

Student-Led Online Discussions

I presented on the topic of student-led online discussions at a roundtable at the American Association of Adult and Continuing Educators (AAACE) conference and as a poster at the University of Pittsburgh's Teaching and Assessment conference.

As an instructional designer, I developed the student-led online discussion assignment to encourage active learning, engagement, and motivation, promote student agency, facilitate deeper engagement with course content, and create opportunities for richer discussions. Student-led online discussions involve having students (1) present a relevant artifact (e.g., news article, works of art) in video form to discourage the use of GenAI, (2) pose thought-provoking follow-up questions, (3) moderate the online discussion, and (4) post a synthesis of and reflection on the discussion in written or video form.

These assignments are described in the [poster](#), assignment prompts, and a few artifacts are provided in the Show and Tell section below.

AAACE Roundtable:



Guiding Question: Can we transform discussions to create opportunities for learner interaction in the age of GenAI?

Pitt Teaching Assessment Conference Poster:

FROM COPY-PASTING TO CO-CREATION:

Student-Led Online Discussions for the Generative AI Era

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BACKGROUND

Traditionally, the use of discussion boards has served as a means for cultivating social presence within online learning contexts (Carlson et al., 2000), thereby enabling students to maintain a sense of connection despite being geographically dispersed. By participating in asynchronous discussions, students are still able to interact and sustain social presence through dialogue with their peers. Moreover, Moore (1989) identifies this type of student-student interaction as one of the three foundational modes of interaction in online education, highlighting the importance of discussion forums in advancing collective knowledge construction through communication and collaboration.

However, online instructors have been noticing students' use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) to craft posts or replies on discussion forums since the release of ChatGPT in November 2022. As a result, course designers have had to revisit and adapt their approaches to discussion board assignments to create opportunities that both encourage student engagement and discourage the use of GenAI for writing responses.

Working with an instructional designer, course developers from two humanities disciplines adapted a framework for a student-led online discussion assignment. In their course design and assessment plan, students led online discussions involve having students (1) present a relevant artifact (e.g., news article, works of art) in video form to discourage the use of GenAI, (2) pose thoughts provoking follow-up questions, (3) moderate the online discussion, and (4) post a synthesis of and reflection on the discussion in written or video form.

In addition to student-student interaction and community building, the rationale for using student-led online discussions was to encourage active learning, engagement, and motivation, promote student agency, allow for deeper engagement with course content, and create opportunities for richer discussions in the pursuit of students' co-creation of knowledge.

RELATED LITERATURE

- Chan, C. & Collison, T. (2024). *The Future of Artificial Intelligence in Education*. Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003456006>.
- Carlson, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical Inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 3(2-3), 87-105.
- Moore, M. G. (1989). Editorial: Three types of interaction. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 3(2), 1-7.



EXAMPLE 1: News Update Assignments



Context:

In the asynchronous online history course Sport Is Global Capitalism, students study the evolution of sport as a global industry. This assignment asks students to analyze how historical course themes shape the contemporary world of sport, developing both their ability to synthesize sources as well as lead peer discussions.



Task:

For each of the five course units, five students were responsible for finding a recent news article relevant to that unit theme, summarizing the article in a brief 2-3 minute video, and posing 2-3 open-ended discussion questions. For any student not presenting during that unit, their task was to watch each of the video summaries and respond to at least two different sets of questions in a robust, evidence-based manner.



Adaptations:

The week following their presentation and discussion leadership, the five students then posted a reflection (either written or oral) where they identified trends or surprises in their classmates' responses, discussed how the replies connected back to the unit theme, and discussed their performance.



Student Feedback:

Having implemented this assignment in one iteration of the course in Spring 2023, I considered it to be a success. For future iterations, I will provide additional guidance and feedback on writing discussion questions that prompt more analytical insights into course themes and send reminders about posting dates to ensure equal distribution of videos across the five themes.

In their reflection posts, students overall reported positive experiences. Even given the restriction of the themes, they enjoyed the chance to bring their particular interests into the course and speak to their classmates about contemporary events. In particular, some students reported feeling surprised by certain responses or trends and commented that these comments had adjusted their own thinking on the topic. In an asynchronous course, this assignment brought students into closer contact with both course themes and their classmates.



EXAMPLE 2: Photography Salons



Context:

This assignment is part of the asynchronous online course Photography and Art, a general education class that offers an introduction to the history of photography. It approaches photography from a variety of perspectives, including as a historical tool, a form of technology, a political and ideological medium, an artistic and creative practice, and an intrinsic element in our daily lives.



