

6-Step Outline

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1) Teaching & Learning Goals

Learning goal

- Students will write thoughtful one-page reflections that meet all the assignment criteria, specifically APA formatting

Objectives

- Utilize the assignment template in order to meet formatting and length expectations (APA, minimum of 1 page)
- Engage with each week's prompt to write a thoughtful reflection that correctly addresses that week's topic
- **Skill/ability** – I would like students to learn how to use APA format for writing one-page assignments
- **Behavior change** – I would like to prevent students from doing things like using excessive headers, changing margins, or font size to falsely increase the length of their assignment. I want them to write one full page of writing in APA style.
- **Knowledge** – I would like to increase their knowledge and utility of APA style writing
- **Assumptions** – I am testing an assumption that if I give a document that is prepared with APA format, students will be less likely to use an incorrect format or use underhanded techniques to reach the page requirement. As such, I believe their grades will improve if they are given a template with clear instructions on how to use the template in their assignments.

2) Teaching Questions

COM 225 An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication

- **Students** – When provided with an APA template, will students will be able to correctly write in APA and meet page length requirements for all one-page writing assignments throughout the semester?
- **Instructor/TA** – When students are provided with an APA template, will grading become more consistent and efficient?

3) Assessment Technique

- **Summative assessment** - The assignments are a form of summative assessment (evaluation based on a benchmark worth course points).
- An APA template was provided with each of the relevant assignments in order to test the teaching question and meet the learning goals.

4) Classroom Practice (Part 1)

- **Assignment** – COM 225 was a hybrid class, meaning that on Monday and Wednesday, students met in the classroom for lecture. On Friday, they did not need to meet, but instead were asked to complete the weekly assignment. The weekly assignments were called *Communication in the Real World* and asked students to reflect on the topic covered in lecture. Generally, these assignments asked students to write one full page reflection in APA format and style. The assignments were explained at the start of each semester and instructions were included in the assignment on D2L. Additionally, upon implementation of the APA template, I introduced the template and instructed the students on how to use them and the expectations of the assignments themselves.
- All weekly assignments were used to examine the teaching questions. An average grade of the scores was collected at the end of each semester. The assignments were submitted online and graded by myself and the other TA through the D2L platform. The assignments were not be anonymous, but the final grade calculation for the purposes of this report was anonymous.
- The assignment template was designed to help students learn APA formatting better and meet (or exceed) assignment guidelines regarding formatting and length and was utilized in all the *Communication in the Real World* assignments that required a reflection paper.

4) Classroom Practice (Part 2)

In order to understand the impact of the assessment with the template two methods were used:

- **Personal observation & Interview** – I was a TA for the course before and after the implementation of the template. I used my subjective experience as a grader to determine if the template eased the grading process. Additionally, the second TA for the spring 2020 semester was interviewed about their experiences grading using the APA template.
- **Quantitative analysis** – I also examined the average grade between semesters. Students should have received higher grades once the template was provided as they have more resources and a model for their assignments. A mean comparison test was conducted between the two semesters to determine if an improvement occurred.

5) Summary of Results

- **Teaching assistant observations** – The subjective experience as teaching assistants for COM 225 is an important part of the implementation of the APA template. After self-reflection and discussions with the other TA, we concluded that overall the templates were a helpful addition to the course. Primarily, they helped us to grade more consistently. Since students had access to correct formatting guidelines, we did not need to justify point reductions due to an incorrectly formatted submission. Instead, we could point them to the template and other resources (such as Purdue OWL) to correct their mistakes.
- **Grades** – There was a significant difference between the fall 2019 ($M=8.44$, $SD=1.7$) and spring 2020 ($M=8.12$, $SD=2.05$) semesters ($t(638) = 1.99$, $p = .007$).
 - COVID-19 may have skewed the data, so a separate post-hoc t -test was conducted ($t(637) = 2.64$, $p = .034$) using only the scores from the first half of each semester. There was still a significant decrease in scores from the fall 2019 ($M=8.78$, $SD=1.74$) and spring 2020 ($M=8.35$, $SD=2.12$) semesters.

6) Conclusion

- COVID-19 is an important consideration regarding the results of this teaching project. This likely had a large effect on the grading of the assignments in COM 225.
- While there was a significant decrease in grades from the fall 2019 to spring 2020 semesters, subjective experiences of TAs found the templates to be helpful in the grading process. Perhaps a more comprehensive grading rubric would improve grades for students and make grading more effective and consistent for teaching assistants.
- In the future, I believe that an APA template plus a clear grading rubric will be helpful for both the students and instructors, particularly in a large course such as COM 225. Consistency is well-liked by students and should make the grading process less time consuming for instructors while still maintaining the learning objectives set within the course.