



Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

Virtual Close Reading, Large Class, Multiple Technologies

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Rationale:

My students are introduced to academic texts in their general education course. For many of them it is their first opportunity to read something that is not a textbook. For this reason, I dedicate one week to a close reading of such a text in my HUM 2020, 300-student course. In Spring 2020, the course moved from mixed mode to virtual over spring break and, of course, this class was up next.

Description:

The first step is constructing an accessible Google/Office document of the reading. Depending on the length of the article and the number of students in the course, you may need to create several copies of the document. For my particular section of about 150 students and an academic article with fifteen numbered sections, I figured that, at the most, I would need two copies of the document if I were to divide students into small groups of five, each one being assigned to one section of the text.

In order to save time, I provided an example of what a close reading of an academic article looks like. I used the highlighter and comment boxes to demonstrate to students how to complete the exercise. I had to ensure that this was completed in advance of uploading the document to Google/Office.

As class begins via Zoom, we see the shared document on the screen as I walk students briefly through the exercise, showing them my own example.

Using the Breakout Rooms function of Zoom, you are able to divide the class into groups of no more than five. Before groups are sent off to their rooms, you explain that groups 1 through 15 will be associated with sections 1 through 15 of the text. You then can explain that those with 16- through 30 correspond with sections 1 through 15 in the other document – something you may have to message those groups about after the students are sent to their breakout rooms.

NOTE: If your article does not have identifiable sections, it is important to create those dividers yourself before sharing the document.

At this point, distribute students to their rooms. Then, share the two document links for the class. Clearly articulate what document is for groups 1 through 15 and what document is for groups 16 through 30. At this point, you should have 75 students working on a single document.

If you are working with a smaller class, you can always run things more informally – giving groups initial tasks and then popping in on them to assign more sections of the text, if not all sections have been assigned.

Students may choose to have one student share the document and allow one student to complete editing. Students may further divide the section into paragraphs and work on them independently. Students may also choose to just speak to each other in the breakout room and make changes more collaboratively and informally. In any event, they are working through the text carefully.

As the instructor, you are able to jump between groups and students can always message you through the chat function to ask you to come and join their group.

The size of your class and the length of your article will determine how much time you spend in breakout rooms, but you are always able to check the progress of the class by scanning either document. When you do return from breakout rooms, you can have all or some of the students report out on what they learned. However, the final product of each group is available for all those who participated.

As the instructor, it is important to review the work of each group to ensure that nothing is too misleading or incorrect. You are able to provide comment responses to the students if any issues arise. Once you've reviewed the documents after the class has come to an end, you can message students through Webcourses to let them know that you've reviewed and responded to the close reading that they conducted.

I would suggest that the use of Zoom, Google/Office, and Webcourses enhanced the experience and impact of the assignment. It was more accessible and more collaborative than it may have been in the classroom.

Appraisal:

In that course, I have been tracking the grades of those who participate in active learning activities and those who do not. In this particular case, there was a small but noticeable difference among students who participated and those who did not. The standard deviation was much greater among those who did not participate. Students who did participate tended to score slightly higher on the assignment. Most notably, 7% of the class who did not participate complete the weekly related assignment late or not at all as opposed to 0% of those who did participate. I'm looking forward to running the assignment again in Spring 2021.

Link or explanation:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/196AzeROufrij_lWjo2304qShfpJBJ5kR92bPuYrIRcUo/edit?usp=sharing