Regular and substantive interaction (RSI) between instructors and students is an essential component of quality online and distance education.

**PRACTICES FOR REGULAR INTERACTION ONLINE**

- **FOLLOW A REGULAR SCHEDULE**
  Set and follow a regular schedule for when you will be present and working in your online course.

- **PROVIDE TIMELY FEEDBACK**
  Establish a grading schedule and stick to it. Make sure that students get prompt and individualized feedback.

- **COMMUNICATE OFTEN**
  Post regular (at least weekly) announcements that address course content, expectations, reminders, and tips for success.

- **MONITOR STUDENT PROGRESS**
  Monitor student progress regularly and then reach out to absent or struggling students via email to offer them support and guidance.

**Note that Regular Interaction is Instructor-Initiated, Frequent, and Predictable**

View Infographic “Practices for Regular Interaction Online”(online)
In our Spring 2023 series of the Stearns Center Digital Learning Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we will review tips and practices to create a learning environment that cultivates online quality through Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI). In our first issue, we presented definition of RSI and how it’s part of good teaching!

In this second issue of our RSI series, we’ll review why Regular Interaction is important in an online course. Then we’ll share some tips for how you can build regular online presence and interaction with your students.

Use this Newsletter information as you plan and teach your Spring 2023 online courses, making sure that you include regular and substantive interaction in your course design and teaching.

WHY SHOULD ONLINE INTERACTIONS BE REGULAR?

Regular and timely interactions with instructor promote student learning, satisfaction, academic achievement, and sense of belonging in online courses (see Kyei Blankson et al. 2019; Mehall, 2020; Park & Kim, 2020).

- As instructor, your regular interaction with online students should follow a scheduled and predictable pattern.
- Let your students know when to expect you in the online course—e.g., when you will be posting announcements; providing instruction (asynchronously or synchronously); responding to their questions about course content; posting feedback and grades; holding virtual office hours.
- You also need to keep track of the academic engagement and progress of your students, proactively reaching out and supporting each student as needed.
Follow a Regular Schedule to Be Present & Work in Your Online Course

- Set and follow a schedule for when you will be present and working in your online course. Map out this schedule as you plan and prepare your course. Stick to this schedule as much as possible during the semester.
- Make sure that you are present/available in your course before major assignments are due or when students are learning difficult or challenging course content.
- Manage your time thoughtfully and effectively reviewing [these time management tips for teaching online](#).

Stearns Center Resource: [Managing Time While Teaching Online](Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, Nov 2021).

Communicate & Participate in Your Course Using a Predictable Pattern

- Send out welcome email to your students prior to the start of the course to establish and share expectations (i.e., what you expect from students, and what they may expect from you as instructor).
- Post regular (at least weekly) course announcements that address course content, expectations of students, tips for success, etc. Share these announcements also with students via email.
- Create a “Questions for Instructor” forum in your course.
- Share your communication policy and availability. How quickly will you respond to questions posted to the course, sent via email or through messaging? Let students know if you are available weekends or evenings. Students need to know when to expect your response.
- Be present/participate predictably in online discussion boards, guiding the discussion, promoting learner-interaction, adding your perspectives, and responding to any questions.

Stearns Center Resource: [Interaction, Instructor Presence, and Organization](The Stearns Center Digital Learning Effective Online Teaching Strategies Video Series)
### TIPS FOR REGULAR INTERACTION ONLINE

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<tr>
<th>Provide Timely Feedback</th>
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<td>• Provide timely feedback and assignment grades; establish a grading schedule and stick to it.</td>
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<td>• Include your grading policies in your syllabus and review your grading criteria with students at the beginning of the course. Remind them of the relevant criteria when assigning and returning work.</td>
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<td>• Create your own archive of frequent comments for assignments, so that you can reuse and customize as you prepare individualized feedback throughout your course.</td>
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<td>• Use Blackboard rubrics so that students know how they did on specific parts of each assignment and how they can improve.</td>
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<td>• Consider using brief audio or video feedback (with tools such as VoiceThread or Harmonize) to personalize/humanize your feedback to individual students and/or as general feedback to the entire class.</td>
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Stearns Center Resource: [Grading and Feedback in Your Online Course](https://example.com) (Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, Sep 2020).

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<th>Monitor Student Progress and Reach Out</th>
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<td>• Reach out to absent or struggling students. Use the Performance Dashboard and Retention Center in your Blackboard course to monitor student progress. If a student is not logging into course, not participating in activities, and/or not submitting assignments, reach out to them via email. Offer support and guidance to help them get on track.</td>
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<td>• Solicit student feedback (with tools such as PollEverywhere) during the course to help you identify common challenges, and to adjust your teaching strategies to support student success.</td>
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<td>• Schedule regular virtual office hours (in Zoom or Collaborate Ultra) to meet with students in real-time; schedule one-on-one consultations (required or voluntary). Consider including some synchronous sessions to review difficult course content.</td>
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Stearns Center Resource: [Getting Feedback from Your Online Students](https://example.com) (Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, Nov 2021).
How does your online course and teaching show these “quality indicators” (from Stearns Center Online Quality Checklist) which address Regular Interaction?

✓ **Presence:** The instructor checks on the course regularly, per departmental standards. The instructor participates in the course and engages with students.

✓ **Expectations:** The instructor’s plan for interacting with learners during the course is clearly stated. Students get clear information about what they may expect from the instructor.

✓ **Course Management:** The instructor creates course structures and patterns that are organized to lower cognitive load for students; resolves course-related issues in a timely manner; instructor proactively addresses problems as they emerge; and is responsive to student concerns.

✓ **Inclusive Classroom Climate:** The instructor creates an inclusive, supportive, and engaging climate. The instructor facilitates positive communication with students, creates and promotes respectful interaction, with specific efforts made to include students with disabilities as well as students from other minoritized or under-represented groups.

✓ **Regular Communication:** The instructor provides regular, ongoing, and meaningful communication with the class.

✓ **Instructor Availability:** The instructor informs students when he/she/they will be available and provides an alternative for students to receive assistance.

✓ **Virtual Office Hours:** The instructor holds virtual office hours and consultations regularly, with options to meet by request (according to department expectations).

✓ **Grading Policies and Criteria:** The instructor provides information on grading policies, including consequences of late submissions, in the syllabus or in assignment descriptions. The instructor clearly articulates the criteria for grading assignments.

✓ **Effective and Efficient Feedback:** The instructor provides effective and efficient feedback to learners. Feedback should be specific, transparent, timely, actionable, and frequent. There are various tools and strategies for effective and efficient feedback.

*Overall, Regular and Substantive Interaction is all about quality teaching online!*
References Cited

