

**Throw What You Know:
Encouraging Student Learning Ownership by Introducing Knowledge Management**

Nellie Hill
Box 42131, 2810 15th St.
Lubbock, TX 79409-2131
806-742-2816
nellie.hill@ttu.edu

Introduction/ Need for Idea

People have an inborn desire to maintain control over their internal and external environments so as to best facilitate interest, enjoyment, and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the classroom, learning ownership is the ability of students to exercise some of such control in terms of the organizational, procedural, and cognitive aspects of their coursework (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). Allowing students to have more autonomy has been linked to student perception of the course and amount learned (Demir, Burton, & Dunbar, 2019).

Knowledge management is an organizational necessity, defined as, “the process of creating, sharing, using and managing the knowledge and information of an organization” (Girard & Girard, 2015, p. 14). A familiarity with knowledge management and how to contribute to it is important so students may be prepared to participate in complex work environments characterized by globalization, doing more with less, turnover, and technological advancements (Dalkir, 2013).

In an effort to give students more agency over their learning and introduce them to knowledge management, those enrolled in a non-major, writing-intensive, agricultural communications course at [university] were required to complete a “how-to” assignment regarding a topic of their own expertise and submit it in either audio, video, or text format.

How It Works

Students were given an assignment requiring they choose an interesting and technical skill or task not commonly known to the general public and give simple, step-by-step directions for completing it. Students were also allowed to choose the submission type as this “How-To” assignment could be completed in the form of an audio recording, video, or text with supplemental images.

During the class session one week prior to the due date, the instructor reviewed the assignment task sheet and rubric with the students in attendance. In a subsequent class session, the instructor allowed time for the students to think, pair, share with their classmates regarding ideas for their how-to topic. If they wanted to, students were able to ask questions and confirm their how-to topic with the instructor before, during or after class, or during office hours. Lectures supplementing the assignment covered the topics of audience analysis, giving directions, and knowledge management. Students submitted their assignment via Blackboard.

Results to Date/ Implications

How-to topics ranged widely, including how to hook up a trailer, calculate the grade of a T-bone steak, use a tensiometer, move cattle in a low stress manner, and several examples of student’s specialty recipes. Of the 86 students who submitted the assignment, 66 chose text submission, 10 chose video, and 10 chose audio.

In order to evaluate students’ perceptions of the how-to assignment, students were asked via a Qualtrics questionnaire: “Did you like having the freedom to choose the way you presented your how-to, either my video, audio, or text? Why or Why not?”

“Allowed creativity to flow.”

Creativity was a common theme among student responses. One student specifically reported, “The ability to choose allowed creativity to flow.” As the course was writing-intensive, this assignment gave students an opportunity to practice their communication skills in a different manner. “It was something new and gave us a break from writing, and allowed us to be more creative,” one student stated. Giving students opportunities to take ownership of the assignment encouraged buy-in. For example, one student reported, “I liked having the ability to choose our topics because I feel like when I am given more creative liberty in my assignments, I am more interested in them.”

“I know my strengths.”

The how-to assignment allowed the student to play to their strengths in terms of topic selection and type of submission. Several students provided statements along the same lines such as, “I liked being able choose the way I completed the assignment, because I know my strengths.” Students reported appreciating having options to execute the assignment because “leaving it open meant that we could choose something that we had a better chance of getting a higher grade on.”

“Can be a little stressful.”

Giving students responsibility for defining portions of the assignment was positively received overall, but some students conveyed the feeling, “sometimes that can be a little stressful because I’m kind of out of practice thinking in that way since all of my classes usually have strict, defined criteria/guidelines for how they want our work.” The opportunity to make decisions about how they would complete their assignment was unfamiliar territory for some students, as they indicated statements similar to, “most classes don’t offer that level of freedom in assignments.”

Advice to Others

Instructors who choose to integrate this assignment into their coursework should consider reviewing examples of each how-to submission type during class time. This may make audio and video formats more approachable to complete. Some students were uncomfortable when first faced with an assignment where they had so much freedom to choose their topic and submission type. It is recommended instructors reserve some class time to have students brainstorm ideas among themselves and be able to confirm their idea with the instructor. It is imperative that the instructor be very clear about the originality requirements of the assignments, meaning all text, photos, audio, and video should be created by the student. It is recommended that the instructor require the student to upload their assignment to an online file management platform, such as OneDrive or Dropbox, then share the link to the file with the instructor via Blackboard or email. This allows large files to be easily transferred.

Costs/ Resources Needed

This assignment can be executed at no cost to the instructor or students. Each student will need to be supplied with the assignment requirements, preferably in rubric form, by way of hard copy or electronic form. Depending on which type of submission students choose, they will need either word processing software and a camera, an audio recording device, or a video camera. Smart phones will suffice for photo, audio and video recording. Students will need to submit their assignment via an electronic format chosen by the instructor.

References

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