

# ENGAGING WITH STUDENT DISCUSSIONS USING VIDEO FEEDBACK

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## KEYWORDS

Online learning, asynchronous delivery, discussions forums, feedback

## SUMMARY

Students on my MSc module engage mainly via asynchronous discussion forums.

As a tutor, responding within the forums to large numbers of threads and posts about lots of different and complex topics could be difficult and very time consuming. Students also were looking for more engagement with the tutor.

I have introduced weekly video feedback instead, recording and uploading a short video where I comment on discussions, link key ideas and offer additional resources and ideas. Student feedback has been hugely positive, with one commenting that they “would encourage all tutors to use regular video updates.”

## CONTEXT

Students on the MSc Sustainability Studies scheme programmes engage with their core and optional modules entirely asynchronously, with students enrolled from all over the world in different time zones. Their main contact with the tutor and other students is via the online Discussion forums on Brightspace. I have introduced weekly videos to feedback on student discussions within the forums.

## WHAT, WHERE?

I have been teaching the online Policy Analysis module (SCQF Level 11) for 10 years. Weekly topics on the module are explored through online lecture notes, module reading lists in Talis, videos, podcasts and other resources. Students are then encouraged to post responses to different tasks and questions on the online Discussion Forum. This ‘continual assessment’ element forms part of their overall mark (20%), with half of the mark allocated for their engagement and contributions to the forums and the other half allocated for a submitted reflection on how they found the process of engaging with the Discussions and what they had learnt.

Students on the courses are usually working as well as studying so they engage with the materials and the forums at times that suit them during the week. Students are also encouraged to draw on their own experiences and explore their own areas of interest. This can mean that after a weekend, there is a huge amount of posts, with threads which often go in many different directions, which can be difficult for the tutor to adequately respond to.

In 2020, I decided to try introducing video feedback on Discussions. Instead of writing written responses to student comments in the forums, instead I record a short piece-to-camera (approximately 5-15 minutes) where I comment on the discussions overall, draw out key student ideas and link them together and to other relevant resources and ideas.

## WHY?

From the tutor perspective, as noted by Macdonald (2008: 83), “*some online activities can be very demanding of tutor time*” and there is a danger that the “*tutor can dominate online group activity if they are too active.*” When initially moderating online discussions for our asynchronous PG modules, I found it difficult to strike the balance of when, how and how much to intervene. I followed the suggestions of Macdonald (2008) for moderating forums, such as ‘*archiving, weaving, summarising and threading*’ but I found the process time-consuming, with large numbers of threads to respond to. From the student perspective, there had been requests from students for more ‘live’ interaction with the tutors on the scheme.

## DID IT WORK?

Recording a short video allows me to more easily draw together themes, name check individual student contributions, and move forward the discussions. Unlike some written posts, this doesn’t signal that the discussion is over once the tutor has commented, it often helps stimulate further contributions. I am still able to ‘*weave, thread and summarise*’ as well as make sure that any misunderstandings are cleared up. According to module surveys, students appreciate that someone is engaging with their contributions and are glad to see someone in person; feedback has been hugely positive:

*“Weekly video update was good, not just for its content, but also as a morale booster and inclusivity exercise.”*

*The weekly videos were brilliant - it is amazing what a difference just 10 minutes of feedback makes. To know that your posts are being read and appreciated is valuable.*

*“The video responses were great to summarise module progress/discussions and without being overly prescriptive like a recorded lecture gives you some sense of personal engagement with the tutor.”*

## WAS IT WORTH IT?

Students have appreciated it and it has saved me huge amounts of time and stress (even if I still can’t watch the videos back 😊). Colleagues across the MSc Scheme have indicated at our recent team meetings that they are keen to take a similar approach.

## WHAT LEARNING AND TEACHING ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY VALUE(S) DOES THIS ALIGN WITH?

Supporting flexible and student-centred learning

Authentic assessment and meaningful feedback

Enriching learning through digital practices

**Reference:** Macdonald, J (2008) Blended Learning and Online Tutoring, Gower: Hampshire, UK, Second Edition

**If you wish to submit your own case study, or have any questions about this resource please contact:**  
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