

## **Weekly Titles as Micro-Advance Organisers: Small Design Choices for Pedagogical Memory**

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### **Abstract**

In multi-week university courses, especially those taught annually or intermittently, instructors can face the challenge of erosion of pedagogical memory. After a year, it may be surprisingly difficult to recall the original intent behind activities, examples, and conceptual transitions. We discuss how the simple, low-cost intervention of assigning each week a concise title or one-sentence summary can have an outsized impact, functioning as instructor-facing micro-advance organisers. This observation arose through reflective analysis and iterative engagement with a low-code class materials system, where the need to manage and update course artefacts made these micro-design elements especially visible. Whereas ideas such as Lang's Small Teaching focus on micro-activities inside the classroom, the emphasis here is on micro-design decisions that shape both the structure of a course and the cognitive experience of the educator. Drawing on Ausubel's theory of advance organisers, narrative cognition, and the broader metaphor of wayfinding, the paper argues that weekly titles serve as conceptual landmarks that orient instructors within a course's evolving narrative. This kind of signposting holds broad relevance across learning contexts, as it requires no technology, budget, or institutional infrastructure, making it readily transferable across resource-diverse settings. The paper develops a pedagogical wayfinding perspective and discusses practical implications for reflective teaching practice, faculty development, and the design of teaching environments, suggesting that although sustainable improvement is often pursued through large-scale reform, small and reusable design practices may offer an under-appreciated pathway.

*Keywords:* pedagogical wayfinding, course design, reflective teaching practice, advance organisers, narrative structure in education

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## Introduction

Seemingly minor organisational choices can play a significant role in how educators experience and sustain their teaching over time. This paper examines intentional weekly titles as supports for instructor recall, narrative coherence, and reflective course redesign across multiple years of teaching. In doing so, it foregrounds pedagogical wayfinding as an underexplored design concern in education, framing weekly titles as “You are here” markers that help educators maintain orientation within a course’s evolving conceptual narrative.

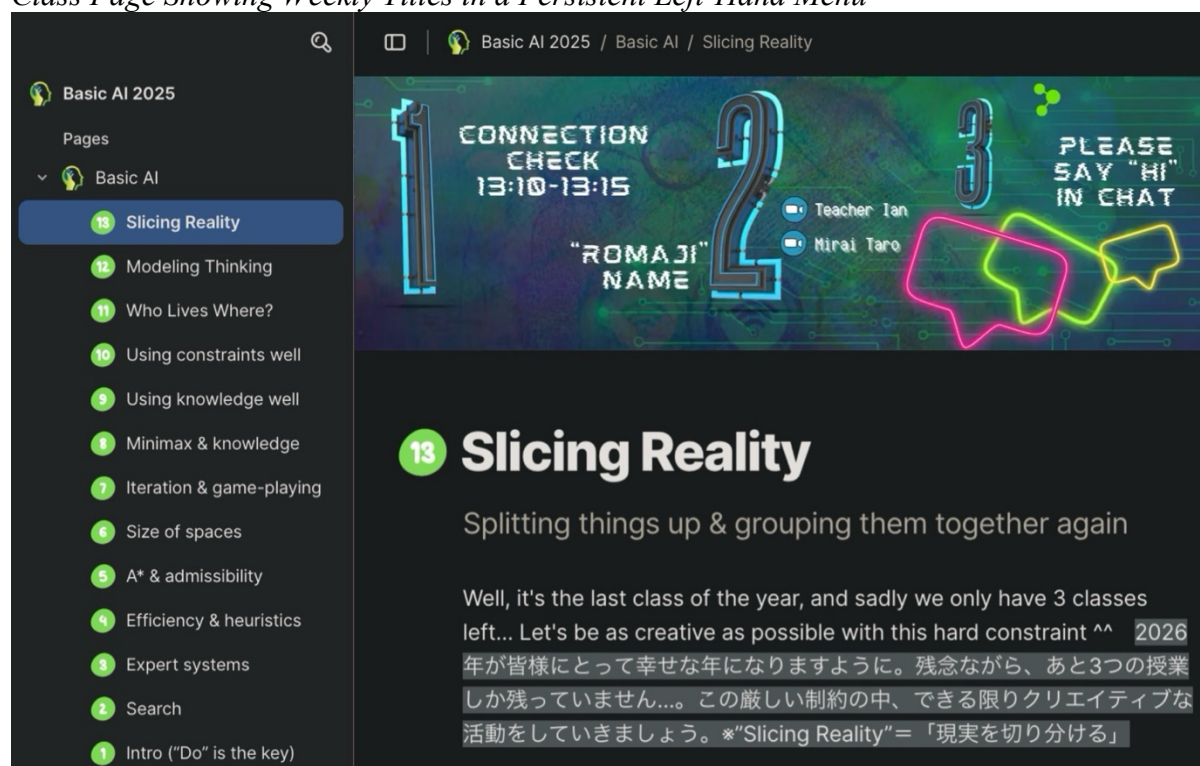
A focus on weekly titles may at first seem almost trivial: more an administrative convenience than a pedagogical intervention. Many educators will already label class weeks in some fashion (“Week 1,” “Part 3,” “Algorithms I”), and most learning management systems provide a default structure that encourages this kind of naming. The focus here, however, is on more intentional weekly titles, including the use of subtitles and one-sentence summaries, and on their potential effects on an educator’s ability to shape, recall, and sustain the underlying logic of a course. Figure 1 shows an example of intentional weekly titles presented together in a class context, functioning as persistent reference points for both educators and students. This kind of course framing may be familiar, but this paper brings a reflective and conceptual approach to the practice.

