Teaching Tips/Notes

Using Remind101 as a Classroom Communication Tool

Introduction

Effective student-teacher communication is critical for success in any class (Dobransky and Frymier, 2004). Far too often, students and instructors communicate at a minimal level and that can create major problems. One important element within a student-teacher relationship is out-of-class communication and when levels of out-of-class communication increase, so will student learning (Dobransky and Frymier, 2004).

Today's students are digitally literate (Roberts, Newman and Schwartzstein, 2012). Many students carry multiple electronic devices and use various communication methods to make sure they are always connected to friends, events and information (Papp and Matulich, 2012). In fact, 99.8% of college students reportedly own one or more mobile phones (Truong, 2010). Furthermore, 97% of students report they use SMS as their main form of communication (Truong, 2010). Because students rely on using text messages as their primary communication tool and are moving away from e-mail in their personal lives (Lenhart et al., 2011), instructors may need to rethink the most reliable ways to stay in touch with their students (Kolowich, 2011).

While it is possible to manually send text messages to students, the process is cumbersome and involves the students giving the instructor their mobile phone number, which can lead to privacy issues (Nielson and Webb, 2011). An alternative approach is to select a group texting tool, which students can choose to opt-in if they wish to receive messages from the faculty member via SMS. This type of service can build the bridge between teacher to student communication and allows them to stay connected no matter which devices(s) they are using. Remind101 is exactly that type of service: "A safe way for teachers to text message students and stay in touch with parents" (Remind101, 2012). This idea can assist agricultural educators in developing "meaningful, engaged learning in all environments" (Doerfert, 2011, p. 21).

Procedure

Instructors can register for a free account at www.remind101.com (Remind101, 2012). Each instructor is assigned a phone number, to which a student will text to subscribe. After registering a class, instructors are given a PDF with instructions they can print out or post on course websites. This makes for quick and easy sign up for both students and teachers. This is an opt-in service, which means that students have to enter a confirmation code to state that they do want to be contacted through Remind101.

It's obvious that students are using mobile phones to communicate, but privacy concerns become an issue when instructors and professors are involved. Remind101 keeps phone numbers hidden so that the parties cannot see other's numbers (Remind101, 2012). Once subscribed, Remind101 will ask for the students' name via text so the instructor can identify them by name only. Students may choose to receive messages via email if they prefer.

Remind101 also allows for pre-planned communication to occur. Instructors can go online to create messages and schedule them to go out at a later date/time (Remind101, 2012). The message history shows when and to whom a message was sent. The available iPhone/Android app makes Remind101 even more versatile since instructors can use any smart phone to send reminders on the go when a computer isn't available.

Assessment

Remind101 was implemented in two agricultural communications courses and one student organization at Texas Tech University and Oklahoma State University. Registering for the Remind101 list was optional and Table 1 describes the level of participation in each of the student groups.

The class instructors and organization adviser used Remind101 to send messages to students with reminders and announcements. Below are a few example messages sent to the students:

Table 1. Student Participation in Remind101 Class Lists

Group	Total Student	Remind101 Students	%
Upper-level design course	26	20	76.9
Upper-level writing course	30	25	83.3
Student organization	25	23	92.0

Teaching Tips/Notes

Instructor 1: Flyer 2 peer review during class today. Bring your first draft (as complete as possible) to class and be ready to give and receive feedback.

Instructor 2: Remember: No class. Career Fair today. 12:30-4:30 GIA. Take copies of your amazing new résumé. Research the cos. before you talk to them

Organization: Hey guys- Don't forget to wear your polos to training today for pictures.

In an evaluation survey, students (N = 39) indicated their agreement with statements about Remind101 on a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Participants said they agreed they prefer using Remind101 to communicate ($M = 4.49,$ SD = .72) and they wished more instructors used the service ($M = 4.62,$ SD = 63). When talking about remind101, one student said "It was easy to use, fast and helped keep me on track. So far I haven't forgot about an assignment b/c of it!" Another student said "It's a nice reminder through my phone, which I have *all* the time." One student who did not opt-in to the service said, "I fear this program takes away part of the responsibility aspect of college."

Advice for Others

The following tips may help instructors who wish to use Remind101:

- Instructors should post remind101 messages in other places (such as class websites) since all students may not have a phone or may choose not to opt-in to Remind101.
- Instructors and students should be aware that Remind101 messages are part of a one-way conversation. Students would like to respond to text messages, but cannot via Remind101.
- Instructors are unable to send Remind101 messages directly from the SMS application on a cell phone. Rather, an instructor must log into the Remind101 website or use the iPhone/Android application.
- Instructors must keep their messages brief and stay under 140 characters, which is the message limit for non-iPhone users.
- This service is not only for homework updates or reminders. Instructors should get fun with it; try trivia contests, motivation, school spirit, or "fast facts" before tests/quizzes.

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The Frustrations of Learning How to Write a Scientific Paper

Abstract

Undergraduate students typically learn to write an English research paper by the ninth grade. However, most undergraduate students are not exposed to writing scientifically until at least their junior year. An English research paper and a scientific paper are two different things. A research paper written for an English class can contain "folksy" words and can be long and elaborate. On the other hand a scientific paper demands the author be succinct, create densely packed paragraphs with facts, all of which must be properly cited. Essentially, a scientific paper is tedious to read, but filled with only the important facts and details. Learning to write such a style of paper can be exceptionally frustrating, especially considering the lack of formal education available to undergraduate students. There is a need to incorporate learning to write scientifically in early undergraduate writing courses as it would benefit the scientific community as a whole.

Introduction

A recent endeavor [1] and writing my first major scientific paper proved both educational and exceptionally frustrating [2]. The major frustration of writing this paper didn't stem from a dislike of the topic, a lack of available information, or the time to work on the paper. The major frustration came from learning how to write the paper scientifically. As an undergraduate student, I have taken several English courses during the course of my academic career. Needless to say I have been taught how to write opinion articles, English research papers, narratives, short stories and poetry, but none of my courses have remotely mentioned how to write a scientific paper. Scientific writing is a writing style all its own, not unlike learning to speak a new language, it is designed to convey relevant data in the most efficient and reproducible manner possible. It demands that the author's thoughts be composed into well written, data filled paragraphs that are arranged in a set order and with strict formatting guidelines. Scientific writing contains only the most important information and conveys this information in a straight forward, data rich method. Unnecessary adjectives and adverbs are to be excluded as well as "folksy" words. Most writing styles taught in an English class encourage long elaborate paragraphs filled with an abundance of unnecessary adjectives and adverbs, essentially words that enrich the opinion, message, or story being conveyed. To make matters worse, scientific writing is not only a totally different writing style, but it is also accompanied by strict formatting rules as well. There are no fancy fonts or headings, large unneeded spaces or figures placed in text. In addition, each academic journal has set guidelines for how to format a scientific document, so when writing a scientific document one must also take into account the formatting required by the publisher. Taking all of this on at once and being tasked to write one's first major scientific paper can be daunting and overwhelmingly frustrating [1, 2].

Abounding Frustrations

Beginning the endeavor of writing my first major scientific paper, I had little knowledge of how to write scientifically and no proper instruction or course to learn from. I also was not familiar with how the journal expected the format of the paper. To make matters worse the scientific paper was to be written by a team of writers, of which almost none had any experience writing scientifically. This lead to many hours of indecisive time wasting and uncertainty. The initial few drafts of the paper were rough and not even remotely written scientifically to say the least. As the paper began to come together and a draft was sent to faculty co-authors for review and input, it became quite evident that the paper needed grammatical and scientific revision. Attempting to re-write the paper scientifically yielded frustrating results as the writing team still had almost no idea how to write scientifically. Many hours were spent reading over the paper, revising sentences and cutting out unnecessary words. The frustration of learning to write scientifically also made it difficult to find motivation to work on the article and was sometimes deterrence, as it was always a struggle to get the information composed in the proper manner. This only adds to the frustration because the paper needed to be written, but was difficult to correctly compose.

The final draft of the article sent to a faculty co-author still yielded frustrating results pinpointing the lack of understanding about writing scientifically. It can be very discouraging for an undergraduate student when an article that consumed many hours of valuable time fails to bring satisfactory results of a quality article worthy of recognition as a good entrance to scientific writing. In time scientific writing will become easier, but for now it remains a frustrating, though exceptionally beneficial, skill to have to learn. With little formal instruction to draw from, learning to write scientifically ultimately comes down to teaching oneself.

Proper Instruction

Typical undergraduate students have taken several English courses prior to admittance into a university and upon entering a university, are commonly required to take an introductory English course as part of a general

education requirement. However, for the most part there is limited to no instruction on proper scientific writing in any of these courses. There is an abundance of instruction on how to write poems, personal narratives, English research papers, opinion articles, short stories, but scientific writing seems to be ignored. For students intent on pursing a scientific career, publications in peer reviewed academic journals are inevitable and as such the ability to write scientifically is required. Proper instruction and background on scientific writing in English courses would benefit students immensely by giving students a foundation to begin building their scientific writing skills.

