

Training programme for the mentors of the bivalve mollusc aquaculture sector

Work Package: 3

Author: M.A.R.E. Soc. Coop. Ar.l.

Date: 02/04/2026



Co-funded by
the European Union



OPTIMA
Good Practices in Molluscs Aquaculture

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

MODULE 4

**1.
Short
description**

The module equips mentors with strategies and tools to engage learners, provide feedback, and support them in overcoming technical, relational, or psychological challenges.

**2.
Objectives
of the
module**

Engage and motivate learners online, use interactive tools, and apply effective assessments. Address challenges and improve through reflection and feedback.

**3.
Learning
outcomes**

Mentors will be able to design engaging digital sessions, assess learners effectively, manage distance learning challenges, and improve their practice through reflection and feedback.

**4.
Prerequisites**

Not applicable

**5.
Duration**

150 minutes (100 face to face online, 50 e-learning)



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

4. Organising digital training

4.1 Be able to support participant engagement during online training

4.1.1 Be able to support learners engagement during online training

This chapter guides mentors in fostering engagement and motivation in digital learning by addressing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs.

It offers practical strategies based on educational research and real-world experiences to monitor well-being and manage online learning challenges.

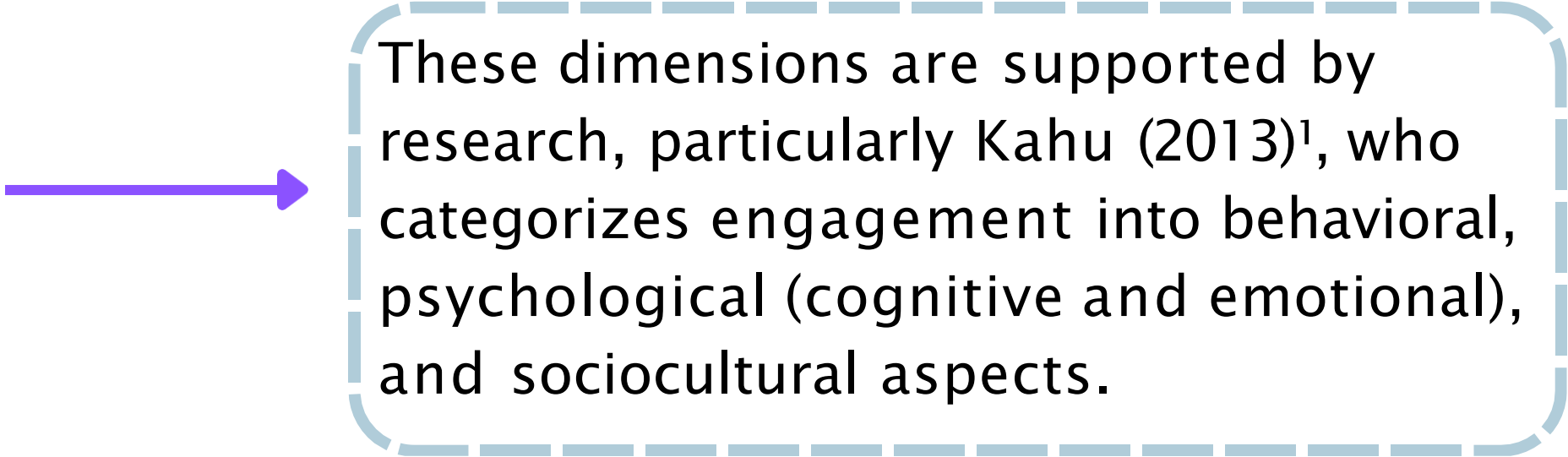
→ Mentors guide learning, transfer knowledge, and proactively address issues to ensure active participation and a high-quality learning experience



MODULE 4

Participant engagement is a multidimensional construct that includes:

- **Cognitive Engagement:** Mental investment in learning tasks, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and connecting new knowledge with prior understanding.
- **Emotional Engagement:** Learners' feelings toward the learning experience, such as interest, curiosity, enjoyment, or frustration; positive emotions support motivation and persistence.
- **Behavioral Engagement:** Observable participation in activities, including discussions, completing assignments, attending sessions, asking questions, and collaborating with peers.



These dimensions are supported by research, particularly Kahu (2013)¹, who categorizes engagement into behavioral, psychological (cognitive and emotional), and sociocultural aspects.



¹Framing student engagement in higher education: a conceptual grounding for practice. Studies in Higher Education, 39(5), 758–773: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1080/03075079.2013.791950>.

MODULE 4

In online contexts, engagement is profoundly influenced by factors such as:

- **Digital literacy:** Participants' ability to use digital tools and platforms effectively.
- **Instructional design:** The clarity, relevance, and interactivity of learning materials and activities.
- **Social presence:** Feeling of connection with instructors and peers, helping reduce isolation in online learning.
- **Mentor's role online:** Unlike in-person training, mentors must proactively monitor engagement and adapt support, as nonverbal cues are limited.

→ Mentors guide learning by transferring knowledge and skills while proactively addressing issues to ensure all participants stay engaged and have a quality learning experience



MODULE 4

4.1.2 Identifying difficulties: signals to monitor and strategies to prevent them

Remote mentoring offers flexibility for workers with time or logistical constraints, but it can also bring challenges.

Success depends on recognizing early signs of discomfort or issues in the mentoring process and addressing them promptly.

Signs to monitor:

- **Reduced participation:** Silence in discussions or cameras turned off.
- **Late or missed tasks:** Especially if it differs from previous patterns.
- **Changes in communication:** Vague, brief, or emotionally charged messages.
- **Lack of progress in LMS (Learning Management System):** Suspended tasks or minimal interaction.
- **Explicit feedback:** Participants express feeling overwhelmed or confused.



MODULE 4

Preventative Strategies: Mentoring and Best Practices

- **Pre-assessment:** Understand participants' experience, digital skills, and expectations.
- **Clear expectations:** Define what active participation means in the online setting.
- **Psychological safety:** Create a supportive environment where learners feel comfortable.
- **Varied activities:** Use different formats to maintain interest and engagement.
- **Regular feedback:** Monitor participants' understanding and well-being through surveys and questions.



MODULE 4

Other intervention strategies for mentors:

- **Regular and varied check-ins:**
 - Individual check-ins: Short optional meetings to discuss progress, challenges, and well-being.
 - Small group discussions: Encourage participation, especially from more reserved learners.
 - Automatic reminders: Use platform tools to remind deadlines and send motivational messages.



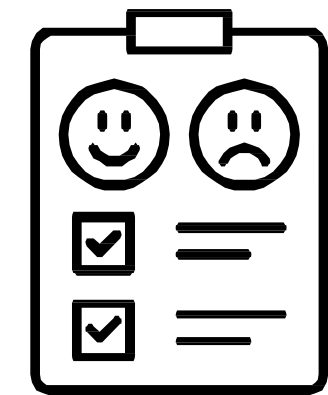
Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4



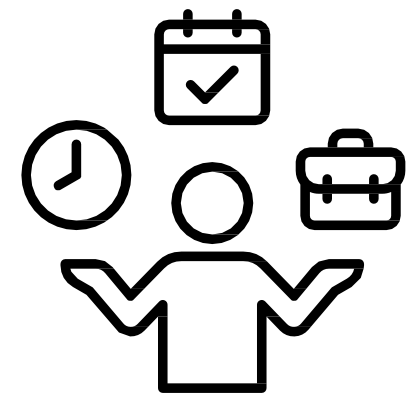
- **Anonymous feedback tools:**

- Anonymous feedback tools: Use proposal boxes or surveys to let participants share concerns safely.
- Plus/Delta feedback: Regularly ask what works well (plus) and what could be improved (delta).



