

Summary Words and in the News*

Nifty Assignment

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I often have learners who are not prepared. They arrive at class having not read or thought about the course material. This creates a significant challenge for them when the class session is discussion-based, rather than lecture. To increase learner preparedness, I started using two assignments a few semesters ago: Summary Words, and In the News. Summary Words (Words) requires preparation before class, and In the News (News) requires application of the course material.

Words is a two-part assignment: add words to a provided Google document, and then discuss with their peers in a discussion board. The learner reads the assigned material, and then records in the Google document what they believe to be the most important topics by listing a combined total of five individual words for all topics. By condensing the assigned reading to five words, they must identify the essence of the material. I have them add their words to a Google document so we can view a single combined list of words during our class discussion.

News is a two-part assignment: find, post, and discuss article information in a discussion board, and then discuss the articles with their peers in the discussion board. After we discuss the material in class, the learners find and briefly report on an article (published within the last eighteen months) related to the material. In their post, they describe how it impacts society, what social or legal issues could arise, and if it agrees or disagrees with the readings. By finding and relating an article to the assigned readings, they are demonstrating their understanding of the material.

Both assignments provide the learners an opportunity to interact with and learn from their peers. This discussion may lead to a better understanding of the material or may raise questions for them to consider.

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