Task:

For this small-group assignment, students are asked with researching a single photograph selected from an image bank and preparing a video presentation. In the presentation, they guide fellow students through the picture using visual analysis, explain the historical and cultural context of the photograph's production, and end with two thoughtful discussion questions, which other students respond to in the discussion board.

Every student is a "Salon Host" for one week of the semester, while the other members of the discussion group are the "Guests." Following the host's presentation and discussion questions, Guests have a week to post answers to the discussion questions. At the end of the week, the Host posts a final reflection summarizing the discussion and offering up any insights from the discussion.



Adaptations:

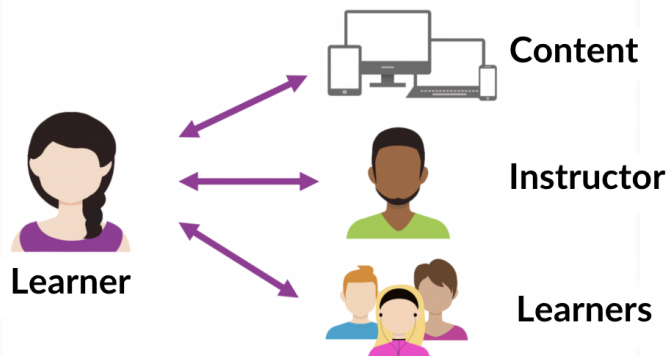
After a positive experience piloting this assignment in a 6-week summer intensive course, I included it in my Fall 2023 course. The semester-long assignment runs parallel to weekly modules. In this second iteration, I have stressed to students the importance of including their chosen image within their presentation (as opposed to speaking about an image that is not visible to viewers) and have requested that students add a slide with sources, indicating where they obtained their information. For future iterations, I plan to streamline the sign-up process and include video instructions for the assignment in addition to the current, written assignment overview.



Student Feedback:

Student feedback has been positive. In the midterm survey for my current course, one student noted that "It's nice to hear a presentation from a classmate that relates to what we are learning and has engaging questions related to the material." Several others echoed this sentiment. As the instructor, I appreciate the ways this assignment creates opportunities for multidirectional instruction and makes students active agents in each others' learning process.

Three Types of Interaction



Adapted from Jered Borup CC BY

[Image Source](#)

Show and Tell

The following assignment example is from a history of sport class titled "Sports and Global Capitalism."

Assignment description:

News Update

Overview

The news update assignment will ask you to find connections between the contemporary world of sport and its history. For each of our five units, five students will be responsible for finding a recent news article and recording a video summarizing the article, connecting it back to course themes/content, and posing discussion questions. The other 20 students will respond to one question from two of the five posted videos. This will replace the typical discussion board with questions posed by me for that week. After the week is finished, each poster will post a reflection summarizing the responses to their questions and their thoughts on the reaction to their article on the Padlet reflections page (see below for link).

Navigation

- Sign up for your News Update slot [here](#)
- Discussion boards will be available in the weekly module
- Find the page for Padlet reflections [here](#)

Requirements for Videos

- The article should be published in the previous 60 days to the selected week. It should come from a reputable news source—a newspaper (college, local, national, international), or a recognizable news outlet (ESPN, the Atlantic, Sports Illustrated, etc)
- The article should directly relate to the posted theme.
- The video should be 2-3 minutes in length
- The video should pose 2-3 discussion questions
 -  Tip: your discussion questions should relate to the article but be broad and open-ended. You don't want simple yes/no answers, but to prompt further thought and discussion.
- The video should be posted by Thursday of the week you've signed up for to that week's News Update discussion board.

Requirements for Responses:

- For any week you are not presenting, you should watch all posted videos and respond to two of the five posted videos.

- Your responses should be 150-200 words and respond directly to the question posed, including specific evidence or arguments.
- Responses are due by Sunday

Requirement for Padlet Reflection

- The following Thursday after you've posted your video, you'll be responsible for reading and reflecting on the responses to your question.
 - Was there general agreement in the responses or trends?
 - Did anything about the responses surprise you?
 - How did the article and the responses reflect course themes and material?
- Your reflection can take the form of either a video (2-3 minutes) or a written response (500-600 words) and should be posted to the Padlet Reflections page.

Discussion Board interface:

Week 15: Discussion - News Update



Welcome to the News Update for our first unit, the club. On this page you'll find 5 videos from your classmates summarizing a contemporary news article related to the topic of individual clubs/teams.