- **Adapting pacing and flexibility:**

- Flexible deadlines: Allow some flexibility to accommodate unexpected challenges.
- Chunk content: Break complex topics into smaller, manageable parts.
- Offer choices: Let participants demonstrate learning in different ways (e.g., written, video, audio).



MODULE 4

- **Creating a psychologically safe environment:**
 - Growth mindset: Encourage viewing challenges and mistakes as learning opportunities.
 - Normalize help-seeking: Reassure participants that asking for support is normal and encouraged.
 - Active listening: Respond empathetically and validate participants' feelings.
 - Share resources: Provide access to academic, technical, or psychological support.



MODULE 4



4.1.3 Resolution of possible conflicts

Conflicts in online learning can arise from communication challenges and diverse backgrounds.

Managing them effectively is key to maintaining a positive and supportive learning environment.

Common sources of conflict in online contexts:

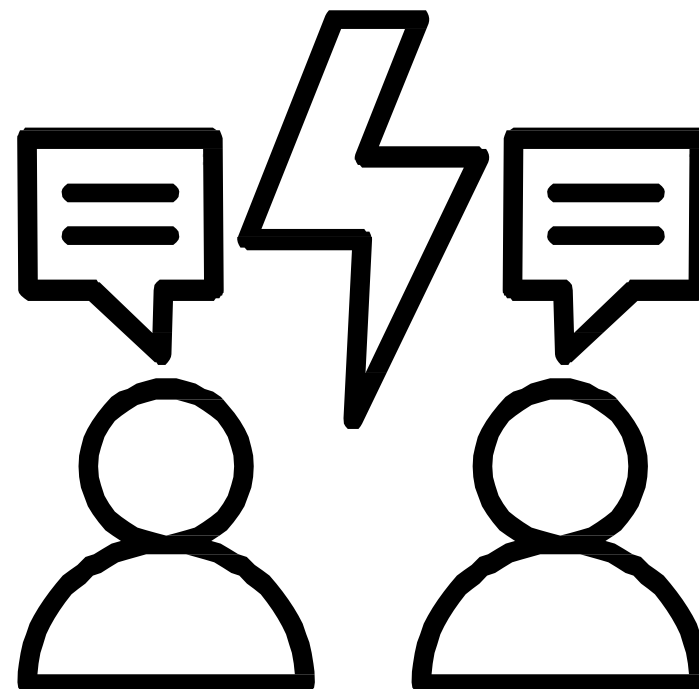
- **Technical issues:** Technical issues with connection or platforms can create frustration and negatively affect relationships
- **Interpersonal Misunderstandings:**
 - Tone misunderstandings: Written communication can be misinterpreted without nonverbal cues.
 - Lack of context: Messages may be misunderstood or taken out of context.
 - Different communication styles: Direct vs. indirect styles can cause friction.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

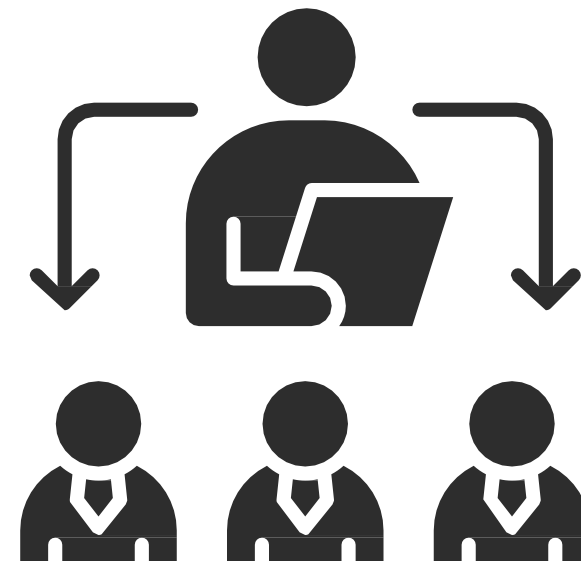
- **Interpersonal Misunderstandings:**
 - Cultural differences: Diverse norms can lead to misunderstandings.
 - Group dynamics: Unequal participation or personality clashes.
 - Unclear roles/expectations: Ambiguity in tasks, roles, or evaluation criteria.



MODULE 4

Effective conflict resolution strategies for mentors:

- **Preventative actions:**
 - Clear communication rules: Set guidelines for respectful and effective online interaction.
 - Netiquette guidelines: Define expected behaviors in digital communication.
 - Defined roles and tasks: Clarify responsibilities in group work to avoid confusion and conflict.



MODULE 4

- Mediation techniques (when a conflict arises):



Active listening



Understand all perspectives and validate emotions



Reframing



Encourage neutral, objective communication focused on common goals.



Neutral facilitation



Stay impartial and support constructive dialogue.



Appropriate setting



Address conflicts privately or in small groups when needed.



Solution focus



Guide participants toward shared and practical solutions.

MODULE 4



- **Clear communication and documentation:**

- Summarize agreements: Clearly outline solutions and actions agreed upon.
- Document interactions: Record mediation efforts, especially for recurring issues.



- **Cultural sensitivity and awareness:**

- Promote intercultural understanding: Encourage appreciation of different communication styles and cultural norms.
- Address stereotypes: Respond to any cultural insensitivity or stereotyping.
- Optional training: Provide guidance on effective intercultural communication online.



MODULE 4

- **Escalation pathways:**

Know when to escalate conflicts to a higher authority if they become unmanageable or involve serious issues.



These practices are based on conflict resolution theory (Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (2011) Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, Penguin Books) and are supported by research on online collaboration and group dynamics (<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=online+collaboration+group+dynamics&id=EJ1171881>), which highlights the importance of clear structures, effective communication, and skilled facilitation in managing diverse teams.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

4.1.4 The Importance of Breaks and Attention Management in Online Courses

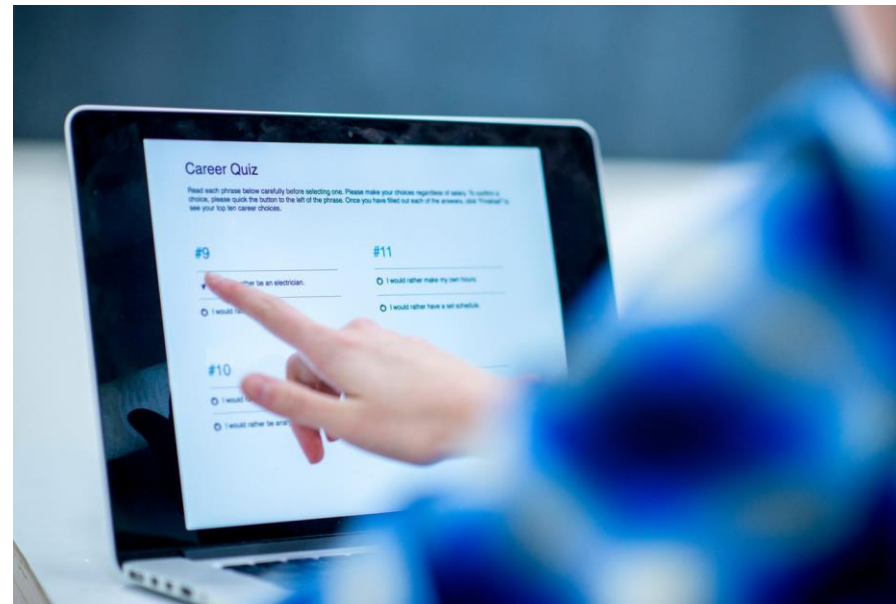
Maintaining attention online is challenging due to screen fatigue, cognitive overload, and distractions, with research showing **attention often drops after 20-30 minutes**.

