

Tips for Using Blogs to Assess Collaborative Learning Outcomes

- Start early. The night before the first day of class isn't early enough. Give yourself at least 20 hours to become familiarized with your online tool of choice. Be prepared to face challenges you didn't expect.
 - Be committed to your project, positive and negative. Getting student buy-in is next to impossible if you aren't there to provide support, and engagement levels can drop quickly.
 - Talk to other faculty members and mentors about the tools they have used to gain a better understanding of which might work best for your purposes. Take a look at what other educators are doing with blogs and other technologies.
 - Understand what you can and cannot do with your blog.
 - Address student perceptions, anxieties, and concerns very early in the semester. Provide foundational activities that build an environment of trust and confidence. Introduce and develop skills that students will need to make online collaboration work:
 - cognitive skills
 - writing and constructive editing skills
 - web skills
 - group process skills
 - affective skills
 - openness
 - integrity
 - self-organization
- Be prepared to address student questions. Start an FAQ page.
- Create a "sandbox" for students to experiment with inserting text, images, hyperlinks, and tables.
 - Develop a clear plan for how you will attempt to assess project outcomes.
 - Utilize moments of conflict to develop constructive behaviors.
 - Take time before, during, and after the project to reflect on and assess objectives.

Source: adapted from *Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web*. James A West and Margaret L. West. (2009). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.