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**Tips for Assessing Student Learning in Online Learning Environments**

As more programs and courses move in the direction of online learning, it is essential to know how to effectively assess students’ learning in online environments. One of the biggest challenges instructors of online courses face is not being able to observe in person, and in real-time, students’ engagement with and understanding of the course material. For example, in traditional, in-person, class settings, instructors can often informally gauge students’ participation and their understanding of the material by observing students’ classroom behavior, the types of question students are asking, and the types responses students are providing to questions being posed throughout class. Although this type of in-person feedback is not possible in online environments, there are effective ways instructors can still collect meaningful formative assessment information. Below are some examples of some formative assessment strategies instructors can use to determine students’ engagement with the course material and their understanding of it:

**Online Self-check quizzes:** One way instructors and students can monitor the progress and extent of their learning from online course material, such as posted lecture slides or online readings is by building in self-check quizzes at the end of, or throughout the learning material. For example, instructors use learning management systems such as Canvas or Blackboard to create brief quizzes that students are required to complete. Most of these learning management systems include settings that allow the instructor to set time limits for completing a quiz, or requirements that students can only move onto to the next material after completing the quiz. In addition, the settings often include options that allow the students and the instructor to instantaneously see how students performed on quiz questions, which can provide more immediate feedback than an in-person quiz.

**Online discussions:** Online discussions not only provide students with a useful way to actively apply their learning in online environments, but also provide students with opportunities to respond to the views and questions posed by their classmates on specific material. In addition, they enable online instructors to effectively assess students’ level of engagement with the online material based on the kinds of questions and responses students are posting. One effective technique for generating an effective online discussion around a topic is by asking each student to both respond to a question that is posed by another student, and to ask a question of their own. For example, the instructor can start off by posing the first question. The first student in the discussion group that sees the question will respond to the question and will then pose another related question for the group. Another student will then respond to that student’s question and then pose a different related question for the group. This in turn will create an interactive chain of questions and responses. In addition, learning management systems such as Canvas include features that enable instructors to divide larger classes into smaller discussion groups so that discussions can be more intimate and closely monitored.

**E-portfolios:** One way foronline instructors to determine the progression of students learning throughout an online course or program is by having students create an e-portfolio (electronic portfolio). An E-portfolio is an on-line collection of digital artifacts and reflections documenting and showcasing a student’s learning journey in a particular course, program, fieldwork experience, or other online learning experience. Artifacts may include writing samples, photos, videos, and research projects, observations by mentors and peers, and/or reflective journals. An e-portfolio enables a student to demonstrate growth in their learning overtime, and enables an instructor to monitor the extent of a students’ growth. It also enables a student to showcase their work, and reflect upon their journey over the course of a learning experience. There are many online platforms that students can use to upload, collect, showcase, and share their work. Such platforms include Canvas, Google Sites, and Dropbox.

**Online Rubrics:** Making expectations for assignments transparent is essential, especially for students learning online. This is because instructors and students often do not have opportunities to meet face-to-face to discuss the assignment and the expectations for the assignment. For this reason, posting online rubrics can provide a valuable way for the instructor to make expectations for the assignment clear. It also enables both the instructor and the students to see how specific assignments are used to measure specified learning objectives within the course. In addition, by providing students with online rubrics students can self-check their work and monitor their progress. Online rubrics also enable instructors to provide concrete and organized feedback to students so that students know how to improve their learning within the course or on a specific assignment.

**Check Out!**:  [Assessing Student Learning in Online Learning Environments](http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/outcomes/online-student-learning-outcomes-assessment) from the [Rochester Institute of Technology's student learning outcomes assessment website](http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/outcomes/) and [Dammann & DeSantis (2017). Unlocking the promise of digital assessment. *Faculty Focus.*](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-with-technology-articles/unlocking-promise-digital-assessment/?utm_campaign=Faculty%20Focus&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=57873365&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8Ks_MDehAEPRkm6V66a3Qsam-llad8qyoQ03AUW4EkAS)

**Please share examples of online assessment techniques you have found to be effective :** If you have examples that you would like to share of how your program incorporates online learning assessments to inform instruction and student learning, please email them to me, and I will feature those examples on [YU’s Learning Assessment Website](https://owa.yu.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=qfPSe4wRYkKrpT3C8vPq8A7wjn94UtMIlXPnm4uIb63uPB_8kYqY2U_p2t2TYINMonFFOW1vbo0.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fyu.edu%2fprovost%2fassessment%2f).

**Please contact me** if you need any assistance with designing online learning assessments.