



Assessment Techniques for Online Learning

In ETLO online workshops/courses/modules, participation is typically assessed based on three central elements: substantive contributions to the discussion in each session; completion of interim assignments with immediate, practical application to the classroom; and a final culminating classroom project that participants develop in stages.

In preparation for facilitating your online content, it is helpful to begin by reviewing the requirements listed in the Goals/Overview section and reflecting on how best to support your participants in successfully meeting the stated learning goals.

Facilitating your peers in an online professional development environment may require a shift of perspective from your role as a teacher with younger students. ETLO facilitators are trained to take a learner-centered approach that respects the resources and knowledge of the adult learners/participants.

[Huba & Freed \(2000, p. 33\)](#) have noted eight features that are considered the hallmark of learner-centered teaching:

- Learners are actively involved and receive feedback
- Learners apply knowledge to enduring and emerging issues and problems
- Learners integrate discipline-based knowledge and general skills
- Learners understand the characteristics of excellent work
- Learners become increasingly sophisticated learners and knowers
- Professors coach and facilitate, intertwining teaching and assessing
- Professors reveal they are learners, too
- Learning is interpersonal, and all learners---students and professors ---are respected and valued

In addition to reflecting on your own philosophical and pedagogical approach to assessing your peers, there are several specific assessment-related tasks that you will need to attend to in the course of running your professional development offering. These include:

1. Providing ongoing feedback and tracking participation
2. Adapting rubrics and assessing final products
3. Passing participants and optionally sending Certificates of Completion

The following sections offer an overview of specific tools and strategies in each of these areas to help you effectively support your participants.

Providing ongoing feedback and tracking participation

Regular participation in the weekly discussions is key to developing an active online learning community. For individual participants it is also essential for successfully completing the content requirements. Finding ways to encourage and support the full participation of all the learners in your group is an important part of your role as facilitator.

Regular weekly interactions with participants on the discussion board and through weekly group emails are valuable opportunities to gather information about what participants understand, identify points that need clarification, and provide informal feedback. Specific, timely and regular feedback can encourage active participation and help keep the group focused on the shared learning goals in each session. It is also way of indicating that you as the facilitator notice and value everyone's contributions and that you are available to help clarify any issues that might impact participation. This is an area where each facilitator will develop his or her own style and approach to some extent. Generally, ETLO facilitators use a combination of the following practices:

- Welcome emails to the whole group at the outset of each session including an overview of the session and any specific assignments
- Weekly emails to the whole group at the mid-point of each session to encourage late posters, summarize key themes, and highlight key tasks
- Individual emails to any participants who seem to be struggling or in need of extra support
- Phone calls to “absent” participants if necessary
- Active participation in weekly discussion forums to model appropriate participation and help keep the conversation focused on the goals and topic of each session
- Brief, individual feedback to each participant at the mid-point of the professional development offering
- Use of the ETLO [Discussion Board Expectations](#) to assess discussion participation
- Use of the online Gradebook to keep track of participation in each session
- End of course feedback to participants on their final projects

Adapting rubrics and assessing final products

Each ETLO professional development offering includes a final project/product designed to encourage participants to make connections between the content and its practical classroom applications. As the facilitator, you can help support participants in this task in several ways:

- Familiarize yourself with the final project so you can communicate clearly about it to participants from the outset
- While interim assignments often help participants build towards the final project, frequent reminders in your group emails can help participants stay on track

- Review the [guidelines for final products](#) included in the Goals/Overview page of most of the ETLO offerings. You may want to revise these generic guidelines to tailor them to the specifics of the final product in your offering. Please note that EDC retains the Copyright for these Final Project Guidelines. You are welcome to adapt and use them if you credit EDC.
- Point out these guidelines or your revised version to participants early in the professional development offering
- When participants share their final products during the last session, refer to the guidelines in order to provide feedback
- Let participants know when they can expect your feedback and try to return their work in a timely manner

Passing participants and sending Certificates of Completion

Once the professional development offering is complete, you will need to certify that your participants met the stated successful completion requirements, communicate this information to the individual participants and the person(s) coordinating the local online professional development initiative, and optionally send out Certificates of Completion and/or feedback to participants.

Here are a few points to keep in mind as you work through this important process:

- ETLO professional development offerings are generally conducted on a pass/fail basis (often framed in terms of successfully or not successfully meeting stated requirements)
- The requirements for successfully completing a professional development offering are clearly spelled out in the Goals/Overview section of each offering. Be sure to familiarize yourself with these requirements so you can clearly communicate them to participants.
- Each local organization may have unique requirements for awarding professional development points/continuing education credits - you will need to clarify this through a conversation with your local coordinator.
- Good communication with participants and your coordinator can help insure that there are no surprises if any participant fails to meet the minimum requirements.
- Once the professional development offering is over, you may elect to create and send Certificates of Completion to all participants who successfully met the requirements. The details of this Certificate should be discussed with your coordinator.

Final Note

An integrated approach to assessment begins before participants even enter the online professional development offering. It starts with your reflection about your role as facilitator and is woven through all of your communications with your participants (implicitly or explicitly). Setting a tone of support and encouragement early in the process will help foster an active and dynamic learning community that leads to a rich

learning experience for facilitator and participants alike. From clearly communicating expectations, to providing timely ongoing feedback, to certifying successful completion, you have many vital roles to play in supporting each participant in successfully completing their requirements.