Mentors can apply the following techniques to counteract fatigue and maintain high energy:

- **Strategically Use Micro-Breaks**
 - Brain breaks: Include short 2–5–minute breaks every 20–30 minutes during live sessions.
 - Segment content: Divide long readings or videos into shorter, manageable units.

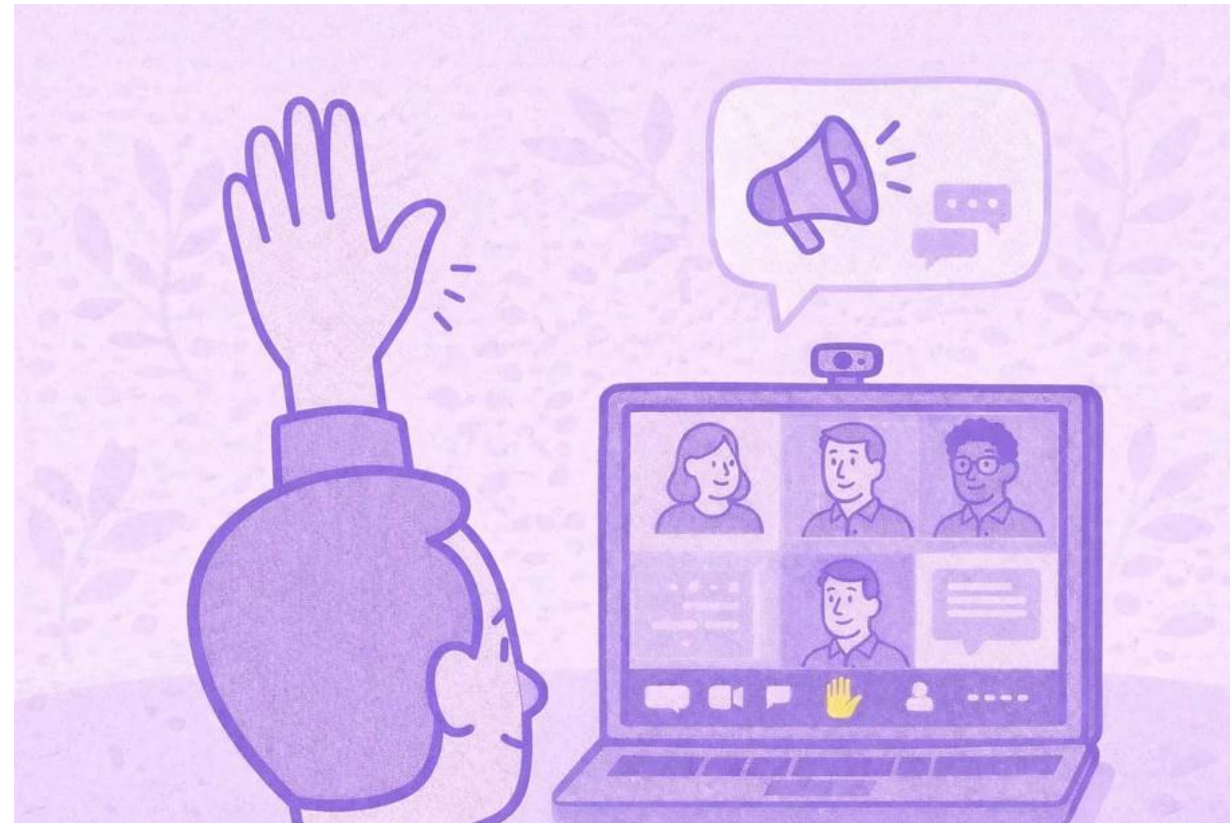
MODULE 4

- Energizing and interactive activities
 - Quick surveys & quizzes: Use polls to check understanding and reengage learners.
 - Think–Pair–Share: Small group discussions followed by sharing with the whole class.
 - Interactive tools: Use collaborative boards or documents for brainstorming and problem-solving.
 - Short debates/role-play: Encourage active participation and critical thinking.



MODULE 4

- Effective use of interactive tools
 - Chat: Encourage questions and comments; consider a co-facilitator to manage it.
 - Q&A tools: Structure questions and allow voting on relevance.
 - Virtual hand raise: Use to manage turns and orderly participation.



MODULE 4

- Attention checks and metacognitive prompts
 - Check-in questions: Ask reflective or application-focused questions to gauge understanding.
 - Visual cues: Use emojis or quick reactions to monitor attention and comprehension.
 - Short quizzes: Ungraded, low-stakes quizzes provide feedback and maintain engagement.



The above strategies are consistent with the cognitive load theory (Sweller, J., 1988), which emphasizes the importance of managing the mental effort required of students in order to optimize the processing and storage of information.

MODULE 4

Organising digital training

Identifying difficulties: Signals to monitor and strategies to prevent them



Signals to monitor

- Sudden reduction in participation
- Late or missing assignments
- Changes in communication tone
- Lack of progress in LMS modules
- Direct admissions of feeling overwhelmed or confused

Resolving possible conflicts



Conflict resolution strategies

- Set clear communication protocols
- Define roles and responsibilities in group tasks
- Apply active listening and neutral facilitation
- Choose a right setting (private vs, public) for addressing conflict
- Be sensitive to cultural dynamics and agreements

The importance of breaks and checking students' attention in online courses



Why it matters

- Attention spans in virtual settings often decline after 20-30 minutes
- Without body language or visual cues, it's harder to assess focus and engagement



Key strategies

- Use micro-breaks every 20-30 minutes
- Chunk asynchronous content into shorter segments
- Use interactive tools like polls, quizzes, breakout rooms, collaborative
- Implement "check-in" questions

MODULE 4

4.1.5 Motivation and Encouragement: How to Maintain Student Motivation

Motivation is essential for persistence and success, particularly in online learning.

It can be distinguished between:

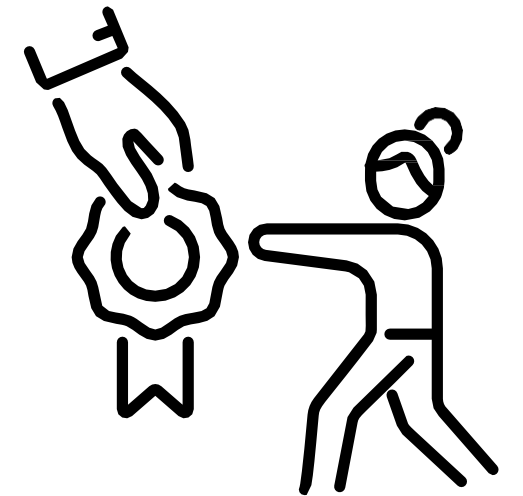


Intrinsic motivation

Driven by curiosity, interest, personal growth, or satisfaction from learning; long-lasting and self-sustaining

Extrinsic motivation

Influenced by external rewards or pressures, such as grades or recognition; can support intrinsic motivation when learners feel competent and autonomous.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

→ In online learning, maintaining motivation is crucial due to isolation, lower stimulation, self-pacing challenges, and distractions.

