ENSURING SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION IN YOUR ONLINE COURSE

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

PRACTICES FOR SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION ONLINE

INSTRUCT DIRECTLY
Use Zoom to interact in real-time for class review sessions, virtual office hours, and for individual consultations.

ENHANCE COURSE CONTENT
Share information from your own experience and expertise to enhance student understanding and to address any questions about course content.

PROVIDE FEEDBACK
Provide personalized & specific feedback customized to each student, commenting on their successes and how they need to improve, promoting a growth mindset.

FACILITATE ONLINE DISCUSSIONS
Participate actively in online discussions, to engage with students and to promote their interaction with course content and with each other.

** Note that Substantive Interaction is Instructor-Initiated and Academically-Related **

View the infographic online, “Practices for Substantive Interaction Online”
In our third issue of the Spring 2023 series of the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, we’ll review and recommend practices for substantive interaction with your students in online courses.

These include strategies that instructors use to teach academic content, provide constructive feedback, respond to questions, participate in discussions, and engage in other activities in online course.

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 practices and strategies for RSI (Regular and Substantive Interaction) throughout our Spring 2023 Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter series, guided by our Online Quality Checklist.

WHAT IS SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION?

Substantive interaction involves engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment in the online course.

Per U.S. Department of Education (DOE), substantive interaction in online courses must be initiated by the instructor, must involve/concern academic content; and must include two or more of the following practices:

- **Direct Instruction**: Instructor provides direct instruction using live, synchronous platform where both the instructor and the student are online and in communication at the same time.
- **Feedback**: Instructor assesses and provides constructive & meaningful feedback of student's coursework.
- **Enhance Course Content & Respond to Questions**: Instructor provides information and responds to questions about course content.
- **Facilitate Discussions**: Instructor facilitates a group discussion regarding course content.
- **Other instructor-led activities** approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

You don’t need to use all of these practices to show substantive interaction in your online course. Just make sure that you include at least two of these forms of substantive interaction for evidence of quality online teaching.

**VIDEO**: “SUBSTANTIVE INTERACTION ONLINE” (from Center for Teaching and Learning at Craven CC).

Watch this [video tutorial](#) about how to incorporate regular and substantive interaction in your online course (8:58)
Include Synchronous Learning Sessions During Your Online Course

- Use technology tools such as Zoom, Class for Zoom, or Blackboard Collaborate Ultra for synchronous online sessions, virtual office hours, and/or individual consultations.
- For synchronous online class sessions, plan & prepare a structured agenda. Have back-up plan in case there are technology glitches. Let students know what’s planned for the session & how to prepare, including any technical requirements.
- Pace sessions, chunk content, vary activities. Include active learning strategies in the session. “Zoom fatigue” is real!

Stearns Center Resource: Synchronous Web-Conference Teaching Resources (from Stearns Center website)

Provide Personalized, Specific Feedback

- Your feedback includes comments to each student in gradebook; your participation in discussion boards; your responses to student questions; your comments about course content and general class progress in regular announcements.
- Provide each student with timely gradebook feedback that is both customized to the individual student and specific to the details of their course work.
- Use inclusive, supportive language in your feedback to promote a growth mindset. Focus on constructive actions for every student, not on perceived deficits. Let each student understand where they are being successful in the course and where they need to improve.
- Use Blackboard rubrics that are sufficiently detailed to permit feedback about key elements of an individual student’s work.
- Try out audio-visual tools, such as VoiceThread or Harmonize, to create & communicate engaging, personalized feedback for your students.

Stearns Center Resource: Grading (from Stearns Center website)
### Respond to Questions about Course Content and Share Your Subject Matter Expertise

- Include a “Questions for Instructor” forum in your online course, where students may post questions about content. Address student questions promptly, directing them to additional resources as needed.
- To enhance student learning, share your subject matter expertise and professional experience in your postings – in announcements, discussions, and in your online interactions.
- Provide sample test questions, models of exemplary work, and study guides to let students know what’s expected of their work. Share tutorials for student to review challenging or difficult course content.

**Resource:** [Ensuring Students Are Thinking and Understanding in the Online Classroom](https://wileyuniversityservices.com) (Wiley University Services).

### Participate in Online Discussions

- Frequently monitor the online discussions, provide prompt responses, and grade student postings in a timely fashion.
- From the start of the course, provide students with clear expectations and guidelines for online discussions. Make sure that you model these discussion expectations in all of your own postings to online discussions.
- Be strategic and efficient. Read, but don’t respond to every post in every online discussion. Comment on postings that may need clarification, correction or guidance; ask additional questions in the discussion, if needed to clarify concepts or to assess student understanding.
- Provide a discussion recap or summary when it’s finished.
- Consider using different discussion-board designs (e.g., student-led facilitation, case-study scenarios) to provide opportunities for students to interact with content, you, and with each other.
- Use tools such as [VoiceThread](https://voicethread.com) or [Harmonize](https://harmonize.com) for more engaging discussion participation in your online course.

**Resource:** [Strategies for Managing Online Discussions](https://facultyfocus.com) (Faculty Focus).
Reflect on these questions as you plan and implement RSI in your online course.

Checklist for Regular Interaction

✓ How are my online presence, communications, and interactions with students regular, scheduled, and predictable?
✓ How do I regularly monitor my students’ academic engagement and success throughout the course? How do I plan, use, and act on these data?
✓ How do I reach out to students who might need academic help, support, or guidance?

Checklist for Substantive Interaction

✓ How do my postings and interactions with students address the academic content of the online course?
✓ How do I include possibilities for direct instruction in the course, such as synchronous sessions, virtual office hours & individual real-time consultations?
✓ How do I provide students with timely, personalized, specific, and actionable feedback for their work and assignments throughout course?
✓ How do I enhance the course by sharing my expertise and perspectives?
✓ How do I encourage and respond to student questions?
✓ How do I actively participate in and/or facilitate online discussions?
✓ How do I manage and facilitate other discipline-related activities in the online course?

• What does your reflection tell you about your online teaching?
• What do the answers to these questions reveal about RSI in your online course?
• What are your RSI strengths?
• What are ways you can improve RSI in your online course?

Contact Us!

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