E-mail Assignments For the Classroom Does It Work ?

Larry L. White, P.E.

Dept. of Engineering Technology
Texas A&M University- Corpus Christi

Abstract

I developed a teaching method where the students have an assignment of a working world engineering problem. The objective is to expose students to working world engineering problems and e-mail communication. I have used this method in my thermodynamics and heat transfer classes for the past 4 years.

In these assignments, the student is an engineer that has been given an engineering problem to evaluate. The student then sends an e-mail to me and I play the role of the supervisor in the assignment's scenario. I edit the drafts and return them for re-submittal. This is repeated several times to teach the student what changes the working world requires.

A pilot study was completed in 2004 where experienced engineers evaluated the student e-mails. This pilot study was done in preparation for a future study to determine if this teaching method improves the students' e-mail communication skills. This conference paper is an outline of the plans for this future study. A goal of this paper is to solicit comments from those in Engineering Academia on the plans for this study.

The future study will have experienced engineers from the working world that will evaluate a before and after set of e-mails from the students. The results will then be statistically evaluated to determine if the students' e-mail skills have improved.

The experienced engineers will also be asked if he/she would schedule a job interview (yes or no) for this student based solely on this e-mail. This is a separate overall impression by each reviewer. This yes/no data will be statistically analyzed to check for consistency in the study.

The Fog Index will be calculated for each e-mail for descriptive information. The Fog Index is a measure of the education level required to understand the writing.

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LARRY L. WHITE
Larry White, P.E., has worked for over 30 years as a Process Engineer with DuPont. This experience includes the design, construction, start-up, and operation of the first commercial scale process to manufacture an ozone safe refrigerant. He is an Adjunct Professor in the Engineering Technology Dept. at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi.