

# ONLINE TEACHING COACHING NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2023 | ISSUE #4

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR RSI

---

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

---

### **Which Tools to Select for Regular & Substantive Interaction Online ?**

- Tools for predictable and regular communication and instructor presence

- Tools to monitor student engagement and progress

- Tools to provide timely, personalized, and constructive feedback



- Tools for direct instruction, including virtual office hours and consultations
- Tools to be responsive to students about course content
- Tools to monitor and facilitate meaningful online discussions

[View the infographic online, "Which Tools to Select for Regular & Substantive Interaction Online ?"](#)

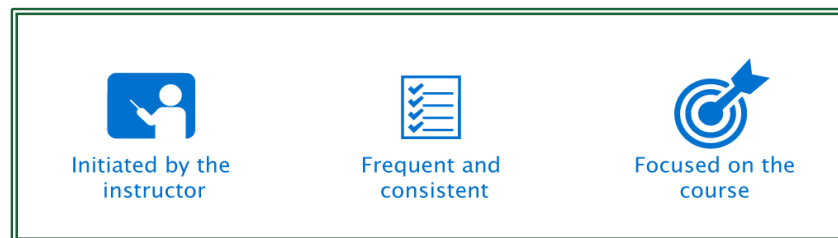
In our fourth issue of the Spring 2023 series of the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we'll review how you can support RSI by choosing and using different digital learning tools. We will review a list of Mason-approved tools, mapping each to the type of RSI these can support. We'll then focus on specific examples of RSI and tools in online courses. Whether you use the basic LMS functions or enhance your interactions with other Mason-approved collaborative multimedia tools, you can ensure Regular and Substantive Interaction and also promote online learner engagement!

Please use this Newsletter information as you teach your Spring 2023 online courses, making sure that you include strategies and practices for Regular and Substantive Interaction in your online course design and teaching.

We'll continue our focus on RSI and [online quality](#) in the next issue of our Spring 2023 Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter series, with Mason faculty sharing their practices and strategies.

## WHICH ONLINE TOOLS SUPPORT RSI?

As we've learned in [previous newsletters](#) in our Spring 2023 series about Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) online, these interactions are instructor-initiated; regular, frequent and predictable; and are academic in nature (*i.e.*, focused on the course).



RSI may take various forms and functions in our online courses. We can support RSI and engage online learners by incorporating tools in our instruction. When selecting a tool, it's best to think about the type of RSI you wish to support and then how to incorporate appropriate tool(s) for meaningful interactions.

Consider how Mason-approved tools may support and cultivate the different types of RSI activities in online courses, such as:

- Providing predictable and regular communication and instructor presence
- Monitoring student engagement and progress
- Providing timely, personalized & constructive feedback
- Providing direct instruction, such as virtual office hours & individual consultations
- Responding to students about course content
- Monitoring and facilitating online discussions

Incorporating tools selectively and effectively in your online course will support RSI, online engagement, and student learning. By promptly and proactively interacting and engaging with your students, you let them know that you are there to support their online learning and success!

*"We need to embrace technology to make learning more engaging. Because when students are engaged and they are interested, that's where learning takes place." – Unknown*

## GETTING STARTED WITH TOOLS TO SUPPORT RSI

Below is a table listing some Mason-approved tools which are available to use in online courses in Blackboard. We've also listed six important types (categories) of RSI, in terms of regular and substantive instructor-driven online activities.

For each of these RSI categories, we've indicated (with a checkmark) tools that might be used to help support that type of RSI and student engagement. As you see in the table, the basic LMS Tools (in Blackboard) all may promote RSI in online courses; for example, you may use Blackboard functions such as [Announcements](#), [Performance Dashboard](#), [Grading](#), [Collaborate Ultra](#), and [Discussion Boards](#). If you wish to enhance instructor presence and student engagement in your course, you might consider using Mason-approved collaborative multimedia tools, such as [Harmonize](#), [Kaltura](#), and [VoiceThread](#). You may grade more efficiently and get a clearer picture of how your students are doing on assignments and exams by using Mason-approved tools as [GradeScope](#) and [Harmonize](#). Synchronous instruction may now be supported with [Class for Zoom](#), which includes additional features which support student engagement and learning.

Please note this table provides *just a start* for your exploration for how you might use [Mason-approved tools](#) into your online teaching to support RSI.

