

Assessing Participation



Assessing participation is a topic that many of us who teach in higher education often think about. Assessing participation is a topic that many of our students in college also think about it. How much does it count? How much should it count? Should it count at all? In this one-pager, we share some ideas to consider when thinking about participation in your course.

Know your why. As you think about your participation policy, know your why. Be able to articulate it to yourself and to your students. If participation in your class is important because you value student-centered pedagogy or because the profession for which you are training your students values participation, let students know. Help them understand the connections between your essential learning objectives and your approach to participation. You can also share numerous studies reveal that students who participate do better in their courses than those who do not (D’Agostino, 2023). Also, know that you can value participation and decide to grade it or not.

Ask students what “good participation” looks like at the beginning of the semester. Invite your students to share what they believe “good participation” looks like in a class (Espy, 2023) and in your discipline. Having them do this at the beginning of the semester can help set the foundation for the class.

Scaffold students’ participation. Some students who come to our classes have had multiple opportunities to discuss topics in class – and they thrive in these contexts. Other students are rather nervous or have not been asked to participate actively in the ways that you would like. Provide students a few questions to guide their reading and/or post discussion questions before class (D’Agostino, 2023). Have students write down their ideas before sharing. Invite students to participate in small groups – perhaps with assigned roles – (Chatterjee, 2020) before whole group sharing.

Offer multiple touchpoints for participation feedback. Consider providing students quarterly participation grades so that they can see their progress and make participation goals for the next quarter. You can also invite students to self-assess so that they are part of the process.

Invite students to offer feedback to their peers. This can be done anonymously or not. Canvas has a peer review tool that can be used. Or you can invite students to assess their peers as part of a class discussion bingo card (Espy, 2023). {This bingo strategy has been used by some faculty here at Elizabethtown College.}

Consider participation beyond discussions. Does participation always have to look like a full-class discussion in your class? Would a parking lot activity work in your class? Would a digital activity allow for more students to participate? Students might also annotate a shared document (Chatterjee, 2020) to gain participation points.

Acknowledge students may have accommodations. Some of your students may have accommodations that may impact the ways in which they participate. Consider adding a statement to your participation policy that helps students who may need accommodations see that you understand participation may look differently for some students, and encourage students who may need an accommodation to reach out to the Director of Disability Services Lynne Davies.



[Click here to read D’Agostino’s \(2023\) Inside Higher Education piece on participation](#)



[Click here to read Chatterjee’s \(2020\) Inside Higher Education piece on participation](#)



[Click here to read about Espy’s \(2023\) class discussion bingo card.](#)