THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

How-To Guide

Using WSJ in Online Discussions

Introduction

The unrivaled coverage of The Wall Street Journal is available anytime, anywhere on WSJ.com and WSJ mobile and tablet apps. See how Linda Christiansen, Professor of Accounting & Business Law at Indiana University Southeast, uses the Journal to keep class discussions moving in the digital world.

How to use WSJ's digital resources in class

Professor Christiansen evaluates WSJ articles based on the following criteria:

- Articles can be used in two general ways: (1) incorporating current events into class
 so students become well-informed about the business world by way of class and online
 discussions and quizzes, and (2) using as case studies for application and analysis of
 course material to real-world situations in assignments, discussions and tests.
- If an interesting and relevant article is not applicable to the topics you are covering in
 class in a particular week, save it and assign it when covering that topic. Some article
 topics are classics. You can collect and use the best articles in later semesters if the
 facts and issues continue to be of value and have not aged.
- Article topics that relate to the interests of the student population (i.e. sports, consumer technology, social media, etc.) are particularly valuable because they engage students and also demonstrate the value of course subject matter to interesting real-world situations.
- The article should provide sufficient facts for the type of assignment. For example,
 a brief article could be used for a quick current-events discussion at the beginning of
 a class session or a short quiz or test question, while a more involved article is likely
 necessary for a group case study or a graduate exam. For most assignments, the
 situation must be explained in enough detail that students do not have to research
 beyond the article unless this is your goal.

Interesting ways to incorporate WSJ into online, hybrid and face-to-face courses

WSJ articles can be used for all disciplines and modalities in a variety of ways, including face-to-face and online discussions, case studies (for individual or group assignments) and test questions.



Class Discussions

Instructors can assign recent articles for students to discuss in class or in online discussions. The article can include current events related to business in general or can illustrate real-world application of the course's subject matter to the class being covered that particular week. Professor Christiansen's face-to-face or synchronous online class sessions often begin with a discussion of articles chosen by students or assigned in advance. An instructor can choose to require a minimum number of participation events, can ask for volunteers and not assess or can award extra credit for presentation and participation.

Group Projects

Professor Christiansen uses WSJ articles as current, real-world case studies throughout her classes in ways that can be used for other disciplines. For example, after students learn the basics of ethical analysis, they form groups and each group selects an article that includes an ethical dilemma. Each student first analyzes the ethical dilemma individually, then critiques and offers feedback on each group member's work. After learning more throughout this process, the group works together to produce an improved analysis. Then students critique and offer feedback on other groups' analyses. Finally, Professor Christiansen offers feedback for each groups' work. At this point, the students are familiar with each group's article and work, so all students benefit from the instructor feedback. The students complete all of this work online, even in hybrid or face-to-face classes.

Exams

Professor Christiansen uses WSJ articles as the basis for exam questions for both business law and business ethics. In some cases, she allows the students to analyze the situation using knowledge and skills acquired in the course; in others, she has offered question prompts to direct the students. The approach varies based on the level of the class (introductory, upper-level or graduate) and whether the article is the sole basis for testing or one of several questions.

Professor Christiansen has used these approaches in both classroom settings as well as online tests. One of the benefits of using WSJ articles for online testing is the fact that the answers are not posted online, like so many test banks.

Papers

Students can write a short paper describing situations in which they applied, or could have applied, what they learned in the Journal in the workplace. This can be a valuable part of internships taken for credit hours.

How to incorporate articles in online threaded discussions

Online threaded discussions are a good tool to use for fully online classes and online portions of hybrid classes. An online discussion forum also benefits a face-to-face course by moving some discussions or other assignments outside of class time so that valuable and limited resources can be used for other activities. The advantages include the fact that discussion time is not limited, as it is in a class session, so all students can participate in the online environment. Additionally, students who are quiet in class sessions often write some of the best analysis in a threaded discussion. Online discussions are an excellent way to engage students and assess student learning.



Depending on your learning goals, you may choose to establish a thread with a Journal article link and a questions prompt, or you can have the students find articles related to the assigned topic and begin the analysis themselves. Requiring students to read the Journal and to find appropriate articles helps students develop independent learning and master application of course material. It also allows students to choose topics, industries, products, etc. that interest them—something that makes learning more relevant.

The instructor can decide how much to be involved and moderate the discussion versus choosing to allow students to develop the conversations and analysis. For grading purposes, you can require students to initiate a certain number of discussion threads and comment on a certain number of other threads over a particular period of time. Instructors can assign student leaders who initiate the discussions for each particular topic or week. Professor Christiansen requires that each comment must offer at least some substance in moving the discussion forward in order to earn credit. With few exceptions, comments should apply some course material to the situation. Instructors can allow students to include outside research to support their points or positions.

How to assess students

With an online discussion assignment, students' posts to threaded discussions must move the conversation forward, be on topic and apply the course material to the fact situation. Student work should be graded for both the quality and quantity of their posts. If students are graded simply on the number of posts they write, some will go through the motions and post the minimum number of words without any thought or application to the course material.

The assessment method you use depends on the way you structured the assignment and your circumstances.

1. Pass-Fail Grading Approach

If you want a quick way to grade because you have a large class or the subject represents a relatively minor assignment, take this pass-fail approach. The general idea of this approach is to read through each post and assess it as "S" or "P" for satisfactory/pass, or "U" or "F" for unsatisfactory/fail. A third grading option for particularly exceptional posts could be "S+" or "E" for excellent, which could be applied as an increase to a student's grade or extra credit. The instructions or a rubric must clearly state what is required for a passing grade. You can decide the minimum number of satisfactory posts required each week or chapter, and the number of satisfactory posts required to earn a particular grade for the discussion portion of the course grade. The grades can be entered into an online gradebook or a spreadsheet of the class roster. This approach makes for quicker and easier grading.

2. Detailed Grading Approach

If you have a smaller class or fewer required posts, or if the discussion relates a major or in-depth assignment, you can devote more time to detailed grading. Establish a grading rubric that measures the knowledge and skills you are assessing and share it with students.

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