Thus, rather than presenting a new system or teaching method, the paper examines this familiar element of course organisation as a site of pedagogical design. It situates weekly titles within existing discussions of teaching, advance organisers, narrative structure, and small pedagogical interventions, introducing pedagogical wayfinding as a lens for understanding how instructors maintain orientation within a course over time. The paper then examines how weekly titles can function as narrative anchors across repeated course deliveries, supporting pedagogical memory, reflection, and revision. Finally, it considers the broader implications of this perspective for reflective teaching practice and for the design of educational environments. A complementary, system-oriented account of the low-code infrastructure and interface design decisions that supported this practice is presented elsewhere (Frank, in press).

## Background and Related Work

The challenge addressed in this paper is familiar to many instructors: the gradual erosion of pedagogical memory. Returning to a course after a gap of a year or more, it can be surprisingly difficult to recall why particular activities were chosen, why a specific example appears in Week 7 rather than Week 3, or how an earlier demonstration was intended to scaffold a later concept. While this difficulty is rarely framed explicitly as a research problem, it has clear practical consequences for teaching quality—particularly in institutions where courses rotate between instructors, where teaching loads are high, or where opportunities for sustained reflection are limited. Foundational work on teaching as professional practice has long emphasised that effective instruction depends on accumulated, structured pedagogical knowledge rather than on isolated techniques (Schön, 1983; Shulman, 1987). However, less attention has been paid to how such knowledge is preserved, retrieved, or re-entered over time.

**Figure 1**  
 Class Page Showing Weekly Titles in a Persistent Left-Hand Menu



*Note.* Viewing all weeks simultaneously foregrounds the narrative structure and can support pedagogical wayfinding by making progression, emphasis, and themes visible at a glance. *Source.* chinou.ianlab.org

Much of the existing literature on teaching improvement is primarily concerned with enhancing student learning and engagement, even when it focuses on instructors' actions. Work on classroom activities, assessment design, feedback strategies, and educational technology adoption typically frames improvement in terms of what students do, experience, or achieve. Influential approaches such as *Small Teaching* (Lang, 2016) emphasise how minor adjustments to instructional practice can yield meaningful learning gains, while instructional and learning design frameworks highlight sequencing, scaffolding, and alignment at the level of modules or curricula (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This paper considers the comparatively under-studied cognitive work involved in sustaining pedagogical intent over time, particularly as instructors re-enter courses after long intervals.

