

Paperless Assignment: Discussion Forum in Angel
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In an online or hybrid course, discussion forums can be helpful in getting students to interact and to demonstrate their understanding of materials such as reading assignments. Such courses reduce the college's overall carbon footprint because impact from commuting is lowered. In distance learning, hybrid, and also in web enhanced courses, faculty can reduce the amount of paper used by having students post their ideas in a discussion forum instead of collecting a paper homework assignment.

You can divide the class into small groups by creating more than one forum and assigning a certain number of students to each forum. Alternately, you can set up teams.

Example

Here is an example of a reading assignment and discussion question I have used successfully in my Distance Learning course. The reading assignment was "The Story of An Hour" by Kate Chopin. The directions read:

Use this discussion board to discuss the story "Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin on page 15. You must create one new post and reply to two posts in order to fulfill your attendance requirement for this week. Your new post must be a paragraph of at least ten sentences, must include at least one quote or paragraph from the text, and must use MLA format. I've started a few threads with questions, but please feel free to add your own.

I then began some discussion threads with the following questions:

- What is your opinion of Mrs. Mallard? Do you think she is a generally good person or a generally bad person? Explain why. What do you think her marriage had been like?
- Do you notice any symbols of renewal and rebirth in this story?
- What is the setting of this story? What effect does the time period have on gender roles? How would the story be different if it was set in current times?
- In the beginning of the story, the main character is called "Mrs. Mallard". When is her first name used? Why do you think she is initially called "Mrs. Mallard" and not called by her first name?

Students then fulfilled their posting requirements by responding to my initial posts, responding to each others' posts, and starting new posts of their own, on topics such as Irony or What Really Killed Mrs. Mallard.

I found this activity helpful in encouraging students to communicate with each other and develop opinions about the material without looking to me, the instructor, for initial reactions and interpretations.

Tips

A discussion forum can be a useful way to keep track of student participation without having to spend time after each class trying to remember who participated in classroom discussions. A discussion board is also a good alternative to written assignments for students that may have different learning styles. It can be linked to a grade book feature in Angel to keep track of activity.

Be sure to have clear start and end days and clear objectives for the discussion forum. For example, a discussion forum may begin on Monday and end of Friday, and students may be required to make one new post and two replies in order to get credit for the assignment.

Also have clear requirements for what you want students to post or what constitutes an acceptable post. For example, you may instruct students that their new post must be a paragraph of at least ten sentences that cites the text once in MLA format.