For those posting videos: Your video should be 2-3 minutes in length and pose 2-3 discussion questions. Make sure you're reviewing the responses to your discussion post--you'll be responsible for summarizing the responses and sharing your own thoughts on Padlet next week. Feel free to respond to any comments as you go! Your video should be posted by Thursday at the latest.

For those responding: please answer a discussion question from two different videos. When you write your responses, keep in mind the netiquette rules we reviewed in the

Start Here module. Your responses should be thoughtful, substantial, and relevant to the question. Whenever possible, please include specific references and evidence. Responses should be 150-200 words and will be due Sunday. Be sure to reply directly to the student by clicking the "reply" button under their post!

Examples of student reflection assignment and examples from Week 15:

Padlet Reflections

The week after you have posted a News Update video summary, I'll ask you to reflect on the experience. You may choose the format of either a brief video post or a written reaction.

Requirements

- The following Thursday after you've posted your video, you'll be responsible for reading and reflecting on the responses to your question.
 - Was there general agreement in the responses or trends?
 - Did anything about the responses surprise you?
 - How did the article and the responses reflect course themes and material?
- Your reflection can take the form of either a video (2-3 minutes) or a written response (500-600 words).

Instructions

1. Prepare your reflection in your chosen format.
2. Review the instructions for making a post on Padlet [here](#)
3. Scroll down and select the appropriate section for your post. Make sure the subject includes your name!

Unit 5: Global Business of Sport

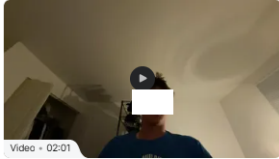
Anonymous
5 months ago

Neymar back to Barcelona: Is that a good idea? (Anisha Sankar)



For this past week's News Update, I shared an article from The Athletic that discussed the potential return of famed Brazilian soccer player, Neymar Jr., to FC Barcelona following a six-month period at Santos FC. The article discusses the controversy of this move, given that Neymar is 33 years old and may not return the same level of investment as younger talents on the team. Moreover, due to significant injuries he sustained while playing at Al Hilal, Neymar has only played 13 matches in the past two seasons. However, the article largely emphasizes the positive aspects of Neymar's return to FC Barcelona, specifically his positive relationship with existing members and his ability to inspire teammates who idolized him growing up. As part of my discussion questions, I postulated whether Neymar's move to the club would be more beneficial to the club or him. One of my classmates mentioned that Neymar's return would be

News Update Review/Wrap Up



Video • 02:01

This video includes my wrap up on the article "Deloitte predicts global revenues in women's sport will reach \$2.35bn in 2025" by The Guardian. I could not get any video longer than 2 minutes to upload so I spoke very fast. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Anonymous
5 months ago

NBC Universal agrees to \$3bn extension to broadcast Olympics in US



For my news update, I shared an article from The Guardian, which addressed the new deal between NBC Universal and the IOC, regarding new media rights. I was very interested in seeing exactly what my classmates opinions were regarding this. The main response surrounded my question of what does the deal between NBC Universal and the IOC suggest about the future of sports media rights and streaming? One of the key aspects I highlighted in my video was the apparent shift towards streaming platforms becoming the primary avenue for sports consumption, rather than a secondary option. The respondent strongly echoed this observation, citing NBC's strategic use of Peacock to showcase the Olympics as a clear indicator of this evolving trend. It was validating to see someone else recognize the significance of this move and its likely foreshadowing of future media deals across the industry. This aligns with our course discussions on the evolution of sports

Anonymous
5 months ago

Aaron Rodgers still undecided on future; retirement possible (Anvith Ramadugu)



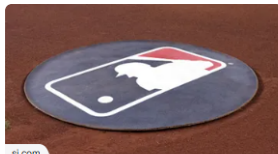
Rodgers still unsure on future, rips Jets for exit

For my news update, I decided to share a piece by ESPN that discusses Aaron Rodgers' potential future in the NFL. The main issue, as the article explains, is that Rodgers is keeping to himself and not informing other teams about his future in the league. While some think Rodgers is right to take his time, others argue that he's being unfair to teams that need to plan for the upcoming season. After sharing my thoughts on this article in the discussion, I was highly interested to see what the other students had to say.

