TEACHING TACTIC

Talking Heads: Crafting Digital Media-Based Research Projects

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The context

An undergraduate course on Psalms, which is offered as a general Bible elective for non-Bible majors and is required for our degrees in Advanced Biblical Studies and Bible and Worship.

The pedagogical purpose

To help students develop competency in theological research, project organization, and cultural engagement. In addition to developing communication skills, this approach familiarizes students with contemporary platforms for idea exchange, content engagement, digital journalism, and social and professional networking, as well as moving them past "opinion essays."

Description of the strategy

The media assignment has a standard set of project and grading criteria. In terms of general guidelines, the video can be no longer than three minutes, must communicate a tightly composed theological message, and must follow a pre-approved production schedule. All of this is communicated through a proposal submitted through our learning management system (LMS). The proposal requires a biblical text for discussion, a theme for the video's message format, and a production schedule for filming and editing the video. A grading rubric is provided so students know how they will be evaluated.

Students are asked to develop a video demonstrating their ability to conduct exegesis on a selected psalm. Students can work in pairs if willing to accept a shared grade. Research focuses on analysis of a passage, which can be clearly and logically articulated in the time allotted. Clarity and professionalism is expected, and examples of past projects are provided on the course resources page. Finally, students must share their completed work with their peers on social media, as a form of informal peer editing.

Why it is effective

The project is quite popular with students. It challenges students to be both concise and resourceful in their research. By requiring a proposal that must be approved and having the grading rubric in advance, students shift away from traditional research papers and embrace multimedia research—research that requires significant analysis and must be communicated succinctly. According to grade analysis, grades are higher for this project as compared to traditional research papers in a similar course.

Challenging students to conceptualize and communicate research material within the video format rather than a written report. This aligns with the rise of the "podcast culture," where information research and analytic data is communicated in real time. Students comment that this project helped them see biblical research as relevant to their lives. Making them public reinforces standards of excellence because students' peers see their work.