate Program Director  
Department of Emergency Health Services  
University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
1000 Hilltop Circle  
Baltimore, MD 21250  
Office) 410/455-3778  
Fax) 410/455-3045  
maguire@umbc.edu  
<http://ehs.umbc.edu>  
<http://userpages.umbc.edu/~maguire>

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