Within cognitive and educational psychology, several well-established concepts offer useful lenses for framing this as a design concern. Ausubel's theory of advance organisers emphasises the value of providing learners with high-level conceptual structures that anchor new material to what they already know (Ausubel, 1968). Classic examples include a brief conceptual overview at the start of a unit, a schematic diagram that situates upcoming topics, or a framing question that signals how new ideas relate to earlier ones. While advance organisers are typically discussed as student-facing supports, the same mechanism can plausibly operate for instructors, helping to stabilise and reactivate conceptual schemas across repeated encounters with a course. Similarly, research on narrative cognition suggests that people remember and make sense of complex material more effectively when it is organised as a coherent sequence rather than as disconnected topics (Bruner, 1986). Together, these perspectives point to the importance of signposting and conceptual landmarks, even at relatively small scales, and motivate examining weekly titles as potential supports for instructor orientation and pedagogical memory.

Seen in this light, weekly titles—despite their apparent triviality—can function as cognitive anchors for instructors. They allow educators to re-enter the “narrative world” of a course more quickly, preserving planning decisions that might otherwise fade. By forcing articulation of what a week is really about, they encourage coherence and highlight conceptual transitions. Crucially, they also enable a form of *pedagogical wayfinding*: an ongoing sense of where one is within the conceptual landscape of a course, how one arrived there, and where the learning journey is heading.

The concept of wayfinding originates in environmental design and urban studies, most notably in the work of Kevin Lynch, who described it as the process by which people form mental representations of complex environments in order to orient themselves, make decisions, and move purposefully through space (Lynch, 1960). Wayfinding research has traditionally examined how cues such as landmarks, paths, districts, and signage support navigation in physical and informational environments. Importantly, wayfinding is not simply about efficiency; it is closely tied to feelings of confidence, coherence, and well-being when operating within complex systems.

When applied to pedagogical contexts, wayfinding offers a useful lens for understanding how instructors and learners orient themselves within the conceptual landscapes of educational subject matter. Figure 2 summarises how weekly titles can be positioned at the intersection of several established educational perspectives, with pedagogical wayfinding providing a unifying frame.

In earlier work (Frank, 2012), principles of wayfinding from environmental design were applied to education, arguing that learners’ navigation of abstract conceptual landscapes presents challenges analogous to those of traversing physical spaces. The present paper extends the perspective more generally to educators, treating curricula, syllabi, and related educational artefacts as navigational supports that shape interpretation, decision-making, and orientation over time. Rather than focusing on curriculum-wide structures or learner-facing guidance, the emphasis is on instructor-facing micro-signage: specifically, the use of intentional weekly titles. From this perspective, weekly titles can be understood as conceptual landmarks that help instructors re-orient themselves within a course after periods of absence and maintain a sense of direction as the course evolves across iterations. In wayfinding terms, they support the primary “You are here” function that anchors navigation within a larger map.

Seen through this lens, weekly titles occupy a distinctive position at the intersection of several established educational frameworks, as visualised in Figure 2. From the perspective of advance organiser theory (Ausubel), they act as compact cues that activate and stabilise conceptual schemas. From narrative theory (Bruner), they resemble story beats: small but meaningful markers of progression that give structure and momentum to an unfolding narrative. From Small Teaching (Lang), they exemplify micro-design decisions—sustainable, low-effort practices that accumulate into broader pedagogical coherence over time. Wayfinding offers a unifying frame that connects these perspectives, suggesting how such minimal artefacts can support orientation, memory, and intentional design.

**Figure 2***Conceptual Positioning of Weekly Titles Through a Pedagogical Wayfinding Lens*

The notion of pedagogical wayfinding, approached here through the concrete and familiar practice of assigning weekly titles, is not primarily about directing students along a prescribed path. Rather, it concerns the educator's own ability to navigate a course as a lived design space: to remember why choices were made, to recognise where conceptual shifts occur, and to see how individual sessions contribute to an overall educational vision. Weekly titles, despite their apparent simplicity, can provide a lightweight yet persistent mechanism for sustaining this orientation. The following section builds on this perspective by examining how weekly titles can function as pedagogical wayfinding markers when used deliberately over time, supporting instructors' reflection, revision, and re-entry into a course across repeated deliveries.

### **Weekly Titles as Pedagogical Wayfinding in Practice**

This section presents a concrete example of how weekly titles can operate as pedagogical wayfinding markers, drawing on sustained use across repeated deliveries of a single university course. Figure 3 reproduces the full sequence of weekly titles and subtitles for the same AI course introduced in Figure 1, allowing the class to be read as a longitudinal conceptual narrative rather than as a series of isolated sessions.

