

Comparing the effectiveness of written and audio posts in online discussion board assignments

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Background

- Course: Reference and Information Sources and Services
- Related course objectives:
 - explain the principles and steps of the reference interview
 - conduct a reference interview
 - identify the sources most likely to contain specific types of information
 - answer representative K-12 reference questions

Assignment

- Reference Questions
- Eight formats:
 - Dictionaries
 - Encyclopedias
 - Library catalogs
 - Ready reference
 - Biographical sources
 - Geographical sources
 - Databases
 - Government sources
- Describe the process of information seeking to the patron. This enables your student to become an information literate, independent learner who can transfer these skills to other resources and other formats.

Assignment

- Response: Give the response as if you were the librarian working with the student. Your response should be clear, complete, and appropriate for the age of the student.
 - Resource Justification: Explain why you would pick this format to answer the question. Include a definition or summary of the format.
 - Finding and Using the Resource: Explain in detail how the student would find this resource and how they would use it. This should be step-by-step, appropriate for the age/grade level of the student.
 - Answer to the Question: Give the actual answer to the question for each component, as if you found the answer with the student. For example, "Yes, I see right here that the Red Socks have won the World Series eight times, most recently in 2013!"

Purpose

Research Question:

- In a collaborative activity, is audio recording for a discussion board post a more effective instructional tool than the written post?

Measures:

- strength of the students' answers to the reference question
- Students' comfort level (sense of preparedness) with answering reference questions



Participants & Methods

- Graduate students in two sections of EDSL 560; summer 2014
- Sample A: audio responses
- Sample B: written responses

- Students paired for questions/responses

Measurements

Measurement	Data
Questions scored with a rubric	Quantitative – scores (t-test)
Survey after first and last Reference Question	Quantitative – comfort level, engagement, process (t-test)
Final survey after all Reference Questions	Quantitative – comfort level, preparation for real world (t-test) Qualitative – additional thoughts

Results

- Eight Reference Question scores, comparing Sample A to Sample B
 - No statistically significant difference
- Reference Question Survey questions
 - **Process** of answering the question
 - Dictionary question – Sample B (written) were significantly more comfortable with the process on this question ($\mu=2.64$, $t < .05$)
- Final Survey questions
 - Difference in samples' comfort and feeling of preparation not statistically significant

Results

- Student Responses to Open-Ended Survey Question:
 - Responses from Sample A (audio):
 - “I actually liked the audio format. It was a good way to move away from the more traditional written response and a way to get some helpful practice for a real situation.”
 - “I especially liked hearing the questions posed in the audio form. It made the interaction seem more sincere.”
 - “Initially it seemed less comfortable than written response. As we did a new one each week, I felt comfortable with the audio response and I also prepared my answers in word before recording.”

Results

- Student Responses to Open-Ended Survey Question:
 - Responses from Sample B (written):
 - “Creating these scenarios really helped me to process the steps necessary to instruct a student in the research process.”
 - “I liked writing in a conversational format. It allowed me to think and answer the way I will in real life situations.”

Additional Findings

- Instructor Field Notes
 - Assessment
 - “I notice it is much more difficult to give a fair assessment of the audio files. In order to refer back to what they said, I have to listen again...it is difficult to give feedback without the written response to look at.”
 - “Listening to the recordings gives me a better idea of how the person would use their tone of voice to make the student feel at ease, welcome, etc. This is an important piece of the reference interview and not something you can tell just by reading.”

Additional Findings

○ Time

- “It certainly takes longer to listen to the recorded entries.”
- “When listening, if I have a question about a part I have to go back and listen again. There is no way to skim the text for what I am looking for. Not sure if this is a good thing or not.”

Implications

Research Question:

- In a collaborative activity, is audio recording for a discussion board post a more effective instructional tool than the written post?
- This study did not find evidence that either format was more effective as shown in scores and survey responses.

Preparation for the Real World

- “I feel I am still not prepared, since I had a lot of time to prepare to answer these questions. If I can compose myself and gather my information I feel I am ready, but if I have to pull information out of my hat in the spur of the moment I still struggle.”
(Sample A student)

Instructor Considerations

- Time
 - Much more time to listen to audio
- Assessment
 - Much more challenging to grade audio
- Process
 - Partner problems
 - Deleted posts

Practical Recommendations

- Consider groupings and have a back-up plan.
- Suggest recording audio outside of LMS and uploading the file so there is a back-up.
- Consider what is most important – content or voice/narration?
- As the instructor, plan plenty of time for listening and assessing audio responses or consider requiring a transcript.
- Provide choice of format (audio or written).



Next Steps

- Face-to-face class – students participate in mock Reference Interviews so they have to think on their feet. More authentic?
- Develop a way for students in an online course to participate in a mock Reference Interview in real time.
- Look deeper into the data to analyze the length of Reference Question responses.

Thank you!

Thank you for your interest in this research study.

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