

TEACHING ELEMENTS ASSESSING ONLINE STUDENTS

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ARE YOU LOOKING FOR STRATEGIES TO ENSURE THAT YOUR ONLINE STUDENTS ARE ACHIEVING LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE COURSE?

Faculty new to online teaching may feel that assessment in online courses is limited to multiple choice quizzes or traditional research papers. However, through careful design and technology use, there are other assessment options to effectively assess how well students achieve learning outcomes in an online course.

As in the classroom, assessment is easier when you start with observable, measurable outcomes. From there, there are a series of formal and informal online assessments that you can use.

According to New Horizons for Learning's Building Tool Room five elements characterize effective online assessment (Gigliotti):

- **Continuous interaction** between instructor and students and among students
- **Contribution to the learning process**
- **Real-world** demonstration, application, or performance
- **Relevant and aligned** to the student outcomes and the learning community
- Clearly communicated **goals and requirements** for success

These elements are seen in other frameworks for developing and evaluating online learning assessment (Gaytan and McEwan 2007).

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN ACTION

A variety of online activities and assignments can contribute to student assessment. Often, you can revise an activity you already use.

Discussions

Asynchronous [online discussions](#) are an effective method for students to apply problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Discussions provide a “running commentary” on student understanding of course content, individually and as a class.

Besides responding to instructor questions, discussions can ask student to:

- Defend a particular stance or point of view with supporting data
- Analyze or critique writings or other works
- Reflecting on personal learning

Rubrics for discussion postings can range from simple to demanding, depending on how discussions fit in the course design and expectations for student contributions.

Low-stakes quizzes and writing assignments

Short, weekly quizzes can provide a snapshot of how well students are keeping up with weekly lessons and whether they need remediation. Auto-corrected multiple-choice quizzes minimize grading time so you can focus on other student work. [Learn more about online multiple-choice test strategies.](#)

Similarly, regular writing assignments like [muddiest point](#) or reflection papers can help assess students' understanding of course content.

Individual activities

A traditional assignment like a research paper can be more effective online by dividing the development into graded sub-deliverables (e.g., research, outline, draft review, etc.) so the student can receive ongoing feedback.

Other online assignments and activities:

- Developing a product similar to what students need to produce professionally or in more advanced courses
- Identifying a reading or other resource, presenting it to the class, and moderating an online discussion on it
- Creating a presentation (and short quiz) on a course topic
- Interviewing a practitioner in the course discipline and reporting to the class on it
- Researching and creating a media presentation
- Developing a portfolio of material throughout the course
- Compiling an annotated bibliography

Group assignments

Online group assignments and activities can help alleviate the isolation some online students feel and keep them engaged and motivated as they draw support from one another. As with individual assignments, dividing a major group assignment into several deliverables enables you to intercede if the group goes off-track. Incorporating a peer evaluation component into the grade helps drive student accountability. Group assignments include:

- Collaborating on a report, presentation, or product
- Creating a wiki resource to share with the rest of the class
- Contributing to a blog
- Preparing for and participating in an online debate

Many individual activities can be modified to group activities as well. [Learn more about online group assignments.](#)

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

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