Case study: asynchronous group discussion

This case study explores an example of online assessment through an asynchronous group discussion. Asking learners to share their learning and articulate their ideas with their peers is a useful way to assess learner engagement with course content.

The assessment context
This assessment was designed to assess learners studying at master's level for an online MSc in Engineering Management. Learners were completing the module Business Strategy for Engineers worth 15 credits.

The group discussion represented 30% of the final awarded mark for the module.

Assessment criteria and set-up
Learners were asked to participate asynchronously in a forum on Minerva in an assessment designed to simulate the type of strategic analysis conducted in a business environment. Learners were directed to submit an analysis of 750 words before providing 250-500 words of feedback/response to a post made by one or more of their peers. Learners were asked to draw upon their practical experience in industry to choose an engineering case study as a focus of their analysis.

The discussion forum assessment was designed with this rubric:

- Learners to post a 750 word scaffolded analysis as a new thread by a given date.
- Learners to reply to a post/thread of one or more peers with 250-500 words of feedback by a date one week later.
- Posts should be referenced using the Leeds Harvard System.

Learners were notified by email when feedback on their submission was available to download from Minerva.

The assessment
The discussion forum was designed to mirror the type of strategic discussion and analysis that would occur in a business environment. Learners provided their own strategic analysis of their chosen organisation including comment on the internal and external environment. Guidance was provided for learners about the course content they should apply in producing their analysis. Posts in response to other learners engaged learners in peer-review by asking learners to identify strengths and weaknesses of their peer’s work, and to stimulate further discussion.

Learners were awarded marks based on the content and level of analysis presented, the structure and reporting style of the strategic analysis posted and accuracy of citations and academic integrity.

Find out more
To find out more about setting up a discussion forum and running effective online discussions explore the discussion and collaboration section on the digital practice website.