**Table: Mason-Approved Tools to Support RSI Activities Online**

	<a href="#">Harmonize</a>	<a href="#">Kaltura</a>	<a href="#">Class for Zoom</a>	<a href="#">Padlet</a>	<a href="#">Grade Scope</a>	<a href="#">Poll Everywhere</a>	<a href="#">Voice Thread</a>	<a href="#">LMS Tools</a>
Predictable and regular communication, instructor presence	✓	✓					✓	✓
Monitor student engagement and progress	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
Timely, personalized & constructive feedback	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Direct instruction, virtual office hours			✓	✓		✓		✓
Respond to students about content	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Monitor and facilitate online discussions	✓			✓			✓	✓

Please contact the [Stearns Center](#) and/or [ITS](#) for information regarding any of the tools listed in this table.

# APPLYING ONLINE TOOLS TO SUPPORT RSI



## **RSI Activity: How may I use tools to support my regular online course announcements throughout the semester?**

- It's critical for RSI to establish a general and consistent pattern for announcements and other communications, which students then may expect throughout the course (at least weekly).
- Regular announcements and messaging support RSI by focusing learners on instruction and course content.
- Announcements should be used as genuine invitations into the subject matter of the course, as well as to remind students of important deadlines and administrative procedures of the online course.
- In your announcements, you can synthesize and summarize course content, activities, and respond to student questions. You also may highlight how assignments reflect course learning outcomes; you may preview key concepts and content that students will be learning in coming week(s) of the course; and you may direct students to additional resources to reinforce and support their learning.

### **Tool options to consider**



Blackboard Announcements provide the basic tool in the LMS to keep students updated and informed. [Using the Blackboard Announcements tool](#), you may post your announcement which is then displayed in the course. You also may opt to send a copy of your posted announcement via email to all course members.



You can enhance your course announcements by presenting brief narrated videos. An example of a Mason-approved tool for creating videos is [Kaltura](#). Kaltura offers several ways to upload and share media directly into your Blackboard course. One option is to upload audio and video directly to the specific Blackboard course area using the [Kaltura Media Mashup tool](#).

Important! When preparing video announcements (or any video for your online course), please make sure that your videos are accessible, and include [captions for your recordings](#).



## **RSI Activity: How may I use tools to help with monitoring student engagement and progress in my online course?**

- It's critical for RSI that you monitor student academic engagement and progress and proactively engage with a student when needed.
- Keep track of the engagement and activities of your online students, such as assignment submissions, so that you may promptly and proactively reach out to them, getting them back on track.
- The dashboards available in Blackboard and in Mason-approved tools such as [GradeScope](#) and [Harmonize](#) can provide information about student performance and engagement. You can learn how well each student is doing, and also be alerted when students may falling behind and at-risk.
- Regularly check these dashboards and then reach out to students as needed. Email students who are not participating, those who need help with their work, as well as students who are doing well. Let your students know where they stand in the course.

### **Tool options to consider**



In Blackboard LMS, you will find the tools to monitor student performance, such as the [Performance Dashboard](#) (Control Panel > Evaluation > Performance Dashboard) which provides an up-to-date summary of student activity in the Blackboard course, including date and time when each student last accessed the course, how many assignments have been reviewed and graded, and student's discussion board participation. The [Retention Center](#) tool (when activated in Blackboard) can let you know which students might be at-risk. From the Retention Center, you then can communicate with students and help them take action for improvement.



[GradeScope](#) is a Mason-approved tool which you may use to [grade, review and publish assignment scores](#) and to [analyze assignment scores and statistics](#) for the class and for individual students.



[Harmonize](#) is a Mason-approved tools with multiple functionalities, including an at-a-glance dashboard ([Engagement Insights](#)) with information to assess student performance, particularly for online discussions. Harmonize tracks engagement and performance of each student relative to their peers in the discussions. These data are then used to [group students by risk levels and concerns](#) which instructor may use to reach out to students at-risk. If you include many discussions in your online course, Harmonize might be an appropriate tool to monitor student discussion engagement and performance.



## **RSI Activity: How may I use tools to support timely, personalized & constructive feedback in my online course?**

- It's critical for RSI to provide students with prompt, personalized, and constructive comments about their work and progress in the course.
- Note that instructor feedback is most beneficial to learning when it comes promptly after students have submitted their work.
- Keep in mind that effective feedback should be timely, targeted, with comments on learner progress, and also giving students the opportunity to reflect on, practice, and implement the feedback they have received.
- Feedback can take many forms, such as written comments, audio or video notes, individual conferences conducted via online meeting tools. In any and all forms, feedback should go beyond simply assigning a grade or score, without further/more specific feedback and guidance. To support RSI, your feedback must communicate to students what they have accomplished, and what they need to improve. In your feedback, also make sure to include specific guidance for how each student may make further progress in their learning..
- Rubrics: Grading and feedback can be clearer and more efficient (to both instructor and to students) through use of rubrics. In rubrics, the expectations for student work are explicitly presented, by listing the set of criteria and the associated levels of quality. Rubrics are helpful for creating a faster, fairer, more consistent grading practice for instructors, as well as focused, actionable feedback for students.
- Comment Archive: To increase grading efficiency, create an offline archive of grading comments for assignments in your courses. Reuse and revise these archived comments, as you prepare individualized and customized feedback for each student.

