



8 ways to incorporate online discussion into assessment

General guide for instructors

For Blackboard Vista 4.x

You can encourage participation, and hopefully the quality of that participation, in online discussion by linking it to formal assessment in some way. Here are eight tips on how you might give an assessment weighting to online discussion.

1. **Make discussion a requirement** – set a minimum number of postings per week or across the teaching period for students to be eligible for a pass in the subject. [This could also be a minimum word limit per week or across the semester.]
2. **Assess participation** – award students marks according to the degree or quality of participation, e.g. in terms of:
 - number of postings
 - quality of postings (which will involve some sort of content analysis on your part)
 - balance between primary postings and responses to others postings.
3. **Have peers assess contributions** – have peers rate the value of the contribution of each student in the group or class (which could be combined with elements of self and/or teacher assessment).
4. **Assess a discussion thread** – have students submit a compiled discussion thread led or initiated by them, with accompanying analysis/reflection, for assessment
5. **Assess ‘my best contributions’** – have students submit a selection of their contributions for teacher and/or self assessment, outlining their value to class discussion and understanding.
6. **Incorporate discussion contributions in an assignment** – set an assignment that requires students to use a given number of contributions/postings of their own (and possibly of others) in their assignment submission.
7. **Incorporate discussion processes in a project/assignment** – set an assignment or project that requires students to use online discussions for the task to be completed (e.g. in relation to a group collaborative project).
8. **Assess a student log** – have students submit a completed list of their postings with an accompanying reflective piece for teacher and/or self assessment.

Things to think about

1. Make sure the focus is on the **content** of the discussion, not the use of the tool per se.
2. Consider how assessment of discussion may impact on other desired course goals or learning outcomes. For example, competitive assessment may compromise the development of a fully collaborative learning community.