Universities typically provide courses on how to write scientific papers, but most are reserved for junior or senior level students. By then it is too late. Exposing undergraduate students to instruction on writing scientifically early on in their academic career could reduce the amount of frustration experienced when writing a scientific paper. This could potentially increase the amount of valuable scientific material that is published and available for the academic community. Additionally, it may help alleviate the frustrations that professor's experience when serving as mentors to undergraduate students undertaking their first scientific publication. This could also help professors be more willing to work with undergraduate students who wish to pursue scientific publications. Scientific writing takes practice to get better at and can be frustrating to learn, but earlier formal exposure to the writing style can help undergraduate students achieve their first scientific publication with fewer frustrating events and potentially career changing discouragements.

Conclusion

Scientific writing is definitely different than any other style of writing. It is centered on conveying information in a logical and efficient manner. As such, the writing style is designed to provide data in a logical, data rich fashion and as succinctly as possible, only including the pertinent information. Learning to effectively write scientifically can be exceptionally frustrating to learn and can be a deterrence when writing one's first scientific paper. There is often little official instruction on writing scientific papers for most undergraduates until their junior or senior years. Earlier exposure to writing scientific papers would be beneficial to the scientific community as it has the potential to increase the amount of publications and knowledge available. The successful completion of one's first scientific paper can be a rewarding experience to the frustrations after learning the important skill of scientific writing.

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Peer Groups and Pairs: Many Benefits for the Online Setting!

Introduction

Exchanging papers with a classmate is very common in most college classrooms (Wolfe, 2004). It encourages interaction between students which has been known to improve student learning. The teaching technique which is one of many is used primarily in face-to-face classrooms. In contrast, most present-day instructors are faced with the need to enhance student interaction in online settings especially since the number of online settings has increased. Over the past several years, online enrollments have been growing substantially faster than overall higher education enrollments (The Sloan Consortium, 2013), for instance, almost 3.5 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2006 term; a nearly 10% increase over the number reported the previous year. As instructors are being expected to increase and assess student learning outcomes in higher education, it is important for these same instructors to address online students.

To address this need, a teaching technique is being used often in the online setting which is "peer groups or pairs." Wolf (2004) conducted a study that examined how an online peer review system affects the student learning process. He found there were many advantages to online peer reviews and groups such as students' role playing as the "teacher." As a result, students: gained better knowledge for the course's grading process, did not have to wait on the teacher to grade papers and who knew more about the assignment instructions were able to help their peers who may have been struggling. And, it resulted in less work for the teacher. Wolfe also

noticed that students seemed to work harder to impress their peers and accepted the feedback better from them as well. However, he pointed out a few disadvantages were experienced such as, possible harsh comments in some reviews, easily open for cheating, late/missing work, students may do more than what is required and students may/may not understand the basics of web technology. Similarly, Ertmer et al. (2007) reported that student discussions play a huge role during online settings, allowing students to exchange ideas, offer explanations, share perspectives and clarify understandings especially during blogging. If the use of peer feedback can reduce the teacher's workload in an online course yet help maintain a high quality of postings, peer groups and pairs would be an effective strategy for learning in an online course.

Most importantly, instructors are encouraged to use various teaching techniques in the online setting since many students reside in different cities, states and even countries, still preferring to have a more personal learning experience with their peers; basically, it is a way for them to "connect with one another."

Procedure

To implement the peer learning environment, instructors will need to assess their classes' needs and available resources. Wolfe provides the following steps for implementing a peer group assignment,
1. Provide instructions to students for completing the assignment(s); 2- Instruct student to post assignments to the course website/platform; 3- Remind students to log in, accesses list of URLs for the other students and review the posted assignment(s); and 4-Inform students they must submit a score and answer questions/leave constructive comments (immediately available for the receiving student). Another technique is discussion boards tailored to course content. For example, students are instructed to respond to a discussion question with a response to a question provided by the instructor and also respond to another students' post. Lastly, Ertmer et al provided an activity were two discussion questions were students post weekly responses and feedback defined as: 1. Assigning a numerical score (0-2) based on Bloom's taxonomy; and 2. Providing descriptive comments supporting the score and the quality of the post.