### **Tool options to consider**



In Blackboard LMS, you will find the basic tools for grading and feedback, such as [Grade Center](#) which includes Blackboard tools and tasks for [Needs Grading](#), [Assign Grades](#), and [Record Audio and Video Feedback](#). You also may create [Rubrics](#) within Blackboard, and then associate these rubrics with any gradable content within Blackboard, such as assignments, blogs and journals, wikis, and discussion forums.



[Harmonize](#) can enhance and streamline your grading and feedback [in several ways](#): [Harmonize](#) offers an at-a-glance dashboard with information to assess student performance; video to share meaningful feedback; auto-grading with LMS gradebook integration; and plagiarism detection integration to ensure the originality of student work. See [Harmonize Overview Video](#) for how you might use this tool in your online course.



## **RSI Activity: How can I use tools to support monitoring and participating in online discussions?**

- It's critical for RSI to frequently monitor online discussions, providing prompt responses and grading..
- If you include online discussions in your course, make sure that these contribute substantively to the course, e.g., with students applying and illustrating course concepts to real-world scenarios.
- From the start of the course, share clear expectations and guidelines for online discussions, including a discussion rubric. Also let your students know how you (as instructor) will be participating: Will you be actively participating in the discussions and/or will you be providing commentaries and summaries when discussions have concluded?
- Be strategic and efficient in your participation. Read, but don't respond to each posting within every online discussion. Comment on those postings that may need clarification, correction or guidance. Ask follow-up questions within the discussion, if needed to clarify concepts or to assess student understanding.
- Use different discussion-board designs (e.g., student-led facilitation, case-study scenarios) to provide students with opportunities to engage, apply and and interact with course content, with each other, and with you (as instructor)
- Consider enhancing online discussions with multimedia, by incorporating Mason-approved tools, such as VoiceThread or Harmonize, for more engaging discussion participation in your online course.

### **Tool options to consider**



[Blackboard Discussions](#) provide the basic tool in the LMS for asynchronous discussions in online courses. Within a discussion board (or forum), threads grow as users post and reply to each other, constructing an online conversation. As instructor, you also may use [Performance Dashboard](#) to monitor and summarize student participation in online discussions.



[VoiceThread](#) allows instructors and students to post, comment on, and share different types of multimedia content. Using this Mason-approved tool, you can replace text-only discussions with media-based conversations, which add the "[human element](#)" into online course interactions.

## SUMMARY

In this newsletter issue, we've seen how there are multiple ways – and a variety of tools– which may be used to support RSI in online courses. You may support RSI with the basic tools found in Blackboard LMS; you also may further enhance RSI activities and learner engagement by incorporating other Mason-approved tools (such as GradeScope, Harmonize, VoiceThread). In selecting tools for RSI, it's best to thoughtfully plan and implement those tools which help address course learning outcomes and activities.

Please contact the [Stearns Center](#) and/or [ITS](#) for information regarding any of the tools discussed in this newsletter issue.

## MORE ABOUT RSI

Here are some additional resources about RSI activities mentioned in this newsletter issue.

### Announcements

- Pritts, N. (2020). [Using Announcements to Give Narrative Shape to Your Online Course](#). *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications, June 1, 2020.

### Monitoring Progress and Reaching Out to Students

- Revak, M. (2020). [When the Tide Goes Out: Identifying and Supporting Struggling Students in Online Courses](#). *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications, March 30, 2020.

### Video Feedback

- West, R., Jay, J., Armstrong, M., & Borup, J. (2017). [“Picturing Them Right in Front of Me”: Guidelines for Implementing Video Communication in Online and Blended Learning](#). *TechTrends: Linking Research & Practice to Improve Learning*, 61: 461-469.

### Online Discussions

- Stearns Center Digital Teaching Tips (2017). [Online Discussions](#).

### Contact Us!

Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning | Digital Learning | Mason Online  
Phone: 703-993-6200 | Email: [stearns@gmu.edu](mailto:stearns@gmu.edu)  
Suite 412 Innovation Hall, Fairfax Campus