

Balancing Voices and Clarifying Concepts Online

Effectively balancing voices and/or clarifying concepts requires us to analyze student responses and then set goals for what and how to respond. Are you trying to engage a quieter student, or manage a dominant one? Did a student post an incorrect response or was their post unclear? Your responses and the method you use to respond (private email to the student, reply to the student in the discussion forum, or reply to the full group) should help you meet the specific goal(s) you have set.

The chart below includes suggestions for balancing the voices and clarifying concepts or misconceptions in an online discussion.

| Student response | Your goal | Method | Example response |
|--|---|--|--|
| Quiet students are often slow to post. | Encourage and support students to express their ideas, and let them know that you notice and are concerned when they do not participate. | Send a private email to the student. | <i>Corinne, we haven't heard from you on this reading yet. Is everything okay? Are you having any difficulties with the reading assignment? How can I help?</i> |
| Dominant students take over the conversation. | Acknowledge the student's contributions, and gently explain the benefits of moderating participation to allow space for comments and suggestions from others. | Send a private email to the student. | <i>Gene, thank you for your thoughtful contributions to the conversation! I'd like to see how your thinking evolves after you read what others express on the topic. Perhaps you can incorporate your ideas into follow-up comments.</i> |
| The student's response is too late to be part of the conversation. | Remind students that there is a give-and-take to interesting conversations, and thus timing is important. | Send a private email to the student. | <i>Angelo, I think everyone would have benefited from your comments if you had posted earlier in the week. Please post earlier next time so that you can be part of the evolving conversation.</i> |
| The student's response is unclear. | Encourage students to clarify their comments and to provide support for their positions. | Reply to the student on the discussion board. | <i>Rina, could you provide an example that illustrates the main point in your post?</i> |
| The student's answer is incorrect. | Ensure accuracy of core concepts in the course and support peer learning. First, give other students the opportunity to provide the correct information. After monitoring the conversation, confirm or correct the information. | Reply to the full group on the discussion board. | <i>Thanks for chiming in everyone! These are tricky issues, so I'm glad we have the opportunity to grapple with the complexities and to clarify these concepts. In fact, the challenge in the Supreme Court case is based on free speech, rather than religious freedom.</i> |