

Eight Low-stakes Assignments for Online Classes

Students taking courses online need more frequent feedback on their learning than they might in a brick-and-mortar classroom, where feedback is built into the experience of interacting in person with a professor and peers.

Here are eight examples of short, low-stakes assignments you can incorporate in your online classes to improve student learning:

1. Short multiple choice or essay quizzes following a brief lecture, reading assignment, or synchronous or asynchronous online discussion.

Pro-tip: Consider breaking up long lectures into smaller (6-minute mini-lectures) and quizzing students after each mini-lecture or limiting discussion to 20-30 minutes and then quizzing.

2. Exit tickets

At the end of every lesson, ask students to respond to questions that require them to rehearse, reflect on, or extend their knowledge. Students can share their responses on the discussion board or turn them in as assignments.

- What is one important thing you learned in class today?
- Write one question about today's content that puzzled you.
- Which of the readings today was most helpful in preparing you for the lesson? Why?
- What is the first step in solving the problem below?
- How might you apply the lessons we learned today in the future?

3. Stop and summarize

Stop the lecture or class discussion periodically and ask students to briefly summarize the main points and post their summary to the discussion board, limiting posts to:

- 10-15 words
- 30-50 words
- 75-100 words

4. Graded Discussion Threads

You may find it challenging to assess students' contributions to synchronous discussions online. Consider requiring students to add to discussion threads to supplement synchronous discussions and assessing their contributions to all or some of the threads. *(Please see the resource on assessing discussion threads for guidance.)*

5. **Create a fill-in-the-blanks prompt for students to summarize and synthesize synchronous or asynchronous discussions.**

Based on Monday's discussion, our class still hasn't resolved the question of _____. Several of my classmates argued that _____. I agree with them that _____, However, they are mistaken when they _____. In contrast, I argue that _____.

6. **Mini-audio/ video/ visual assignments that ask students to explain concepts, summarize readings, offer examples, apply their knowledge, or critique course material or discussion.**
(Note that if you ask students to post these assignments to a discussion or interact with another student's contributions, you will also help build a sense of community among your students.)

- Ask students to narrate the process they followed to solve a problem.
- Ask students to record themselves responding to a prompt.
- Ask students to take pictures that illustrate scientific principles or concepts.
- Ask students to record an elevator pitch for a paper they are writing and share it with you and/ or the other students in the class.

7. **Concept Maps**

Ask students to construct concept maps that demonstrate the relationships among ideas in a lesson or a class. While there are many online programs that help students build concept maps, low-tech options include asking students to use PowerPoint or to draw images by hand and take pictures and upload to Canvas. Curate the best examples and share them with the class.

(Timelines are also an example of a concept map.)

8. **Annotations**

Ask students to annotate their own texts and to comment on another student's annotations. here are excellent programs that enable students to annotate and share their texts (ex. Hypothes.is), but students can also just scan or take pictures of their annotations.