

## Assessing online discussion forums

Janet Macdonald, [Assessing online collaborative learning: process and product](#) recommends:

- If course designers wish to give all students an opportunity to experience online collaborative learning, then it is recommended that such activities are tied to the course assessment.
- Online collaborative learning is a complex process, which may include basic IT skills, online interaction skills; a familiarity with the discourse and a growth in confidence. Course developers need to address the question of whether skills are to be developed during the course, or whether it can be assumed that they have already been acquired. If they are to be developed during the course, their practice must be written into the assessment.
- The inclusion of skills development as an integral part of the course and its assessment has implications for the course content which can be covered, particularly since collaborative working may impose additional time burdens on students.
- Activity linked assessment can be a useful approach in providing a link between assessment and online work. The use of a series of linked assessments can also be effective in providing for the gradual development of skills over the course.
- The product of online collaborative work need not necessarily be assessed, but if it is this may demand the use of additional skills such as peer review, time management and task negotiation which students need to acquire, and which may again need to be articulated and rewarded through the assessment.
- The design of online collaborative assessment needs to take cognisance of the aims and goals of the task, and the relative weight to be attributed to the individual learning and the group processes. These aims need to be clearly set out in the assessment criteria, so that both students and tutors are able to judge the extent to which they have been met.

### Use a rubric to model quality discussion forum activity. Some examples:

- [Basic 3 by 3 rubric from Las Positas College](#)
- [Mason University - copyrighted rubric from N.Dabbagh](#)
- [4 by 3 rubric with points from University of Wisconsin](#)
- [Rubric from College of Sequoias using unsatisfactory, needs work, satisfactory, very good descriptive criteria](#)
- [John Mueller, Northern Central College, Illinois. 5 by 4 rubric adapted from Finch & Connolly](#)
- [7 by 5 Discussion rubric from Loyola University, Chicago](#)
- [6 rubrics from Mid Tennessee State University](#)