To my surprise, every single responder had similar opinions. In response to my third question, whether the NFL should require players to decide on their retirement earlier in the offseason, everyone agreed that this should not be allowed. The unanimous opinion was that players should have the right to take their time when deciding retirement, as it is a highly

Anonymous
5 months ago

MLB & ESPN Drop National TV Contract - Madelyn McLaughlin



MLB, ESPN Agree to Drop National TV Contract Following 2025 Season

After sharing my video about the article "MLB, ESPN Agree to Drop National TV Contract Following 2025 Season," I was really interested in reading what my classmates had to say. I asked what the MLB should look for in a new media partner to help grow its global audience, and I noticed a few clear trends in the responses.

Almost everyone agreed that MLB should team up with a streaming platform that works well worldwide. A lot of people mentioned options like Amazon Prime, Apple TV+, or YouTube—platforms that already have big international audiences and let fans watch games live or later, depending on what works best for them. This is super helpful for fans in other time zones. Some classmates also said that MLB should find a partner with cool features, like real-time stats, player tracking, or polls during games. These things can

This article greatly reflects class discussions and themes surrounding player negotiations and club benefits. It describes the struggles of FC Barcelona to match Neymar's salary from other clubs, and explains that Neymar's potential return would be largely possible due to his free transfer. In our class, we have discussed the dynamics of standardizing and controlling salary levels for players in different leagues, and it was interesting to learn how this process works in La Liga. Moreover, the article parallels the risks of Neymar's return to his personal legacy with the overall benefits that the club would experience, demonstrating that while player satisfaction is important, ultimately the club is acting in its own monetary interests. This echoes many of our discussions about the club vs. player power dynamics. The exploration of these ideas reflects the power of competing interests in global sport.

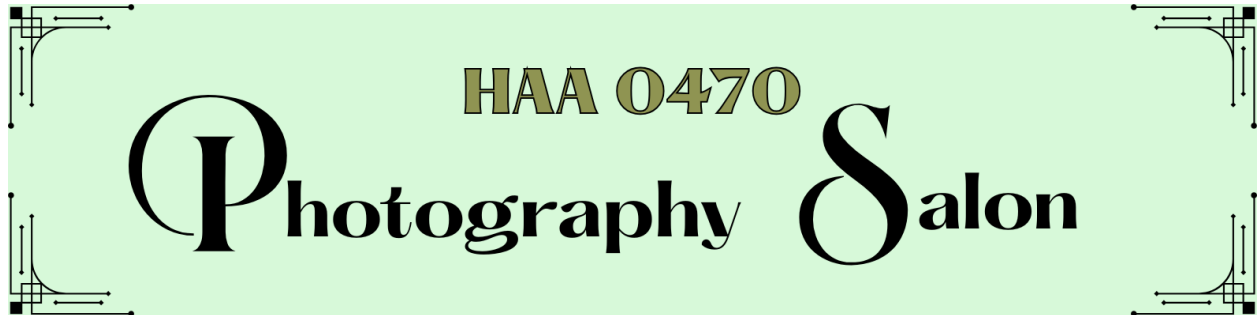
When responding to question 3, many students offered valuable suggestions as to how the NFL should respond to players who are undecided about retirement. Some said that instead of punishing players, the league should offer incentives like bonuses or post-career support, which could help nudge players into making a decision. Comments like these have changed my view on the situation, which I was surprised about. When I first read the article, I thought Rodgers was being a little unfair in how he treated teams interested in him. However, I now agree that his decision is very difficult, and that the league needs to be more respectful of him during this time.

Reading everyone's responses made me think deeper about my own ideas. At first, I mostly focused on international access, but now I see that the issue is also about making baseball easier to watch, more exciting, and still affordable. MLB has to balance a lot, keeping longtime fans while also trying new things to attract new ones.

Overall, this discussion helped me understand how important media choices are in sports. It's not just about who shows the games—it's about how fans experience them, how the league makes money, and how the sport can grow around the world.

The following assignment example is from a history of art & architecture class titled "Photography and Art"

Assignment description:



Overview

Imagine it's the 1920s and you're invited to an elegant affair: a Photography Salon. You will dress up in your finest, be greeted at the door with a beverage in a beautiful glass, and your host will introduce you to a photograph you may have never seen before. From their presentation, you will learn about the artist who made it, hear about the significance of the photograph, and be left with some questions to feed your thoughts. Then, you will mingle with fellow guests and discuss the photograph and the questions from your host. At the end of the soirée, the host will sum up the discussion before everyone goes home.

Our Canvas version of this party is the **Photography Salon** assignment. Each week, one student will "host" the Salon, while the rest are the "guests."

