

# SPARK!

*Igniting digital learning through shared experience*

**Teacher Edition**

## HOW CAN DISCUSSION BASED ASSESSMENTS ENHANCE THE VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

● Amy McKenzie; Low Country Virtual

Discussion Based Assessments (DBAs) are a popular method of assessing online learners in the K-12 setting. Teachers have a one-on-one discussion with each student in order to assess their understanding. DBAs are a dynamic tool at a virtual teacher's disposal that can be conducted in multiple formats to allow for flexibility to meet every teaching style and comfort level.

The simplest way to conduct DBAs is to give your students the topics ahead of time and then schedule a short phone call or virtual meeting. It is best practice to give students broad topics or open-ended questions because the purpose of this discussion is to gain a deeper insight into the student's understanding of the content rather than testing their memorization skills.

You should also provide prompts or clarification during the discussion so that the student leaves feeling confident. If your schedule does not allow for individual synchronous meetings with each student, you can conduct a discussion asynchronously using a platform that allows students to record themselves speaking. Some Learning Management Systems have video recording built in, or you can explore external platforms such as Padlet or Flip.

Discussion Based Assessments give virtual students the opportunity to express their voice and make connections with their teachers. During a DBA, you are setting aside a specific block of time for each student. For some students, having the undivided attention of an adult that is invested in their learning is rare and can be extremely meaningful. Taking the time to speak to each student individually will not only cultivate a genuine connection, but also provide a better understanding of their academic standing.

Having individual discussions with each student will allow you to formatively assess the students more accurately. DBAs give teachers the opportunity to see what information each student has retained and the content that needs to be revisited.

## TRADE SECRETS

- **Make your first DBA simple to help build up student confidence.**
- **Prepare prompts ahead of time to help struggling students.**
- **Encourage your students to practice with an adult at home first.**
- **Plan time between appointments in case you and your students become engaged in a deep conversation.**
- **For asynchronous DBAs, ensure your students are familiar with the platform by using it ahead of time for a fun, community building activity.**

From an academic integrity standpoint, DBAs also help teachers identify students who may be getting too much assistance from parents or if students have been violating academic integrity policies. While the topic of the DBA will be content specific, the act of participating in a DBA will also be a chance for students to focus on the soft skills needed for workplace success such as critical thinking and effective communication. Discussion Based Assessments should be used periodically throughout your course to hold students accountable for their learning and help them build confidence in their ability to demonstrate what they have learned.



## RESOURCES

[Florida Virtual School's Quick Start Video on DBAs](#)

[A Guide to FLVS DBAs - Study Tips and Tricks](#)

[The Learning Accelerator's Overview of DBAs](#)

## Quarter 1 Discussion Based Assessment

**Directions:** Choose 1 of the topics below to discuss during your DBA. Check your Google Calendar for your DBA appointment. Prepare ahead of time, but remember that this is a conversation so there's no need to memorize or write anything before your appointment.

### States of Matter

What are the 3 states of matter and how can objects change from one type to another?

### Mixtures and Solutions

What is a mixture?  
What is a solution?  
What is the difference between them?

### Separating Mixtures

Explain three common methods of separating mixtures and when you would use them.

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