- **Effective Strategies for Mentors: Gamification and Game-Based Learning**
 - Badges & points: Reward module completion, participation, or milestone achievements.
 - Leaderboards (optional): Track progress individually rather than fostering competition.
 - Narrative & story telling: Use engaging stories to make learning meaningful.
 - Challenges & missions: Turn activities into goal-oriented tasks with rewards.

MODULE 4



4.2 Learning Assessment

The training program includes a final assessment, so **mentors should understand key evaluation methods.**

Effective assessment is essential to track progress, adjust teaching, and promote learner accountability.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

4.2.1 Why Assess? The importance of assessment for measuring progress and improving course effectiveness

- Purpose and Value of Assessment

- Formative Assessment vs. Summative Assessment
- Assessment Tools and Techniques
- Digital Assessment Tools (e.g., Google Forms, Kahoot, Padlet, LMS–Integrated Tools)
- Engaging Participants in the Assessment Process
- Peer Feedback, Analysis Journals, Self–Assessment Rubrics

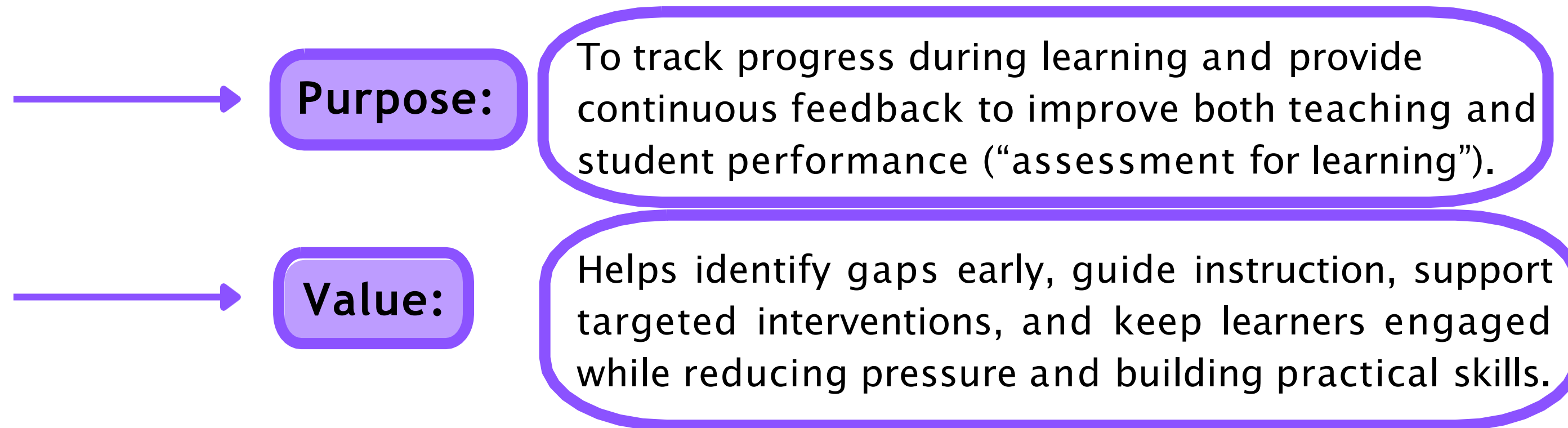


MODULE 4

- **The Meaning of Assessment: Beyond the Grade**

Assessment in online learning goes beyond grading, serving to provide feedback, boost motivation, and improve teaching. Mentors need to understand these roles to support effective learning.

- **Formative Assessment**



A landmark 1998 study showed that formative assessment strongly improves final learning outcomes, supporting deeper understanding and self-regulation, and is considered a key milestone in education research.

MODULE 4



Online learning examples:

- **Quick comprehension surveys:** Short polls during lessons to quickly check understanding and spot difficulties in real time (e.g., "On a scale of 1 to 5, how confident do you feel about this concept?").
- **One-Minute Papers / Exit Tickets:** Brief reflections at the end of a lesson to highlight key learning and remaining questions (e.g., "What is the most important thing you learned today?" or "What question do you have left?").
- **Forum discussions:** Open-ended questions that encourage reflection and application, helping mentors see students' thinking.
- **Ungraded practice quizzes:** Low-stakes quizzes with instant feedback to reinforce learning without pressure.
- **Concept or mind maps:** Visual tools that show how students connect ideas, revealing depth of understanding.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

- **Summative Assessment**

→ **Purpose:**

To evaluate learning at the end of a course or module against defined standards (“assessment of learning”)

→ **Value:**

Provides an overall measure of achievement, supports certification, and ensures accountability through fair evaluation of knowledge.



MODULE 4



Online learning examples:

- **Online final exam:** Timed test on the LMS covering all course content, often supervised by a mentor.
- **Comprehensive project / case study:** Real-world task where students apply knowledge and present results (report, presentation, demo).
- **Digital portfolio:** Collection of students' best work showing progress and skill development over time.
- **Final presentation / discussion:** Students present their project in a video call and respond to questions from mentors and peers