For the instructor, this representation provides a single, consolidated view of all titles and subtitles, making it easier to grasp the overall conceptual landscape of the course as a whole. Students, in contrast, typically encounter titles sequentially and must navigate into individual pages to access subtitles and contextual detail. This difference in visibility matters. The instructor's overview functions as a map: it supports reflection on emphasis, pacing, and transition, and enables deliberate reshaping of how the course narrative is presented and experienced. Through this kind of map, the instructor is not merely reading the landscape, but actively revising and re-composing it across iterations of the course.

**Figure 3***Longitudinal View of Weekly Titles and Subtitles for a 15-Week Undergraduate AI Course*Contents DX > **Class Story**

Week ↑	Class Title	Sub-title
Wk01	Intro ("Do" is the key)	Welcome to my online class! I hope we can learn a lot together
Wk02	Search	Our first algorithm: "depth first search"
Wk03	Expert systems	"Expert systems" & thinking (backwards)
Wk04	Efficiency & heuristics	How to identify "better"?
Wk05	A* & admissibility	The rabbit and the tortoise...
Wk06	The size of spaces	(And a preview of "iteration")
Wk07	Iteration & game-playing	How game programmers found a search improvement...
Wk08	Minimax & knowledge	Modelling the moves of the enemy
Wk09	Using knowledge well	Where we meet networks...
Wk10	Using constraints well	Reasoning with networks...
Wk11	Who Lives Where?	AI solves logic puzzles!
Wk12	Modeling Thinking	Can networks represent the world?
Wk13	Slicing Reality	Splitting things up & grouping them together again
Wk14	Framing ideas	World models with structure
Wk15	Understanding the world	An empty queue (and evaluation)

*Note.* Read vertically, the titles give a conceptual narrative for the course, while subtitles capture some of the pedagogical intent and transitions that support instructor orientation and course redesign over time.

Viewed in this way, the overview foregrounds questions of intent and transition: *What is this week really about? How does it connect to what came before? What kind of conceptual work should stand out at this point in the course?* Engaging with these questions across iterations can reshape the internal logic of a course, encouraging greater coherence and making its pedagogical structure more legible both retrospectively and prospectively.

The points below illustrate several distinct functions of weekly titles in pedagogical wayfinding, focusing on what becomes visible when such titles are treated as part of an evolving course narrative.

***Weekly Titles as Narrative Material***

The weekly titles shown in Figures 1 and 3 were developed incrementally across multiple iterations of the same course. They were not designed in advance as a complete narrative, nor were they intended as a formal framework for students. Instead, they emerged through routine acts of preparation and reflection, gradually accumulating into a sequence that can be read retrospectively as a conceptual journey. While Figure 1 shows the titles within the lived context of a class page, Figure 3 renders the sequence more legible in condensed form across the semester. Read in this way, the titles function as narrative material: they capture shifts in

emphasis, framing, and conceptual focus, while also supporting recall and suggesting opportunities to reconsider or reshape the course's flow.

### ***Titles as Compact Records of Pedagogical Intent***

Read sequentially, weekly titles reveal more than topic coverage. They encode decisions about emphasis, pacing, and conceptual transition that are often difficult to reconstruct after time has passed. A title such as *Slicing Reality*, for example, does more than name content; it frames the week's activity as a particular kind of cognitive operation and signals how students are expected to engage with complexity at that point in the course. In this sense, weekly titles can function as compact records of pedagogical intent, preserving not only what was taught but how it was meant to be understood within the broader course narrative. This function becomes particularly salient when instructors return to a course after a long interval.

### ***Titles as Supports for Iterative Course Refinement***

Across repeated deliveries, explicit weekly titles make misalignments easier to notice. Titles that feel vague or out of place stand out when read alongside neighbouring weeks, prompting reconsideration, while titles that capture a week's intent effectively tend to persist across iterations, stabilising key moments in the course narrative. This process can also extend to surrounding student-facing text, prompting revision of descriptions, subtitles, or class-page explanations so that they better match the conceptual role implied by the title. In this way, weekly titles support a low-friction form of revision embedded in routine preparation rather than treated as a separate evaluative task. At a micro-design scale, these adjustments accumulate gradually, reshaping the course through repeated acts of noticing and re-framing rather than through wholesale redesign.

