

## Online Teaching Quality: Supporting Learners in Your Online Course

### How to address the following quality indicators from Stearns Center Online Quality Checklist?

**Quality Indicator 4.5. Flexible & Responsive.** *The instructor is flexible and responsive to student needs.*

**Quality Indicator 4.10. 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.*

**Quality Indicator 6.4. Learner Help & Support.** *The instructor encourages students to contact them when questions arise. The instructor provides an information list and/or links for online learner resources (tutorials, models, examples, on-campus resources, or offices) to students in the online classroom.*

### How Do You Support Learners in Your Online Course?

How do you show your students that you are committed to their learning & success?

How do you communicate, respond, and resolve student concerns?



How do you know the guidance & support your students may need?

How do you provide students with resources to support their learning?

*Your engagement, responsiveness, and proactivity as instructor in the online course are critical for student engagement, learning, and success.*

[View the "How Do You Support Learners in Your Online Course?" Infographic Online](#)

## Supporting Learners in Your Online Course

As an instructor, you support student learning by being **engaged**, **responsive**, and **proactive**.

- **Being Engaged** means that students see and experience that you are committed, dedicated, and actively involved in their learning. You share your enthusiasm for the course content with your students, you provide guidance, and you guide them toward academic success. Your engagement influences the engagement of your students! Engagement occurs when students are thinking hard (*cognitive engagement*), working hard (*operative engagement*), and feeling good about learning (*affective engagement*).
- **Being Responsive** means that students can rely on you to communicate regularly, to respond promptly to their questions, and to provide them with specific guidance, assistance, and flexibility per their needs. To be a responsive teacher, you'll need to get to know your learners, to better assess what they have learned, where they might be struggling, and what support they may need.
- **Being Proactive** means that you anticipate how to guide, support, and assist your students, even before they ask for help. You're prepared with information and resources to help them succeed. Being proactive in an online course includes sharing rubrics, models of exemplary work, tutorials, and other resources to support their learning. Being proactive also means reaching out to students who aren't participating or logging into the course and those who appear to be struggling in the course.

### How to achieve being engaged, responsive, and proactive in your online course?

Although online courses are available 24/7, you need to plan and balance your workload -- to provide support to your online learners, while also effectively managing your time. This is done by setting boundaries and expectations, *i.e.*, letting your students know when you are available and what they can expect of you as instructor. **Time management** can be challenging to online instructors. Dedicate specific blocks of time for your online course each week and stick to that schedule as much as possible. Plan to be present in your course regularly and often, and make sure that each time you're in the course, you leave your students some evidence that you've been there (*e.g.*, posting an announcement, grading assignments, responding to question, participating in a discussion). If students don't **see** evidence of your presence and engagement in the online course, it's as if they're taking a class with no instructor!

**Your engagement, responsiveness, and proactivity as instructor in the online course are critical for student engagement, learning, and success.**

## Strategies for Supporting Learners in Your Online Course

Please see examples of some strategies and best practices for supporting learners by being engaged, responsive, and proactive in your online course.

### Be Engaged

**Support Affective Engagement:** Show your student that you genuinely value and enjoy the subject matter, discipline, and teaching. In your postings and communication, share a little bit about your own academic experiences, as undergraduate, graduate student, academic/professional.

**Support Cognitive Engagement:** How do students learn in your course? Present course content in chunks, to reduce cognitive load. Scaffold assignments or projects into steps or phases, so that student can reflect on their progress and get formative feedback. Consider activities in which students use graphic organizers, such as concept maps to express and demonstrate their learning.

**Support Operative Engagement:** Support & encourage students' active participation in the online course by modeling participation yourself (e.g., provide examples of how to post and respond in discussions).

### Be Responsive

- Organize and manage your time. Plan and set a specific, realistic schedule to work on your online course each day and week throughout the semester.
- Set expectations from the start of your course, to provide students with transparency and clear guidance.
- Post regular announcements in your Blackboard course. After a few weeks of the course, change the Blackboard course entry page to the Announcements, so that students can see these whenever they enter the course.
- Get to know your students to better support their learning. Include whole-class introductions and icebreakers to build community. Also consider scheduling instructor-only introductions for each student, e.g., synchronous one-on-one meetings, to learn more about individual students.
- Use inclusive and culturally-responsive teaching practices to make learning meaningful and relevant to all learners.

## Strategies for Supporting Learners in Your Online Course *(continued)*

Please see examples of some strategies and best practices for supporting learners by being engaged, responsive, and proactive in your online course.

### Be Proactive

- Prepare and post a list of **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** in your online course with questions that students often have concerning the course & assignments.
- **Address individual learning needs in an inclusive manner.** In your syllabus, make sure to include information for how students obtain accommodations for disabilities, with a link to [Disability Services](#). Let all your students know that they may talk with you to discuss their individual learning needs.
- **Provide rubrics, sample test questions, models of exemplary work, and study guides.** Consider sharing sample test questions with answers and exemplary work of previous students, discuss how to study for course exams, provide study guides.
- **Be flexible.** Provide opportunities to promote a growth mindset. Allow students to make mistakes and fail in a safe environment, where they can submit an assignment again (*e.g.*, taking a quiz multiple times; rewriting & resubmitting a paper), applying what they have learned in the process.
- **Post information about student support services at Mason.** In your syllabus and/or posted in your Blackboard course, list URLs and other contact information for Mason academic services and student services. Also see [the list of student support resources](#) found on [Mason Online website](#). Please let your students know that Mason services are available to all students, including online students.
- **Proactively reach out to students who aren't participating or logging into the online course.** Use the [Performance Dashboard](#) in your Blackboard course (Control Panel > Evaluation > Performance Dashboard) and [Retention Center](#) (Control Panel > Evaluation > Retention Center) to identify students who may be at-risk. You then can email the students and help them take immediate action for improvement.

### Contact Us!

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