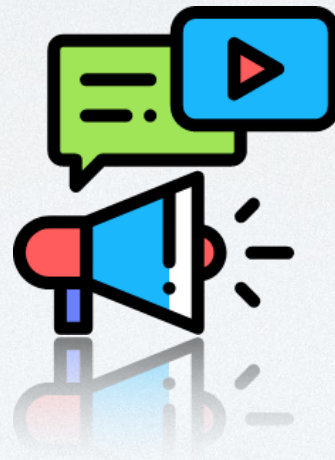Assessment Case Study

Challenges Using Blogs, Vlogs and Podcasts

Claire Hansen and Roger Osborne - Challenges using blogs, vlogs and podcasts for assessment in a first-year English Literature subject.

Overview

In this JCU snapshot, we consider an innovative subject, designed to give students the opportunity to express themselves in different digital modalities, to make their own choices and to access good amounts of formative feedback.

While the assessment design was promising, the subject coordinators felt the assessment was not as effective as they hoped. This snapshot provides an overview of their design and the challenges they experienced.

[**Valid. Fair. Authentic. Continuous. Transparent. Varied Methods.**]

About this subject

EL1009 Great books: Epochs and Classics

Internal and External Study Mode

Townsville and Cairns Campus
Co-ordinator Claire Hansen and Roger Osborne
Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Education

The aim of this subject is to provide students with an engaging journey through the works of major authors and texts of English Literature.

The coordinators designed an assessment task whereby students created vlogs (video blogs), blogs, or podcasts to express their critical thoughts, to develop their digital writing skills in multiple modalities and to interpret the 'great books' that form the basis of study in this subject.

Additionally, their continuous assessment strategy was intended to provide students with opportunities:

- for guidance (scaffolding) in the way of informal, formative, summative and global feedback.

- to interact with other students in their classes and those studying online or at another campus.

Students are mainly BA or BEd students with a few international exchange and Psych students.

JCU

Celebrating 50 YEARS 1970 - 2020

Learning outcomes

✦ Identify the characteristics of a selected text in the context of a major literary period and movement.

✦ Apply the method of close reading to the analysis and interpretation of set texts.

✦ Communicate and have an understanding of the interpretation of literary texts through the production of analytical and argumentative writing; and apply a complex understanding of one set text within its literary movement and period.

Assessment task

Blogs/ Vlogs or Podcasts (30%)

- ✦ Students write two blogs (750 words) or record two vlogs (video blogs) or a podcast (3 mins) between week 1-7 on a chosen text and post to a WordPress site that has been created for the subject.

- ✦ Students are encouraged to make their posts engaging to readers/ viewers/ listeners through the use of images, graphics, videos and links.

- ✦ Students are also encouraged to respond to each others' posts.

- ✦ Finally, students collate their blogs/vlogs/ podcasts into one Word document and submit to LearnJCU for marking.

This assessment task was designed, not only to help students complete their readings and provide feedback in various forms, but also to help students practise applied research skills thereby strengthening their capacity to complete the final essay for the subject.

Additionally, this assessment task provides an opportunity to develop multimodal communication skills and familiarity with contemporary digital communication platforms.

Challenges

In implementing this assessment strategy, there were a number of challenges the coordinators raised about the effectiveness of the assessment design.

Challenge 1: Getting the right balance of blogs, vlogs, podcasts

✦ In the initial implementation, students had to complete 3 blogs/vlogs/podcasts, however this became difficult to manage for students and with increasing student numbers so it was reduced to 2 blogs/vlogs/podcasts in the second year.

Challenge 2: Too many choices for students

✦ Students had choices around the weeks, and thus readings they chose to respond to in their blog/vlog/podcast.

✦ The subject coordinators felt they gave students too much choice and too many moving deadlines for their stage of study (first-year).

Challenge 3: Students confused around submission dates

✦ As due dates were determined by the weeks they chose for their readings, each student had their own unique due date which caused confusion.

✦ Students often left it a little late to get started and got a bit confused about dates – despite clear instructions and guidance provided.

✦ There were multiple due dates students needed to manage – for example there was an additional due date to submit their portfolio of blogs to the LearnJCU platform that was the same for all students. Students had difficulty managing all of these dates.

Challenge 4: Student engagement

✦ The subject coordinators believed that students would feel more accountability for their work as they were sharing it with other students – however this did not equate to student engagement for all students. Posting responses to other students' work was not compulsory, but encouraged, however, many students didn't engage with the opportunity.

✦ External students in particular were less engaged – the subject coordinators were unsure of students' expectations of engagement for an external online subject.

✦ Although there are many opportunities for guidance, checkpoints, feedback and continuous assessment, the reading workload was quite high and while some students readily engaged while others were more 'resistant readers'.

Challenge 5: Students' digital literacies

✦ Some students got a little confused working with Wordpress (a blogging platform) and related platforms (e.g. YouTube, Sound Cloud) which highlights some issues with students' digital literacy levels.

Challenge 6: Workload for the teaching team

✦ Due to confusion about due dates, there were many student queries to staff.

✦ Staff had to be aware of students' unique deadlines to manage submission dates and apply late penalties that were relevant.

The next iteration of the assessment task

The subject coordinators are now using online quizzes to add more checkpoints to ensure readings are completed. This also means students are writing on a broader range of texts. Quiz questions are also shorter and more targeted which is more manageable and clearer for first year students.

This revised approach has mitigated the need for student queries to staff (because there is no confusion on due dates). At the same time, the quizzes are designed to engender more engagement with the readings across the semester. However, this approach also comes with constraints in terms of fostering more creative approaches for expression and collaborative knowledge-making.

In addition, due to Covid-19, in 2020 this subject is running online-only, which means another assessment task (Assessment 3: Proposal Presentation) now requires use of technology for recording and publishing a presentation that is usually given live. Reducing the technological requirements of Assessment 1 balances this in a more manageable way for students.

Technologies

- WordPress

- YouTube/ Sound Cloud

- Storymap JS

- JS Story

- LearnJCU

Tips

✦ For first-year students, try to ensure that due dates are fixed and clear.

✦ Choices around assessment can be powerful but sometimes students just need clarity, especially in first year.

✦ Consider levels of digital literacy when selecting technologies and consider the staff time/workload to teach the chosen platforms

✦ Consider the time commitment necessary to complete the tasks for both students and staff.