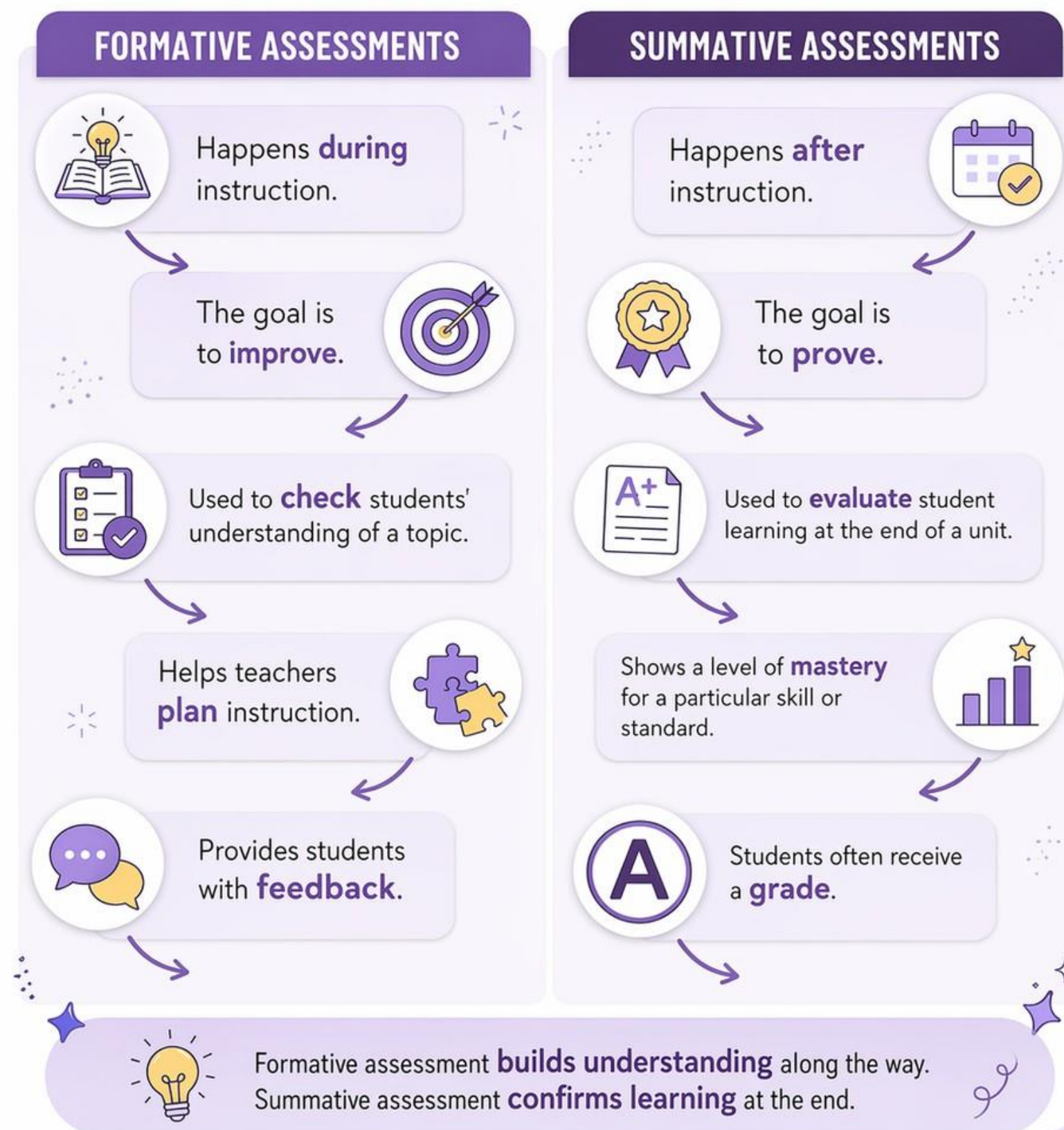


Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

FORMATIVE vs. SUMMATIVE assessments

Different purposes. Same goal: student success.



MODULE 4



4.2.2 Assessment Tools: Tests, Questionnaires, Portfolios, Performance Observation

Tools Integrated into Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Modern LMS platforms (for example Moodle, Canvas, Blackboard, Google Classroom etc...) offer a range of tools that simplify and make assessment more effective

Quizzes/Tests

→ Create multiple-choice, true/false, short-answer, or essay questions with automatic feedback and grade tracking.

Example: A module on "Digital Marketing Fundamentals" includes weekly quizzes in Canvas to test vocabulary and basic concepts, with immediate feedback.

Assignment & Project Submission

→ Students upload documents or multimedia; instructors can annotate and grade using rubrics.

Example: Students upload a draft marketing plan to Moodle, and the mentor uses the annotation tools to highlight areas for improvement and assign a score according to the rubric.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4



Discussion Forums

→ Evaluate participation, critical thinking, and communication through structured online discussions.

Example: A mentor asks students to critically analyze a case study in a Blackboard forum, evaluating the application of theories and interaction with peers.

Gradebook

→ Track grades, calculate final scores, and give students a clear view of their progress.

Example: Students can consult the gradebook in Canvas to monitor grades and current course status.

Analytics Dashboards

→ Monitor student activity and engagement to identify issues and intervene early.

Example: A mentor notices through analytics that a student hasn't accessed the course for days and contacts them. This approach falls within the realm of learning analytics (Siemens & Gasevic, 2012)



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

EVALUATION TOOLS



TESTS



QUESTIONNAIRES



PORTFOLIOS



PERFORMANCE
OBSERVATION

MODULE 4



Digital tools for assessment and interaction

- **Google Forms:** Create surveys, self-assessment quizzes, and feedback forms; easy to share and collaborate.

Example: Collect anonymous feedback after a complex session.

- **Kahoot!** Interactive quizzes and polls; fun way to review content and keep attention.

Example: Review last week's material at the start of a live class.

- **Padlet** Virtual bulletin board for brainstorming, ideas, and quick responses.

Example: Students post project ideas and mentors respond visually.

- **Mentimeter / Slido** Live polls, word clouds, Q&A, and interactive presentations.

Example: Create a word cloud for “What is your main challenge in this module?”



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4



- **Perusall / Hypothesis** Collaborative document annotation; supports active reading and discussion.

Example: Students comment on an article; mentor identifies key points.

- **Flip (formerly Flipgrid)** Video discussion platform for speaking, presentations, and creativity.

Example: Students record a 1-minute video introducing themselves and goals (instead of a written text).

- **Online Whiteboards (Miro, Jamboard)** Collaborative brainstorming, concept maps, and visual projects.

Example: Groups design a workflow; mentor assesses comprehension and teamwork.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

Actions and Best Practices for Mentors

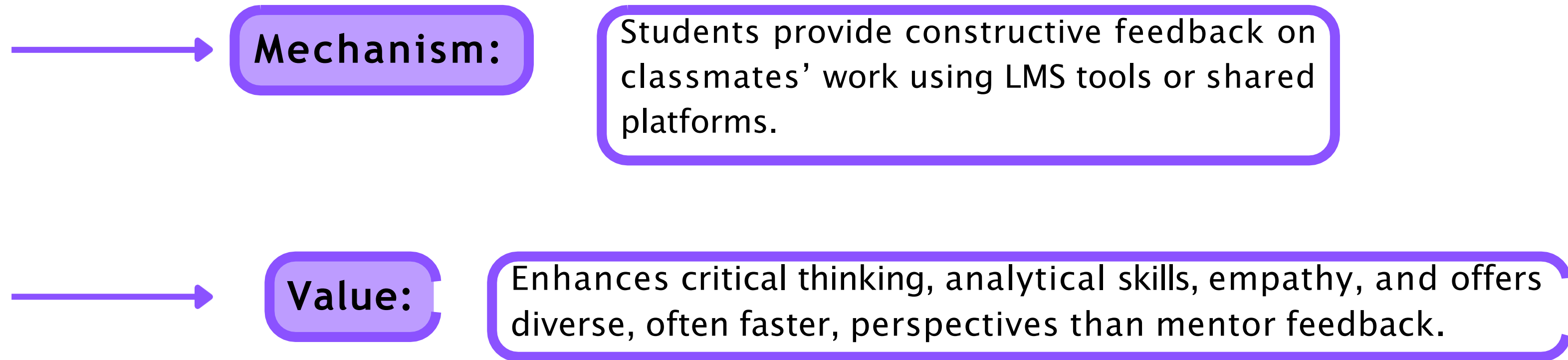
- Match the tool to the objective: choose tools that truly support the learning goal, not just “innovative” ones.
- Provide clear instructions/support: explain how to use the tool and what’s expected; short tutorials can help.
- Use varied assessment methods: combine individual and group tasks, written/oral, practical/theoretical to suit different learning styles.
- Automate when possible: use self-assessment quizzes or surveys to focus more on qualitative feedback.



