

From Talking to Writing: Writing Assignments Based on Interviews Workshop Summary

At this workshop, faculty from four different disciplines described their interview-based assignments. The assignments were diverse but all gave students the opportunity to develop interviewing and writing skills; most also involved presentation and/or collaboration skills. These assignments enabled students to apply course concepts in practical situations and to have positive, personal learning experiences.

Carleen Yokotake – Speech

Students work in pairs to do 3 different interview assignments, each following the same sequence. The assignments are a getting acquainted interview with a classmate followed by introducing the partner to the class; a probing interview on a controversial subject; and a mock employment interview.

Assignment Sequence:

- Students get a form to fill out with information about themselves, their opinions on an issue or their job history and future goals, depending on the assignment. (For the employment interview, students must also prepare a one page cover letter and resume.)
- Each student exchanges the form with a partner; then they use an outline form to prepare questions for the interview. The emphasis is on effective communication using open (vs. closed) questions, building rapport and using proper interview etiquette.
- During some of the actual interviews, students work in threes: an interviewer, interviewee and a neutral observer/notetaker. In the observer role, students gain practice in giving direct yet tactful feedback to the pair.
- Afterwards, students fill out a self assessment of their strengths and weaknesses.

Outcomes/benefits of interview assignments:

Students gain confidence, learn communication strategies for asking questions, conducting interviews and being interviewed, and giving feedback. They also find that the communication skills they develop carry over to their personal lives and enhance their personal relationships.

Judy Lee – Economics

Introduction to Economics: First, students are given a hypothetical total of \$8,000 for 2 semesters; they are supposed to create a budget for it and describe what type of lifestyle they could maintain on this money. They share the budget with a partner. After this warmup assignment, students are assigned to interview someone who is at least 50 years old for at least an hour about what the economy was like when that person was the student's age. Students are told to find out about living conditions, jobs, attitudes, education and values, and to write a 2-3 page paper about the interview.

Outcomes/benefits of interview assignment:

Students see the relevance of classroom learning to “real life”, and often write longer and better papers than they thought they could. Personal rewards are especially significant: they appreciate what they have, and some become closer to the person they interviewed (often a parent or grandparent) than they were before.

Microeconomics: Students interview three business owners to learn about how the business got started, the market, how it has changed over time, fixed vs. variable costs, etc. They write up one of the interviews and share the experience in small groups, then present it to the class.

Outcomes/benefits of interview assignment:

Students apply economic concepts to a real business situation, and gain a great deal of confidence from the experience of contacting and interviewing three businesspeople.

Donna Matsumoto – Writing

Students in online or hybrid (web-enhanced) English 100 classes each interview a college teacher (in a field other than English) to find out what he or she expects from students’ writings. Then students work in teams to co-author a summary of what they learned from the interviews. In the process of doing the assignment, students post messages to one another in a discussion forum, meet for a scheduled online chat, and view PowerPoint presentations on conducting interviews and how to collaborate online. After posting their collectively written summary, each member completes a team assessment and posts it to the group.

Outcomes/benefits of interview assignment:

From the interview itself, students learn that writing, including grammatical and mechanical accuracy, is important in classes other than English. From the group project, they learn how to work with others, negotiate, allocate tasks and solve problems.

Stanley May – Business

The Office Supervision class is the OAT program’s capstone course, and its capstone project is an interview with an office supervisor. This process involves numerous steps and different writing and speaking/presentation tasks: Students arrange for the interview; confirm the appointment with a letter; prepare for and conduct the interview; write a thank you letter to the interviewee; write up the findings and present them to the class. Each student also evaluates all classmates’ presentations.

Outcomes/benefits of interview assignment:

Students learn about the “real world” challenges and rewards of office supervision, the field they have been studying for a number of semesters. They also gain confidence and make useful contacts. Some students have even succeeded in getting jobs from the people they interviewed!

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