

Including a Question & Answer Forum

Regardless of how diligently we develop assignments, carefully construct mini lectures, or include details in our syllabus, students will have questions. This is a good sign, as students who take the time to form and ask questions are generally engaged with the course and invested in their learning. In fact, it is a good practice to thank students for their questions.

To efficiently respond to questions and help students find the answers they need, it can be helpful to have a Question & Answer (Q & A) forum where students can post questions. The forum can save you from responding to the same question several times and help students who might be reticent to ask, even though they had the same question. It also gives students the opportunity to serve as support for other students when they are able to respond to a classmate's question.

Responding in the Q & A Forum

For the Q & A forum to be successful, be sure to set the forum notifications to ping you or send you an email any time a student posts a question so that you can reply promptly. If the forum or your LMS doesn't provide the notifications option, set a reminder for yourself to check the forum at least once each day of the week. You may even include in the syllabus the turnaround time that students can expect for a response to something posted in the Q & A forum.

Q & A Forum as Feedback

As you review student questions in the forum, it can be helpful to keep a running list of the topics or assignments that students commonly seem confused about. This way you can adjust those lessons or assignments for future classes.

In your current class, if you are finding common areas of confusion or misunderstandings, there are a number of things that you can do to support your students.

- Provide additional resources
- Create an additional microlecture explaining the content in a new way
- Design an assignment to ensure students have grasped important concepts before moving on to the next module

You can also scan student interactions in discussion forums to see if there are assignments or assignment directions that students are struggling to understand.

Creating a Q & A Video

If there is a particular question that you think is important to clarify for the entire class, or a specific topic that many students seem to have questions about, you can respond by creating a video and posting it for the entire class. The video or additional microlecture can serve as a response to the question and a way to demonstrate to your students that you are engaged in the class content and invested in their ability to master course content.

The box below demonstrates the points that you may include in your video response.

1. Acknowledge the student question(s).
2. Recognize why the specific content, topic, or assignment may be confusing.
3. Identify content from an earlier module that, when revisited, may help students better understand the current content.
4. Briefly explain the foundational concepts from the earlier module.
5. Transition the foundational concepts to the current module's content.
6. Explain the current content in a new way or through a different approach.
7. Offer a step-by-step explanation for solving a problem.
8. Reiterate to students that you welcome their questions in the forum and they should expect this type of clarification when you see that many students are struggling with the same issue or concept.
9. Assign a short quiz or reflection assignment to ensure that students understand the content.

Sample Q & A Video

The box below is the dialogue from a sample Q & A video. In this scenario, the instructor of a writing course asked students to identify the point of view within the assigned memoir. The assignment required students to provide evidence to support their responses. It seemed to be a straightforward assignment, but several students had questions such as, "What if the author doesn't have a point of view?" or "What if the point of view shifts?" These questions helped the instructor realize that students hadn't yet developed a strong understanding of or ability to identify an author's point of view.

1. I have received several questions about the point of view within the memoir. Some of the questions asked how to identify the point of view, or what to do if the author didn't use a point of view.
2. I understand that identifying point of view might be difficult within a memoir because, until now, we have only worked on identifying a point of view when reading fiction.
3. I think it would be helpful to review what the point of view and central themes are.
4. The point of view in any writing is the form of narration that the author uses. In literature, point of view can be first person, where the narrator uses "I, me, my", or second person, where the author uses "you, your," or third person, where the author uses "she, he, they, her, his, their."
5. The important thing to note here is that memoir is personal experience, so the narrator really only has the first- or second-person point of view to choose from. Fiction often uses third person because the narrator presumably knows the thoughts, feelings, or intentions of others, and this is not the case in life nor in memoir.
6. So, as we study memoir writing in this class, we have to keep in mind the importance of having a reliable narrator. In a conversation with someone, we won't say, "She felt alone. She chased her friend down and begged for forgiveness. It was the only consolation she had on a such a rainy night." Instead, we would say something more along the lines of, "I saw her chase her friend down the street and say she is sorry and that she didn't want to lose the friendship. It all looked more dramatic because it was raining that night. I don't know if she meant it or if she just wanted a friend because she felt alone." Memoir works the same way. The narrator can't know what other people are thinking or feeling, so events are written in first or second person and describe what is experienced or witnessed.
7. So, in the example I just gave, what is the point of view? The narrator used the words "I don't know if she meant it" and "I saw her." Although the words "she" and "her" are used, the narrator is describing a personal point of view using "I," which is first person.
8. I hope this clarifies the topic. If you have any questions, please post to the Q-&-A forum. I also have office hours on Thursday from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Please feel free to drop in via chat or video for some additional help.
9. I have created a short quiz just to let me know how everyone is doing with this content. Please complete the quiz before 5 p.m. tomorrow.
10. Thank you.

The follow-up can be a short, five-question quiz created in the LMS, asking questions such as which pronouns correspond with which point of view, and why point of view differs in fiction and in memoir. This will help the instructor know whether students need further instruction before moving on to the next module.

Source

Adapted from Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science in Online Classes (pp. 38–41), by F. Darby & J. M. Lang, 2019, Jossey-Bass.