

Chapter 2

Engaging Students Through Creative Assignments and Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers several models teachers can use to better engage students in content through the use of creative assignments. It begins with the importance of effective online orientation and building student learning outcomes specific to online classes. That is followed by examples of how to use the traditional discussion forum in new ways to encourage true intellectual exchange. The chapter ends with a series of sample creative assignments that help students personalize and fully integrate complex content.

INTRODUCTION

As stated in the opening chapter, there is not only one way to create effective online spaces. This chapter models the ideas in the opening work and offers practical solutions to some of the issues raised therein. It is intended to be a resource and a place to start for those wishing to improve their online offerings.

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Creating an Effective Orientation Module (Julie C. Tatlock, PhD)

It is important to remember that while students have ample experience with social media online, they have far less skill doing the kinds of work required in a fully online course. In a fully asynchronous online class, it is essential to evaluate students' technological abilities and teach them what they need to successfully navigate the class. Even if your university benefits from an organized LMS orientation through an instructional design team, you still should invest the time to create an orientation specific to your class. While students might be used to a paper syllabus, I go with a fully integrated orientation module in my LMS. In my mind such a syllabus module forces students into the digital space right away.

ORIENTATION MODULE

Introductions and Discussion Forum

Humanize yourself as the faculty member. In a face-to-face class, you may want to ensure that student's respect your authority from the first moment, while in an online class, you might already seem quite distant to students. I suggest finding a way to make yourself feel less remote by using an introduction forum. Ask students to offer a unique representation of an aspect of their personality. It might be an avatar, a song, an animal they relate to, or an art piece they create. Also consider requiring that they choose a student learning outcome that most resonates with them. This assignment also ensures that can use the discussion forum from a technical standpoint. The faculty should be present in this opening but in a simple way. You might like a students' post or comment quickly on the outcome they chose. Make this initial assignment low stakes, perhaps even a simple complete/incomplete grade.

Student Learning Outcomes, Expectations, and Submitting a Work Calendar

As Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) are our main goals for the course, I want to make sure students take some time to think about them. It is helpful to list each goal and connect that goal with a specific assessment. For example, one of my SLOs says that students will learn to use digital information in a sophisticated and academic way. In a chart, I connect this to where in the course this will happen. While the humanities generally shies away from emphasizing work skills, I do not. I think that our courses already prepare students for future employment and pointing it out simply makes it clear.

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