Post 4 – Anticipation, Tesler's Law, Poka-Yoke Principle

My LIBR 240 instructor, Raymond Dean, created a course site separate from D2L, and I think it shows many web usability principles. I see three different principles at work in one very simple but very helpful element. The red circle on the screen shot below indicates this element. There is a drop down that allows students to choose the assignment number for which they are submitting a response. Instead of making this an annoying and hazardous task (i.e. the student always has to make a selection, or may forget to choose), Raymond has it set to update *automatically* to the current week's assignment. For example, on the first day of next week's class, the drop down will automatically change from Assignment 2 to Assignment 3. Again, while this seems like a potentially annoying additional task or an insignificant and inconsequential element, it's actually full of excellent functionality and usability.

Anticipation (Tognazzini)
The drop down anticipates users needs by automatically adjusting to the proper assignment number based on the date. For those who'd like to work ahead, they can do so through the same drop down menu, appropriately categorizing their work so that the instructor can easily find and grade it.

Tesler's Law (Saffer, p. 136)
Allowing multiple assignments to be uploaded through the same interface poses some challenges in terms of organizing those assignments for not only the instructor's retrieval, but also future reference and retrieval for the students. There is complexity involved here in terms of denoting which assignment is being submitted. However, instead of allowing the complexity to fall on students' shoulders, the instructor has moved it to the system, which automatically updates the drop down selection based on the date. The task is simplified for the student. As Amanda pointed out in her post on Tesler's law, moving complexity from the user to the system is a user-centered method to create user-friendly interfaces.

Poka-Yoke Principle (Saffer, p. 137)
The automatically adjusting drop down also helps to error-proof the assignment submission box. Perhaps a student is rushing to submit this week's assignment and completely forgets about the drop down menu. What might result in an error and confusion in interfaces that don't error-proof is prevented because the drop down automatically adjusts to the appropriate assignment number based on date.

What other usability principles do you see in action on this page?

Can you provide another example of a site element that reduces complexity for the user?