MODULE 4

4.2.3 Self-assessment, co-assessment and ongoing assessment: involving students in the assessment process

- Peer Feedback



MODULE 4



Implementation Methods

- **Structured Rubrics / Guiding Questions:** Use clear rubrics or guiding questions to make feedback focused and aligned with learning objectives.

Example: "Does the introduction clearly state the main point?", "What part could be clarified better?"
- **Training and Modeling** Provide short activities to teach effective, constructive, and supportive feedback. Mentors can show examples.
- **Anonymity (optional)** Decide if feedback should be anonymous or attributed based on topic and group safety.
- **Scientific Support** Research confirms peer feedback improves learning, self-regulation, and critical thinking.



MODULE 4

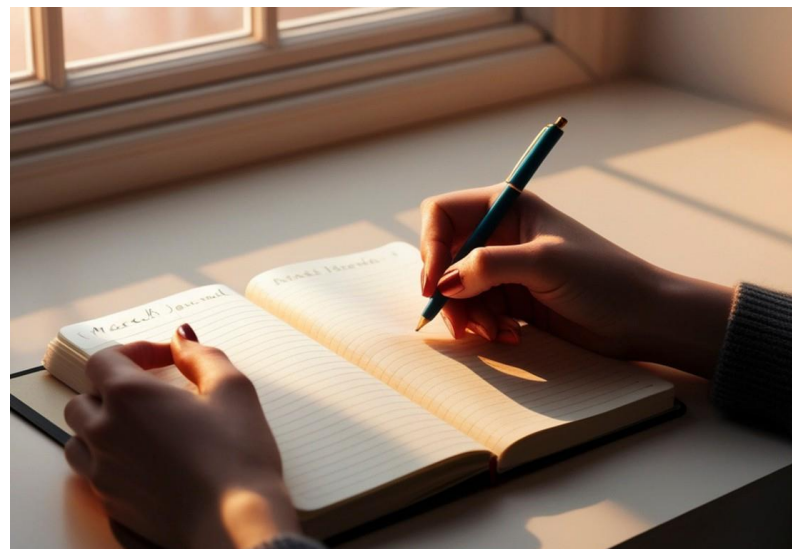
- Reflective Journals / Learning Logs

→ **Mechanism:**

Learners regularly record reflections (text, audio, or video) on their learning experiences and challenges. Can be private (between mentor and student) or shared between mentor and small group of students.

→ **Value:**

Promotes metacognition, self-awareness, and critical reflection; helps track progress and identify strengths, weaknesses, and next steps.



MODULE 4

Implementation Methods

- **Clear Prompts: Provide specific reflection prompts** Provide specific questions to guide reflection and make it more meaningful.

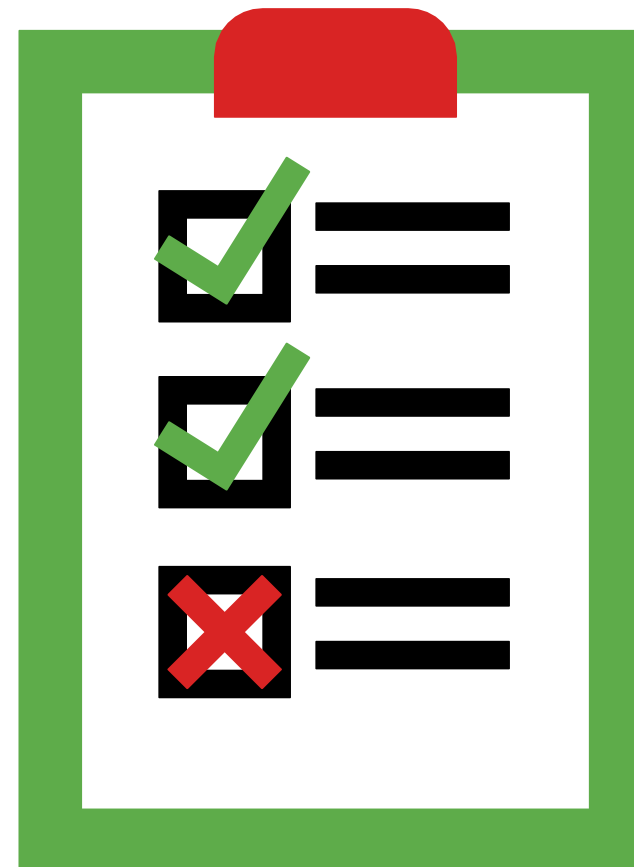
Example: "What was the most difficult concept this week and why?", "How does this module relate to your personal experience?", "What new questions emerged after reading?", "Describe a lightbulb moment you experienced this week."
- **Low Evaluation Impact** Emphasize personal growth over grading; give qualitative feedback on depth of reflection.
- **Frequency and Format** Encourage short, regular entries (e.g., weekly) with flexible formats (text, audio, video).

MODULE 4

- Self-Assessment Criteria

→ **Mechanism:** Students use the same criteria as mentors to review and improve their work before submission.

→ **Value:** Clarifies expectations, supports self-correction, and develops critical thinking and autonomy.



MODULE 4



Implementation Methods

- **Shared Rubrics** Give students access to assessment criteria from the start to guide their work.
- **Co-creation (optional)** Involve students in defining criteria to increase understanding and ownership.

Example: e.g. ask them what makes a piece of work "good."
- **Guiding Questions** Provide prompts to support structured self-assessment and reflection.

Example: *"Based on this rubric, what score would you give yourself for each criterion and why? Provide concrete examples." "What changes will you make based on your self-assessment?"*
- **Pre-submission Checklist** Turn rubric criteria into a simple checklist to review work before submission.



MODULE 4

Action points and best practices for mentors

- **Model Reflection:** Share your own reflections to normalize it as part of the learning process.
- **Feedback on Feedback:** Guide students by giving feedback on the quality of their peer- and self-assessment.
Example: Your feedback to your colleague was very specific and helpful," "Try adding concrete examples to your self-assessment."
- **Integrate Reflection Strategically:** Make reflection a core part of learning, aligned with objectives—not an add-on.
- **Value Growth, Not Just Results:** Recognize effort, improvement, and engagement, not only final outcomes.



MODULE 4

CONTINUOUS SUPPORT AND CRITICALITIES MANAGEMENT IN ONLINE LEARNING



ACADEMIC, EMOTIONAL,
AND TECHNICAL
SUPPORT BY MENTORS



CREATING A SAFE AND
INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTT



PROACTIVE IDENTIFICATION
OF LEARNER DIFFICULTIES



CONFLICT RESOLUTION
STRATEGIES

MODULE 4

4.3 Ongoing Support and Critical Issue Management

Effective online mentoring goes beyond content delivery, requiring **continuous academic, emotional, and technical support**.

It involves **creating a safe, inclusive environment, identifying and addressing challenges early, and managing conflicts** to ensure a positive learning experience.



MODULE 4

1. Academic Support



Objective

Helps learners understand content, build skills, and achieve learning goals.



Value:

Improves outcomes, boosts confidence, and prevents disengagement.



1. Academic Support

Example:

- **Content Clarification:** Use Q&A sessions or forums to address doubts and explain complex topics.
- **Homework Feedback:** Provide timely, specific, and constructive feedback to support improvement.
- **Resource Orientation:** Guide students to additional materials and academic support resources.
- **Study Strategies:** Suggest effective online study techniques, time management, and note-taking methods.

