

# A Collection of gifts



Issue 19, Fall 2019

## Great Ideas For Teaching

### **19.7 InstaPedagogy: Critical Thinking, Digital Communication and Instructing Through Instagram**

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In the Age of Information where the Digital Revolution is in full rage, I have found that teaching oral communication skills using social media and digital tools can be a great way to internalize concepts, as well as prepare students for a world where being fluent in technology-based tools will be central to their professional success. My favorite assignments meet students where they already are in the digital world—Instagram. I ask students to create memes, vlogs and daily stories that will be posted, promoted and analyzed for audience effectiveness.

To help keep things centralized (and control the content), I create one Instagram account for the class to share at the beginning of the semester. The password is shared with all the students. Throughout the semester, various assignments teach students how to use the digital tools on Instagram to create content, post it to various parts of Instagram, engage with audiences, manage content, analyze feedback and reflect upon how to improve the effectiveness of their message. In this way, these assignments ask students to do more than think about how they represent themselves online.

Instead, they call upon students to reposition themselves as content creators rather than content consumers within these social spaces.

I typically like to break the digital ice early in the semester with an introduction meme & vlog. These work great for both online and face-to-face classes. Instructors can put their own spin on the meme content, all throughout the semester. I'll share a digital icebreaker that's worked well with students and teaches the essentials of how to use the Instagram tools.

#### **The GIFT: Selfie Album Cover Meme & Vlog**

The purpose of this assignment is to develop skills in content creation.

##### 1) Create your own meme

I introduce this part of the assignment as a lesson in creating visual aides. There are many meme-making apps and websites dedicated to creating stunning visuals. I love Canva.com as a presentation-making website and app. The large quantity of templates, plus amazing selection of free stock photos really assist students in creating quality visuals. Also, they already have the specific aspect ratios for every single digital presentation you can think of. From logos and daily stories on Facebook to resumes and invitations, there is so much to choose from.

For the Selfie Album Cover assignment, have students upload a selfie picture as the background.

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Add the following text to the Selfie:

- An Album Title
- 3 song titles representing you. (Song titles can be real or imagined, but should have some significance to your identity).
- First name only.

### 2) Record A 60 sec video

Video is the most effective and engaging type of content on social media. And for a Communication professor, it is absolutely crucial in helping students to overcome camera anxiety and stage fright. That's why the first video speech is a simple explanation of each part of their Selfie Album Cover. Additionally, students are challenged to respect the time limitations of Instagram as a speaking platform and aim for a 60 second presentation.

### 3) Post To Instagram as a Carousel Post

Once students have created both their Selfie Album Cover Meme and Vlog, they upload both items into a Carousel post on Instagram. A Carousel has multiple items uploaded onto a single post. For this assignment, students were asked to use the photo as the top item and the video as the second item. This allows followers to see the album cover and then slide to the left for the video explanation. Encouraging this type of interaction between the content and followers not only increases engagement but is also key for understanding how effective one's message is.

This was a really fun icebreaker because students went all-out with their album covers. When posted, the meme basically functioned as a promo ad for student videos. This inspired students to choose fun, adventurous, and thoughtful images of themselves. They also really thought about their song titles, choosing to tap into trending songs of the time and to create their own. The videos were inspiring as well. Each student was encouraged to have fun and keep it diary-style. Students shot videos in parked cars, at the park, in the bathroom at work—they really tapped into their own lived realities and brought that with them to the video. And most importantly—it introduced students to Instagram as a digital tool for content creation. Students were able to creatively learn how to use the platform and how to represent themselves to others.

### Concluding Thoughts

What I love about Instagram is that it's a platform built upon niche communities. From a pedagogical standpoint, an instructor could use Instagram as a creative space to explore visual, verbal and vocal representation. I chose an introductory topic: the self. But I could just as easily have selected a literary topic, like poetry, or a cultural perspective like Latina photographers, and created digital assignments specifically for those niche audiences.

While I know social media is often shied away from in the classroom for a number of reasons, platforms like Instagram can become transformative spaces that challenge students to take into consideration not only what they say, but also how they say it—in different contexts. It can encourage students to think critically

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about what their message will look like and how it will be received by their target audiences.

This is a valuable skill as we are constantly consuming information asking us to make social choices and digital decisions everyday. 📱