

Web-Papers: Using an Online Journal Format for Writing Assignments

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Abstract

To give students experience in organizing presentations by using hyperlinks in the style of online articles, I require a “Web-paper” in my Developmental Anatomy course. Students are assigned a topic and work in pairs to develop a paper suitable for publication in an e-journal. The paper consists of an extended abstract with links to supporting materials, including additional text, illustrations, and definitions of technical terms. Students upload the Web-paper to their university locker space in the form of a small Web site. Each paper is reviewed by two student peers, and the authors must respond to the reviewers’ comments by sending a reply to me (the editor of the fictitious e-journal). The Web-paper project has achieved the goals of promoting learning of biological concepts, improving communication skills, and exposing students to the peer review process of publication.

Presentation Notes

Objectives of Class Assignments

For many years, I have used assignments in my Developmental Anatomy class with the following objectives in mind:

- 1) To develop student skills in obtaining and synthesizing information on biological topics
- 2) To improve student skills in communication
- 3) To encourage collaborative interactions among students.

Table 1 shows three types of assignments and the type(s) of communication skills that each was designed to enhance (see URLs below for examples).

Table 1. Assignments and Communication Skills

Assignment	Written Presentation	Oral Presentation	Collaboration
On-line essay	X		
In-class exercises	X	or X	X
Major paper	X	X	X

Given the importance of the Internet as a communication tool and the emergence of e-journals, I recently decided to add two additional objectives to class assignments:

- 4) To enhance student skills in presenting information via the Internet
- 5) To provide practice in peer review, as done when publishing in the field of biology.

A new type of assignment, which I call a Web-paper, fulfills all of the original and new objectives.

Creation of a Web-Paper

Students worked in pairs and picked a topic from a list given by the instructor. Each student pair then developed a Web-paper in the form of a small Web site, which was uploaded to the student's university locker. The Web-paper followed the style of some current e-journals; it consisted of a page of text (extended abstract) and links to images and additional text. Thus, all diagrams, photographs, definitions, and paragraphs of supporting details were accessed through hyperlinks. The students were treated as authors, and the instructor played the role of editor of the journal. The student authors were provided with guidelines covering style, length, and content of the paper as well as directions for making links, using illustrations, and providing proper references. Each student also served as a reviewer for one Web-paper; thus, each paper received two reviews. Reviewers also followed a set of guidelines when writing their reviews. (See URLs below for author and reviewer guidelines.) The authors were required to respond to the reviewers' comments on a tight schedule and to report subsequent changes to their paper to the editor. After the Web-papers had been revised, the authors presented the material during class, using their Web site for visual aids. Thus, both written and oral skills were utilized.

Grading of Web-papers and Student Response

The Web-papers were graded on an 80-point scale with emphasis on good organization and adherence to the guidelines. Both written and oral aspects were judged, but with emphasis on the written format. The student reviews were graded on a 20-point scale with emphasis on adherence to the reviewer guidelines and thoroughness of the review. Students had little problem with the technical aspects of the Web-paper project. Since they worked in pairs, at least one of the two students was usually able to solve any technical problem with little input from the instructor. Students were initially anxious about the project, since constructing a Web site with hyperlinks was a new experience for most of them. However, as the project progressed, most students appreciated the skills that they were developing and realized that they would need to do similar things in their professional future. At the end of the project, most students indicated that they would prefer to create a Web-paper instead of a traditional term paper in future classes, if given a choice. The quality of the Web-papers varied, but all were acceptable and most ranged good to excellent. Some examples of student work may be accessed by the URLs below.

URLs

Examples of previous class assignments

Online essay:

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/essay.htm>

In-class exercise:

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/inclass.html>

Major paper:

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/paper.html>

Web-Paper Information Provided to Students

Example of a paper in an e-journal:

http://technologysource.org/article/rising_stars_in_virtual_education/

Example of a paper in an online biology journal:

<http://www.molbiolcell.org/cgi/content/full/18/12/4741#T1>

Topics for the Web-paper:

http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/topics_only.html

Guidelines for student authors:

http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/author_guidelines.html

Guidelines for student reviewers:

http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/reviewer_guidelines.html

Schedule for six student pairs:

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/schedule.html>

Examples of Student Work

(Note: Links within these student webpapers may not work.)

A student review of a Web-paper:

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/review-Kevin.htm>

A student author's response to a review:

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/response-Kevin.htm>

Student Web-papers:

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/Kim.html>

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/Corey.html>

http://www.ncsu.edu/project/bbprojects/unc2008/Vann_webpaper.html

Video excerpts of a student presenting his Web-paper:

http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/project/bbprojects/unc2008/student_flash.html