



Assessing class participation: What, why and how?

Participation of students in classroom settings is an important feature of quality learning and teaching. Class participation encompasses many ways in which students meet formally in non-lecture formats to discuss, complete tasks, or demonstrate knowledge gained from readings and lectures. This may include tutorials, seminars, labs, workshops, studios and online environments. This document has been developed by TALQAC for subject and course co-ordinators to guide their assessment of class participation.

WHY ASSESS CLASS PARTICIPATION?

Class participation comes in many forms and is used for different purposes. Whatever its form or purpose, it is more than simple attendance and it should be clearly linked to the learning objectives of the subject, particularly if class participation is assigned as an assessment component. Examples of learning objectives that could be assessed using class participation include developing: oral and written communication skills, confidence, analytic skills, listening skills, skills around using technology, and team work skills.

Benefits of assessing class participation:

- Provides opportunities for students to articulate their ideas, build shared understandings, engage with content, and to contribute to a dynamic learning environment.
- Provides tutors with a means of acknowledging students' contributions.
- Provides incentive for students to actively participate in class discussions, and by doing so, improve their oral communication skills, one of the University's graduate attributes.
- Encourages students to prepare for classes and engage with course readings and materials.

Challenges of assessing class participation:

- Often difficult for students to ascertain when, and for which types of contributions, marks are awarded. This is especially problematic where the criteria for class participation are ill-defined.
- Challenging for teaching staff to interpret and define these criteria and communicate them to a diverse group of students consistently and fairly.
- Students who are confident speaking up in group situations may be disproportionately rewarded, regardless of the quality of their contributions.
- Assessing class participation is especially challenging in large classes. Many students may be discouraged from speaking in large group situations, or class time may be too limited for all students to make a substantial contribution.

Does the University have a policy on assessment of class participation?

Yes, the University Policy on class participation is: <http://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1200>

Item 1.3: **Class participation will not be assigned more than 10% of the total mark for a subject.** Assessment criteria for participation must make clear the expectations for participation and explain how performance is differentiated (e.g. what is 'good participation' compared to 'outstanding participation'). Participation means more than attendance, and marks should not be awarded simply for students attending scheduled classes.

How to assess class participation

Questions for consideration

- How is assessment of class participation aligned with the subject's learning outcomes?
- What types of participation best suit the learning objectives of the subject?
- Have expectations about class participation been clearly communicated to students?
- What are the criteria for assessing participation? Have these been made explicit for students?
- What opportunities do students have to learn and develop the participation skills being assessed?
- How are students receiving feedback during the semester on the quality of their class participation?
- How can students be involved in peer and self-assessment of class participation?
- Have you considered students' social and cultural differences and expectations with regard to participating in class discussions and activities?
- Is the learning environment, for example large classes, suitable to assess class participation?

TALQAC welcomes feedback on this guide and any suggestions from academic staff about effective strategies they have used in assessment of class participation. This guide was developed in response to a query from Hana Dalton, TALQAC UMSU 2014 student representative; this is in keeping with our commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Please send any comments and suggestions to Chair, TALQAC: Professor Marilyns Guillemin; m.guillemin@unimelb.edu.au

What do you want to assess? Resources

Preparation

- Quiz on readings/materials
- Discussion on readings/materials and assessing contributions to discussion based on materials
- Journal/blog entries identifying and analysing the key arguments from the readings/materials – submitted online before class.

<https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessing-blogs>

Contribution to small group work

- Small group discussion, group projects and problem solving, small-group debating
- Peer-assessment of group members' contributions (and teamwork skills, if appropriate)
- Self-assessment
- Constructive commentary on blog posts submitted by class members

Peer review (with guidelines for how to do it) of class participation

http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources_teach/teaching_in_practice/docs/Student_Peer_Review.pdf

http://services.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/529777/Working_in_Groups_Update_051112.pdf

Contribution to whole class discussions

- Monitoring who contributed; who asked relevant questions; who responded to peer's contributions; quality of the contributions
- Assessing contributions to online discussion boards, chats etc.
- Self-assessment

<http://www.uow.edu.au/about/teaching/goodpractice/UOW008518.html>

Self assessment: Knight, D. (2008). A Useful Strategy for Assessing Class Participation. <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/educational-assessment/educational-assessment-a-useful-strategy-for-assessing-class-participation/>.

http://services.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/471279/Tutorials_Update_051112.pdf

Leading discussions

Students are allocated classes to prepare and lead discussion

- Assessment (by teacher) of level of preparation and skills in leading discussion
- Peer assessment; for example, of facilitation skills

Oral presentations

- Individual and peer assessment of performance, as individuals or groups
- Peer review (with guidelines for how to do it) of class participation

http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources_teach/teaching_in_practice/docs/Student_Peer_Review.pdf

http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills/all_resources/speaking-and-presenting/presenting_effectively_1

Listening

- Deep listening, reflecting back to the speaker, and the class

Encouraging Student's self awareness: <http://www.indigenousteaching.com/12-encourage-student-self-awareness>