Case study: A mentor notices common difficulties in solving an analytical task and takes action by organizing an optional in-depth session, sharing some examples with the class to better understand the problem.



MODULE 4

2. Emotional Support



Objective

Supports well-being, builds confidence, reduces anxiety, and fosters belonging.



Value:

Essential for maintaining motivation and preventing burnout.



Co-funded by
the European Union

2. Emotional Support

- Example:
- **Regular Check-ins:** Keep informal contact (email/text) to monitor how students are doing.
 - **Active Listening:** Show empathy by acknowledging and validating students' feelings.
 - **Encouragement:** Recognize effort, progress, and resilience, especially in challenging moments.
 - **Growth Mindset:** Frame difficulties as opportunities for learning and improvement.

Case study: A person writes to express frustration with the workload. The mentor responds with empathy, asking questions to better understand the difficulties and suggesting small steps or access to support services.

MODULE 4

3. Technical Support



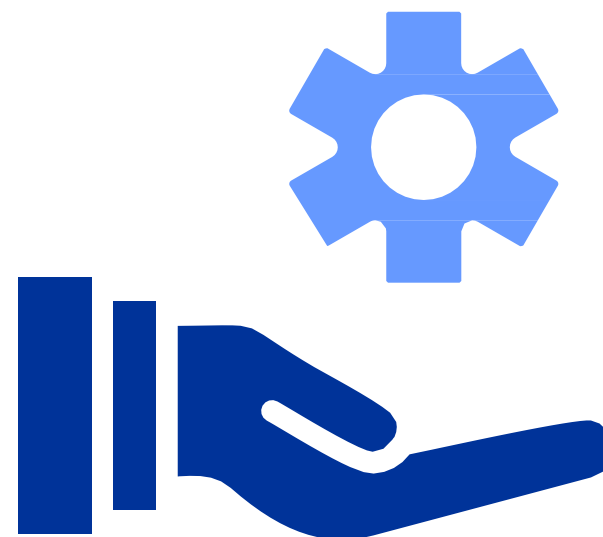
Objective

Help students navigate digital tools and platforms.



Value:

Improves outcomes, boosts confidence, and prevents disengagement.



Co-funded by
the European Union

3. Technical Support

Example:

- **Basic Assistance:** Help with common technical issues (e.g., browser cache).
- **Orientation to Support Channels:** Provide contact info for IT support and help desks.
- **Proactive Information:** Share instructions and tutorials before introducing new tools.
- **Peer Support:** Encourage students to help each other with technical problems.

Case study: If a participant is unable to open a video or download slides, the mentor provides troubleshooting guidance and, if necessary, involves technical support.

MODULE 4

4. Create a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment



Objective

Ensure all students feel respected and safe to express themselves.



Value:

Promotes engagement, learning, and diverse perspectives (aligned with UDL, Universal design for Learning).



MODULE 4



4. Create a Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

- Strategies:**
- **Coexistence Rules:** Co-create or share guidelines for respectful communication.
 - **Inclusive Language:** Use diverse examples and cases that reflect all learners.
 - **Promote Empathy:** Encourage reflection on different perspectives.
 - **Address Microaggressions:** Intervene promptly and sensitively when issues arise.
 - **Foster Belonging:** Use icebreakers and personal-sharing activities.
 - **Accessibility:** Ensure materials and tools are accessible and guide students to support services.

Case study: At the beginning of the course, the mentor proposes an activity in which everyone shares a significant cultural aspect, promoting openness and mutual respect.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4



4.3.1 Identifying difficulties: signs to monitor and strategies to prevent problems

Mentors should proactively identify student disengagement or distress and follow clear protocols to intervene before issues escalate.

Signs to Monitor:

- Reduced Online Activity: Sudden or sustained drop in logins, forum posts, or assignment submissions.
- Late or Missing Assignments: Recurring missed deadlines or incomplete work, especially if unusual for the student.
- Changes in Communication Tone: Messages become brief, vague, or express frustration, anxiety, or apathy.
- Poor Attendance in Live Sessions: Camera off, minimal participation, or no response to direct questions.
- Direct Expressions of Difficulty: Students explicitly report feeling overwhelmed, confused, or struggling.
- Declining Performance: Significant drop in quiz or assignment scores without clear reason.
- Social Isolation: Avoids group work and peer interaction, shows shyness or withdrawal.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4



Preventive Strategies (Proactive Actions):

- **Early and Frequent Feedback:** Give regular, specific, low-stakes feedback to keep students informed and motivated.
- **Clear Expectations:** Provide explicit instructions, rubrics, and deadlines to reduce stress and confusion.
- **Regular Check-ins:** Monitor progress with surveys or short one-on-one sessions for at-risk students.
- **Building Relationships:** Foster a welcoming environment so students feel comfortable seeking help.
- **Flexibility:** Offer adaptable schedules, deadlines, or learning paths to meet individual needs.

Case study:

The mentor offers an anonymous survey asking, "*How do you feel about this week's content?*" ("*Secure*," "*Confused*," "*Difficult*").

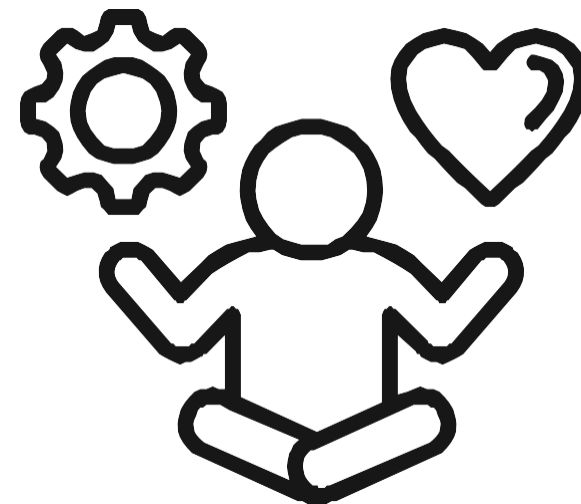
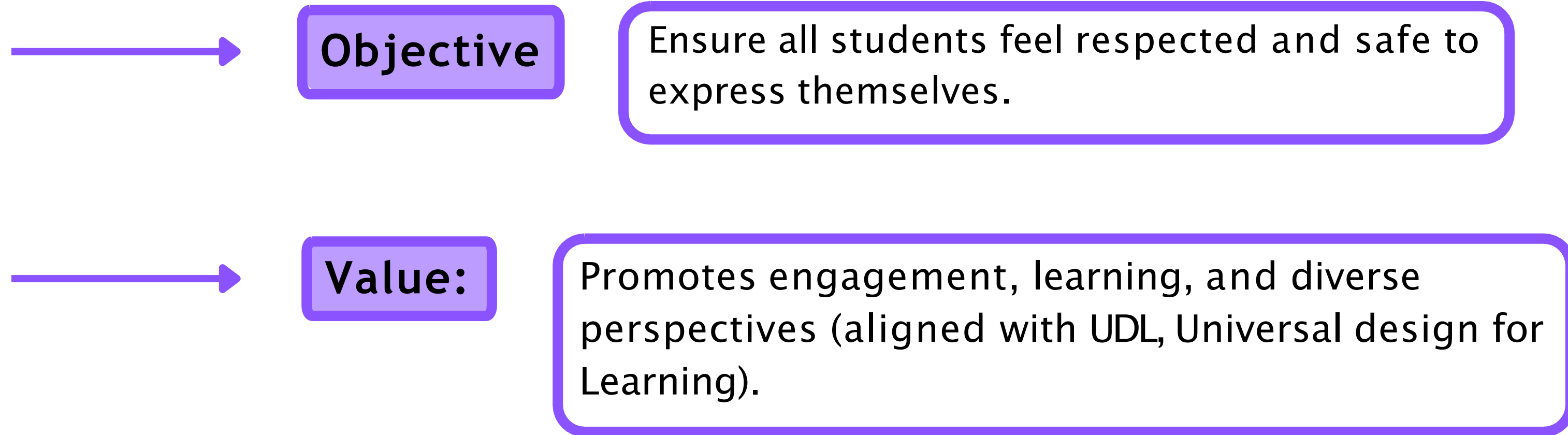
If many participants report difficulty, the mentor may decide to organize remedial classes or extra sessions.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

