

## Assessing Student Participation in Online Discussions

When assessing online discussion specifically, it is crucial to communicate your expectations to the students so that they know what is ahead of them.

- Indicate whether the discussion will be graded.
- It is usually not good practice to grade based on the number of postings. You may require students to complete a certain number as a minimum, but well-constructed, thoughtful postings are more beneficial to the discussion than many shorter “I agree” or “Good point” responses.
- Use solid criteria to determine what a “good” and “poor” response may be. Provide a rubric and sample discussions to your students.
- Some instructors require students to provide a self-assessment report of their discussion contributions. Students may copy and paste actual examples of their postings to support their grade recommendation.

### Other things to consider...

- In online discussions, instructors can offer immediate short feedback. A simple “Good job, Scott” or “I haven’t heard from you recently, Scott” can help maintain active participation.
- Think carefully about the amount of time required for students to meet the discussion requirements, as well as the amount of time it will take for you to assess the quality of their work.
- Spend the time to construct creative, challenging, and engaging discussion assignments, which promote participation.
- You may provide a few guidelines regarding the polite, constructive conduct of online communication. These guidelines are commonly referred to as “netiquette.”

### Sources:

1. Edelstein, S. & Edwards, J. (2002). *If you build it, they will come: Building learning communities through learning discussions*. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume V, Number I. Available at <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring51/edelstein51.html>
2. Garrison, R. & Vaughan, N. (2008). *Blended learning in higher education: Framework, principles, and guidelines*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
3. Hazari, S. (2004). Strategy for assessment of online course discussions. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 15 (4), 349-355.

**SAMPLE 1: Rubric for Online Discussions (Edelstein & Edwards, 2002)**

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Unit \_\_\_\_\_

Category	1	2	3	4	POINTS
<b>Promptness and Initiative</b>	Does not respond to most postings; rarely participates freely	Responds to most postings several days after initial discussion; limited initiative	Responds to most postings within a 24 hour period; requires occasional prompting to post	Consistently responds to postings in less than 24 hours; demonstrates good self-initiative	
<b>Delivery of Post</b>	Utilizes poor spelling and grammar in most posts; posts appear "hasty"	Errors in spelling and grammar evidenced in several posts	Few grammatical or spelling errors are noted in posts	Consistently uses grammatically correct posts with rare misspellings	
<b>Relevance of Post</b>	Posts topics which do not relate to the discussion content; makes short or irrelevant remarks	Occasionally posts off topic; most posts are short in length and offer no further insight into the topic	Frequently posts topics that are related to discussion content; prompts further discussion of topic	Consistently posts topics related to discussion topic; cites additional references related to topic	
<b>Expression Within the Post</b>	Does not express opinions or ideas clearly; no connection to topic	Unclear connection to topic evidenced in minimal expression of opinions or ideas	Opinions and ideas are stated clearly with occasional lack of connection to topic	Expresses opinions and ideas in a clear and concise manner with obvious connection to topic	
<b>Contribution to the Learning Community</b>	Does not make effort to participate in learning community as it develops; seems indifferent	Occasionally makes meaningful reflection on group's efforts; marginal effort to become involved with group	Frequently attempts to direct the discussion and to present relevant viewpoints for consideration by group; interacts freely	Aware of needs of community; frequently attempts to motivate the group discussion; presents creative approaches to topic	
<b>TOTAL</b>					

Facilitator's Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**SAMPLE 2: Rubric for Online Discussions (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008)**

<b>Points</b>	<b>Competencies</b>
<b>4</b>	Posts in discussions indicate careful of and critical reflection on reading assignments. Readily offers interpretations of course readings and supports opinions with evidence from the readings. Comments on other posts and responds appropriately to comments on own posts. Ideas are expressed clearly, concisely. Uses appropriate vocabulary. Is attentive to spelling and grammar.
<b>3</b>	Posts in discussions indicate reading and basic understanding of reading assignments. Supports some opinions with evidence from reading. Offers occasional comment on other posts and usually responds to comments on own posts. Ideas are sometimes unclear due to poor organization or poor word choice.
<b>2</b>	Posts suggest incomplete reading or poor understanding of the material. Either does not offer an opinion on reading material or fails to support the opinion with evidence from the reading. Rarely comments on other posts and fails to respond to comments on own work. Frequent spelling and grammatical errors.
<b>1</b>	Posts are rare and do not answer the discussion question, or do not indicate reading and comprehension of the reading assignments. Does not comment on other posts or reply to comments on own posts. Spelling and grammar are so problematic that the message is garbled.
<b>0</b>	Student did not use the discussion board.

**SAMPLE 3: Rubric for Online Discussions (Hazari, 2004)**

Points	Competencies
<p><b>1.0- 2.0-</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posted main topic information</li> <li>• Replied to one other student posting</li> <li>• No depth or presentation, no research base, opinion only</li> <li>• Information posted only one time or several posts at a time</li> <li>• Comments were barely related to main discussion question and/or other student posting</li> <li>• No constructive comments to help class discussion</li> <li>• All posts made within 24 hours of assignment due date</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.0- 4.0-</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posted main topic information and one response on the same day</li> <li>• Several posts, but all on the same day</li> <li>• Time between posting indicated student had read and considered substantial number of student postings before responding</li> <li>• Replied to other student postings and provided relevant responses and constructive feedback to the student.</li> <li>• Enhanced quality of discussion (i.e. illustrated a point with examples, suggested new perspectives on issues, asked questions that helped further discussion, cited current news events, etc.)</li> <li>• Time between posting indicated student had read and considered substantial number of student postings before responding</li> <li>• Referenced other research, gave examples, and evoked follow-up responses from other students</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.0</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated leadership in discussions</li> <li>• Posted regularly during the week</li> <li>• Replied to main topic. Substantially enhanced quality of discussion (i.e. illustrated a point with examples, suggested new perspectives on issues, asked questions that helped further discussion, cited current news events, etc.)</li> <li>• Replied to several other student postings on a regular basis and provided relevant responses and constructive feedback to the student posting</li> <li>• Time between posting indicated student had read and considered substantial number of student postings before responding</li> <li>• Referenced other research, gave examples, and evoked follow-up responses from other students</li> </ul>