Steps

1. **Sign up:** Each student should sign up to host the Photography Salon one week.
2. **Select:** The Host selects an image from the image bank.
3. **Present:** The Host prepares a 3-5-minute video presentation (see specifics below)
4. **Discuss:** Guests are responsible for posting at least once in response to the Hosts' video and questions each week.
5. **Responses & Final remarks:** The Host can respond to post individually and interact actively with guests, if they like. At the end of the week, they should present a final reflection on the discussion and how effectively the questions opened up more ways to think about the photograph. This reflection can be in writing or video format.

Image Bank

Please refer to the assignments for each week to access image bank.

! Note: I encourage you to choose from the pre-selected photographs in the image bank. However, if you would like to choose a different image, this is ok, **as long as it's related to the course content for that week and approved by Prof. X.** For approval, please send me an email with your chosen image and title, author, year and a sentence or two on why you chose this image, by **Friday 12pm noon** of your assigned week.

Evaluation / Rubric

You will receive **two grades** for the Photography Salon assignment:

- One grade is based on your ongoing participation in weekly discussions. For an A, you should post engaged, thoughtful comments in your group's Salon discussion at least 8 of the 9 weeks that you will be a Guest. For a B, post at least 7 of the 9 weeks. For a C, post at least 6 of the 9 weeks. Posting 5 or fewer times will result in a D or less.
- The other grade is based on your presentation video and managing of the discussion and end-of-week summary. For an A, your presentation should fulfill all points indicated above, be well organized, include the picture in your presentation, and your end-of-week post should be thoughtful and specific. To earn a B, your presentation should fulfill most points indicated above, and be somewhat organized, with a comment posted at the end of the week. To earn a C or lower, your presentation would fulfill half or less of the requirements. Not posting a video for your group will earn an F grade.

Requirements for Host Videos

- Host videos should:
 - guide us through the chosen photograph using visual analysis,
 - offer some context for making sense of the photograph (who made it, when, why, what is its importance in the history of photography)
 - draw connections to the themes for that week's module as well as course readings & videos
 - end their presentation by posing 2 discussion questions for the guests to dwell on. **Note:** These questions should be open-ended questions that invite conversation, and address something specific about the chosen photograph and/or connected themes. Try to stay away from yes/no questions, or questions that could be asked of *any* photograph, such as "How would the meaning of this photograph change if it were in color/black-and-white?"

- The video should be posted to that week's Photography Salon discussion board by **Sunday**.

Requirements for Guest Responses

- You should watch the posted videos and post minimum one response.
- Your responses should be 150-200 words and respond directly to the question posed, including specific evidence or arguments.
- Responses are due by **Tuesday**.

Requirement for Host's Final Reflection

- By the following Sunday after you've posted your video, you'll be responsible for reading and reflecting on the responses to your question.
 - Did you notice any trends or insights in the responses?
 - Did anything about the responses surprise you?
 - How did the responses reflect course themes and material?
- Your reflection can take the form of either a video (2-3 minutes) or a written response (roughly 250 words) and should be posted to your group's Discussion Board.

Discussion Board interface:

Photography Salon 1 (Week 3)

Week 1 Hosts: Please post your Photography video here by Sunday September 14, 11:59pm. You can choose the image for your presentation [here](#), and find detailed instructions in the [Photography Salon Assignment - Overview](#).

Everyone else: please make sure to post your response by Tuesday, September 16, 11:59pm.

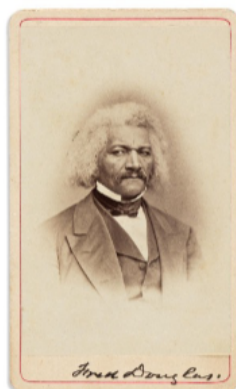
Image Bank:

Photography & Art (Fall 2025) - Photography Salon Image Bank

Photography Salon 1 (Week 3)



Sojourner Truth seated with photograph of her grandson, James Caldwell of Co. H, 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, on her lap, possibly taken in 1863. Prints & Photographs Division.



Carte-de-visite portrait of Frederick Douglass, taken by an old ally (photographer John White Hurn). Albumen photograph, 3 1/2 x 2 1/4 inches, on contemporary plain lined mount, with manuscript caption "Fred Douglass" on lower mount. Philadelphia, 10 March 1873]



Carte de visite of Arabella Chapman, photographer unknown. Carte-de-Visite Albums, ca. 1850-1900. Clements Library, University of Michigan