Assessment

Ultimately, peer groups and pairs improves student learning especially writing skills; for example, in a study conducted by Liang and Tsai (2010) that assessed the use of writing via online peer assessment, found that students gained progressively higher scores; and significantly improved their science writing in terms of both the expert's and peers' evaluations. When students engage in peer reviews, the practice of peer assessment may help them identify their own writing weaknesses. Or, when reviewing peers' work, students have more opportunities to carefully read examples of superior writing by their peers (Liang and Tsai, 2010). In the end, if the use of peer feedback can reduce the teacher's workload in an online course, yet help maintain a high quality of postings, this would be an effective strategy for learning in an online course (Ertmer et al., 2007), and should be considered.

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Blending the Three-Part Mission of the Land Grant University

Introduction

The core of the land-grant university system is the three-part mission of research, extension and education. Ideally, each part of the mission should benefit the other components of the mission. The "Explore Research at the University of Florida" video project has successfully blended all three parts of the mission. Students take an advanced digital media production course where they develop videos documenting research at the university and the videos then serve as extension of research. The videos are then displayed at the Florida Museum of Natural History and various online, broadcast and cable television outlets.

Teaching

To be accepted into the class where the sole focus is the production of the videos, students must submit video resumes showcasing what they have been able to apply in an introductory digital media course. The advanced production course begins with students practicing shooting and editing videos before they begin working with researchers. The production process goes as follows: 1) stories are assigned to students, 2) students conduct pre-interviews with researchers as preparation for both the students and the researchers, 3) the interviews are conducted, 4) students edit their videos, 5) the videos are critiqued by the instructors and fellow students at least twice, 6) the researchers review the videos, 7) re-editing occurs if the researchers do not approve of the videos initially, 8) final approvals are received from the researchers, 9) and videos are submitted to the museum. Surveys have been conducted of both the students and participating researchers. As found in surveys, the students have reported increased skills in video production, improved ability to coach interviewees and gains in communicating science. Other impacts on the students includes the museum hiring three students as video producers as a direct result of having participated in the class. In total, 130 videos have been produced for the project.

Research

The videos focus on explaining the practical impacts of scientific research being conducted at the University of Florida. The goal of the videos is to take what can sometimes seem like esoteric research and show how the research translates into real-world applications. Some examples include the use of algorithms to detect landmines, mapping cell phone use to track malaria and manipulating light colors to affect plant growth. The researchers are able to tell the story of their research in their own words, in an understandable manner. They have realized increased exposure for themselves, their research and their departments/centers. Surveys have shown the researchers have been satisfied with the process. They also reported positive feedback from viewers, resulting from their stories being aired on the local PBS affiliate.

Extension

The extension component of the project stems from the dissemination of the videos. Initially, the videos were intended to be on display at the Florida Museum of Natural History, as well as being made available through the museum's YouTube and TeacherTube pages. Since September 2012, there have been almost 200,000 views of the videos online. The videos have reached other outlets, including the National Science Foundation website, a local PBS affiliate, cable television outlets across the state, webinars generated from video content and use in the curriculum of the Florida Virtual School. The videos have also been used to tie into articles from the Explore Research magazine produced by the UF Office of Research.

Recommendations for Implementing Similar Programs

To implement a similar program at another university, it is recommended to identify and work with a real client, in this case, the Florida Museum of Natural History. At other universities, it may be working a university's Office of Research or Experiment Station as a first step. It is also worth considering specialized centers at your university. Examples at UF include the Water Institute, Climate Institute and Center for Public Issues Education, though more exist. It is also important to note these programs are not meant to supplant college and/or university communications centers. The programs should exist to provide students with learning opportunities, while also benefiting the universities' other functions.

Recommendations for Incorporating Students

For a course like this that incorporates the three-part mission of the land-grant system to succeed, it is important to make the course worthwhile for the students, providing them with something more than a grade. Students should feel that they are beneficially contributing to a client, with an end product that will be used, while at the same time, students should gain important knowledge and skills in the process of meeting the needs of the client. This particular course utilizes a

real client with a real project. This is contrasted with courses that develop projects for a real client, but the client does use the finished product, or with courses that create hypothetical clients and hypothetical projects that are never used. It is important for the projects to be client-driven, to provide students with the real-world experiences they face upon graduation. Setting a high bar of professional expectation is also necessary for success. Students need to know that they are expected to create as close to a professionally produced project as possible. It is the experience of instructors of this course that students have risen to the expectations that are explained to them at the beginning of the semester. It is also recommended that instructors be selective when admitting students to a course of this nature. In addition to showing excellence in the introductory digital media

production course, students had to submit a resume video and provide a brief explanation on why they wanted to take the course, before being allowed to enroll. Having a system like this in place means only those students who want to excel, learn new or advanced skills and benefit from the high-stakes assignments will be part of the course.

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