- Escalation Protocols and Support Networks



MODULE 4

Protocols:

- **Persistent academic difficulties:** if a participant continues to struggle despite mentor support, involve the instructor, academic advisor, or course support services.
- **Emotional distress and mental health:** if signs of severe stress, self-harm thoughts, or serious issues emerge, immediately contact counseling services, the student office, or activate emergency protocols.
- **Complex technical issues:** direct the participant to the help desk or technical team and follow up until the issue is resolved.
- **Inappropriate conduct or plagiarism:** report to the instructor, course coordinator, or relevant disciplinary body in line with institutional policies.
- **Documentation:** record interactions, observed signals, and actions taken in a clear, objective, and timely manner, including contacts and timestamps.



MODULE 4



Mentor Support Networks

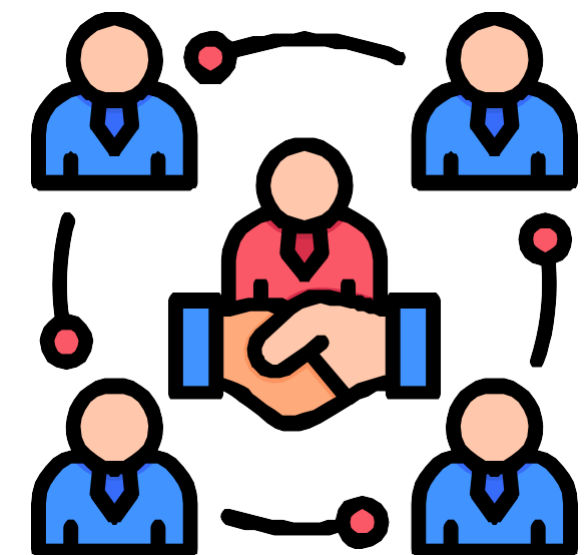
Mentors must be aware of and able to activate their internal support network:

- **Instructor/Course Coordinator:** for course-specific teaching/policy issues.
- **Program Director or Department Head:** for more general issues or critical situations.
- **Student Services:** for psychological support, disability, inclusion or specific needs.
- **IT Department:** for technical issues.
- **Other mentors:** for discussion, peer support and management of complex situations.

Case study:

A mentor receives an email from an user expressing anxiety and difficulty related to their workload.

The mentor consults the protocol for managing distress, contacts the psychological support center, and sends an email to the user to confirm assistance.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4



4.3.2 Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are inevitable in online learning, so mentors need skills to prevent and manage them constructively, ensuring a respectful and positive environment linked to psychological safety.

Types of Online Conflicts

- Communication misunderstandings: Messages can be misinterpreted due to lack of tone and non-verbal cues.
- Teamwork problems: Issues like unequal workload, personality clashes, or misaligned expectations.
- Content disagreements: Conflicts arising from debates, criticism, or differing opinions.
- Cultural differences: Variations in communication styles, norms, and expectations.
- Technical frustration: Stress from tech issues leading to negative or abrupt communication.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

The Role of the Mentor as Mediator

- **Neutrality:** Stay impartial and focus on the issue, not the individuals.
- **Listening:** Give all parties space to express their perspectives.
- **Finding common ground:** Identify shared interests to build agreement.
- **Rephrasing & paraphrasing:** Turn emotional statements into neutral language to reduce tension.
- **Focus on solutions:** Guide participants toward practical, shared outcomes.
- **Setting clear boundaries:** Reinforce respectful communication and intervene if needed.
- **Private discussions:** Start with individual conversations before bringing parties together.



MODULE 4



Role-playing and case studies for practice

They provide a safe space for mentors to practice conflict management, strengthen communication skills, and build confidence in handling complex situations.

Implementation Methods

- **Case studies** Analyze realistic conflict scenarios to understand causes and identify effective responses.
- **Role-playing** Simulate situations to practice communication, emotional control, and conflict management skills.
- **Debriefing** Reflect on what worked, what didn't, and explore alternative approaches after each activity.

Case study:

Students participate in a role-play in which one student plays a participant frustrated by the lack of input from a group member.

The mentor should use active listening and problem-solving techniques to guide the student toward a solution.



Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 4

4.3.3 Motivation: How to keep participants' attention high

- **Maintaining Motivation Over Time**



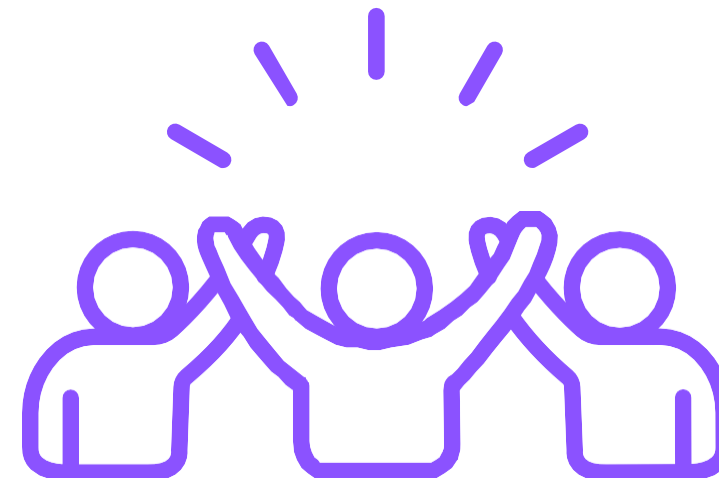
Objective

Counteract the drop in motivation during online courses caused by isolation, fatigue, or increasing perceived difficulty.



Value:

Essential for maintaining consistent learning, supporting retention, and ensuring course or module completion.



MODULE 4



Strategies:

- **Celebrate milestones:** Acknowledge progress regularly to keep motivation high (50% of the course done, great!).
- **Variety of activities:** Use different methods to maintain interest and engagement.
- **Connect content to reality:** Show practical relevance to make learning meaningful.
- **Offer choice and autonomy:** Give learners control to boost intrinsic motivation.
- **Foster peer bonding:** Encourage interaction to build a sense of belonging.
- **Regular, motivating communication:** Stay present with updates and timely responses.
- **Feedback loops:** Act on learner input to show their voice matters and increase engagement.



Co-funded by
the European Union