### ***Titles as Anchors for Instructor-Facing Annotations***

Figure 3 provides a concrete example of weekly titles paired with one-line summaries, creating a supporting layer of instructor-facing design artefacts. While titles form the visible surface of the course narrative, accessible to students as signposts of conceptual progression, summaries and short reflective notes can help instructors preserve the context, rationale, and experience beneath those labels.

In this role, titles act as stable reference points around which brief annotations can accumulate. Summaries capture intended focus in compact form, while notes record how a session unfolded and what may require adjustment. Together, they form a lightweight but durable record of pedagogical intent that extends beyond the title itself. Over time, this layered structure supports re-engagement and refinement: titles cue recognition, while summaries and notes supply the detail needed to interpret them in light of prior experience.

### ***Titles as Inspiration for Syllabus and Course Communication***

Weekly titles can also serve as prompts for refreshing the outward-facing presentation of a course. When a title captures the conceptual role of a week clearly, it can suggest improvements not only to internal planning and class delivery, but also to the wording of syllabi and other student-facing materials. In the course discussed in this paper, the main weekly titles were included as-is in the most recent round of syllabus revision. This can bring life and coherence to descriptions that might otherwise remain flat or administrative in tone. In this use, titles

support not only instructor-facing wayfinding, but also more intentional framing of the course as it is encountered by others, with possible implications at the institutional level.

### ***Supporting Reflective Practice in the Age of AI***

Weekly titles can support reflective practice when they are treated as more than static labels. Read together as a developing story, they give educators a high-level vantage point from which to ask whether a course still makes sense as a whole: whether the emphasis feels appropriate, whether transitions are working, and whether the overall direction remains aligned with instructional intent. In this role, titles help make the course available for reflective inspection during routine preparation.

One contemporary support for this reflective stance comes from the use of AI tools as lightweight brainstorming partners. While high-level course design remains difficult to delegate or evaluate at a glance, suggestions at the level of weekly titles and concise summaries are more readily open to human judgement. In this context, AI-generated variations can serve both as prompts for exploration and as points of comparison, helping instructors surface alternative framings or confirm existing ones before selecting or refining a final version. Used in this way, AI does not replace pedagogical judgement; it lowers the cost of exploration, making reflective use of weekly titles more accessible under real teaching constraints.

Taken together, these perspectives show how a commonly overlooked aspect of course organisation can support pedagogical wayfinding when treated as a site for reflection rather than as mere administration. The following section considers some broader implications for reflective teaching practice and the design of educational environments.

### **Implications for Reflective Teaching Practice and Educational Design**

The previous section highlighted several ways in which weekly titles can function as conceptual landmarks within a course's evolving landscape. In physical navigation systems, the absence of clear landmarks or "You are here" indicators is widely recognised as a design failure; in educational settings, by contrast, comparable orientation cues are often implicit, informal, or entirely absent. The position of this paper is that this absence is not neutral: without persistent orientation markers, pedagogical intent must be repeatedly reconstructed, increasing cognitive load and weakening narrative continuity.

What, then, are the practical remedies? Foremost may be the importance of teaching environments and tools that at least permit, and ideally encourage, the articulation of weekly intent. These need not be sophisticated platforms or new technologies. Rather, environments that surface weekly structure, preserve titles over time, and make them easy to revisit can quietly reinforce reflective practice. Treating weekly titles as first-class elements of course design rather than incidental labels increases the likelihood that they may become resources for reuse, comparison, and discussion across iterations. This may be particularly valuable in courses dealing with abstract or technically complex subject matter, where local coherence can easily obscure global structure.

A second implication concerns faculty development. Although institutional change is always challenging, the practice of weekly titling lends itself particularly well to collaborative, workshop-based forms of professional learning. Rather than beginning from abstract principles of course design, educators can be invited to bring, create, or revise titles for a course they are

actively teaching, and to share both the resulting titles and the experience of articulating them. Since titles are compact and familiar, they lower the barrier to discussion, making pedagogical intent visible without requiring extensive documentation or wholesale redesign. In this way, faculty development can gain an emphasis on shared sense-making around narrative, emphasis, and transition.

