Example D

Context
This subject is an upper level (second and third year) literature subject, focused on autobiography and autobiographical fiction.

What I did
Students were required to read eight literary texts for the unit. In addition, they were provided with a number of secondary readings introducing critical concepts and analyses. The lecturer posted 6–8 questions online on each set text, on the class website, using the ‘forum’ mode. Students were required to respond, online, to one question (300 words) on each text. As students added their responses, a thread on each question would develop, with some students building on other students’ observations.

Teaching and learning benefits
• An archive of responses to questions on each text developed over the course of the semester; this archive was a valuable resource for students, lecturers and tutors
• Students received ongoing, formative assessment which enabled them to develop their analytic skills
• Regular postings on each text enabled lecturer to be actively engaged with students’ learning and enhanced lecturer’s ability to respond to student learning
• Regular postings reated a ‘community of practice’ in the tutorials
• In their final essays, students drew on the concepts and analytic frameworks they used in their online responses, which enabled them to develop their analytic skills
• Standard of the final essay was significantly improved over classes in which reading journals were not used

Challenges
• Students who posted online responses early in the week had an advantage; later students needed to find a new angle to avoid simply repeating what had come before.
• How to assess students who rehashed ideas that had already been discussed?
• Whether to require students to read the other forum posts in the thread—how to assess this?
• Deciding whether lecturer should respond to online posts during the posting period – for instance, to raise questions or re-orient the discussion – this can be time-consuming, and since the forum is open to all members of the class, comments on individual posts need to be thoughtful and sensitive

What I would do differently
• Discuss the marking rubric for online posts in the first tutorial, discussing the importance of grounding responses in evidence from the text
• Require students, once in the semester, to assess another student’s post