One challenge may be that the value of weekly titles is often not immediately apparent. Early on, articulating weekly intent can feel like unnecessary overhead or “busy work,” particularly under high teaching loads. The benefits tend to emerge only retrospectively, across multiple deliveries of the same course. But this delayed appreciation is itself instructive. Practices that primarily support long-term orientation and reflective re-entry are easy to overlook in environments that prioritise short-term efficiency or visible innovation. Making such practices explicit, shareable, and discussable is therefore a central challenge for faculty development initiatives.

From a workshopping perspective, the potential of these ideas is further strengthened by their connection to broader cultural practices that shape expectation, memory, and interpretation. For example, television episode titles often operate as narrative cues whose significance becomes clear only in retrospect; anyone who has seen the *Breaking Bad* episode “Face Off” will remember the moment when the title’s deeper meaning becomes apparent. In writing craft, similarly, devices such as loglines, beat sheets, and chapter titles help authors and readers orient themselves within a larger narrative arc (e.g., Mittell, 2015). Drawing attention to these familiar examples can help educators recognise how brief textual cues shape anticipation and meaning, and why titles matter beyond simple labelling.

Some writers, such as Jacobs (2010), have taken the transformative potential of “themes” to surprising extremes through so-called “lifestyle experiments,” in which individuals adopt a weekly constraint or focus to provoke reflection and change. While pedagogical practice is not a lifestyle experiment, the analogy is suggestive. An institution inviting faculty to adopt explicit weekly titles for a limited period, and to share reflections on the experience, would likely raise eyebrows. Yet in contexts characterised by rapid educational change, resource constraints, and the need to scale reflective practice without extensive infrastructure, such low-risk, time-bounded experiments may offer a pragmatic route to capacity building, in addition to reflecting educationally beneficial practice.

Whatever the approach taken, this paper has suggested that instructor-facing wayfinding practices merit greater attention in both educational research and faculty development. Attention to small, sustainable design practices can open new avenues for institutional growth as well as reflective teaching and educational design. By treating weekly titles not as administrative labels but as navigational landmarks, educators and organisations can support ways of thinking about courses that are collaborative, resilient, and imaginative.

## Conclusion

This paper has examined the practice of assigning intentional weekly titles in multi-week university courses, interpreting their role through a pedagogical wayfinding lens. Weekly titles were framed as instructor-facing micro-advance organisers that can function as lightweight “You are here” markers within a course, supporting orientation, coherence, and pedagogical memory across repeated deliveries. Rather than seeking to demonstrate effectiveness through formal evaluation, the paper aimed to make visible why such a deceptively simple practice can

have disproportionate influence on how courses are designed, revisited, and sustained over time.

By situating weekly titles at the intersection of advance organiser theory, narrative cognition, small teaching, and wayfinding, the paper reframes them as a meaningful pedagogical design choice rather than a purely organisational device. In fields such as cartography, architecture, and interface design, explicit orientation cues are treated as fundamental to usability. In education, by contrast, comparable supports for instructor orientation are often implicit, informal, or left to individual habit. Framing the absence of such cues as consequential rather than neutral helps bring weekly titles into view as a significant element of pedagogical design, particularly in courses that are complex, abstract, or taught intermittently across years.

Seen in this light, weekly titles represent a minimal, low-cost practice that requires no specialised technology, training, or institutional infrastructure. Their simplicity supports transfer across diverse educational contexts, including those characterised by limited resources, high teaching loads, or instructor turnover. At the same time, the practice aligns naturally with contemporary teaching workflows, in which small, repeatable design decisions accumulate into durable pedagogical structure.

Future work could extend this perspective by identifying other micro-design practices that support instructor orientation, exploring disciplinary differences in pedagogical wayfinding, or examining how educational platforms might better preserve and surface pedagogical intent over time. Attending to weekly titles as a design concern can itself be read as a signpost, pointing toward forms of sustainable pedagogical improvement that arise not from large-scale reform, but from small, deliberate design acts that help educators know where they are—and where they are going.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

Generative AI tools were used during the writing process to support drafting and editing. The author retained full control over the content and is responsible for all interpretations and conclusions presented in this paper.

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