



Harmonize

**Your RSI
Resource Kit**

Why Regular & Substantive Interaction Matters

Instructor-student interaction is a key component to learning, and this is no less true for distance education and online education. The student is responsible for knowing the syllabus, assignments deadlines, school policies, and reviewing all communication from instructors. The instructor is responsible for initiating regular and consistent contact with each student in their online or distance education courses in order to provide feedback that will help the student improve.

Aside from now being a federal requirement, regular and substantive interaction is a central component of learning that ensures high-quality course design and delivery. Studies have shown that RSI improves student retention, motivation and success, as well as fosters a sense of community -- critically important for online students who are removed from the physical space of a traditional classroom.

Positive impact on students

- Engagement
- Retention
- Student Success

Effects on financial aid

The U.S. Department of Education requires that all online courses for which students may use Title IV funds ensure that there is regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors. Otherwise, institutions risk losing funding and could face fines if found in non-compliance.

Instructors should be prepared to promote student interaction, build in multiple opportunities for instructor-to-student and student-to-student contact, encourage students to ask questions, and provide feedback related to course competencies or subject matter in a timely manner. This resource kit will help ensure your online or distance education course incorporates RSI, and includes a customizable:

1. Course Design RSI Checklist
2. Instructor RSI Self-Assessment
3. Turning Non-RSI Activities into RSI Chart
4. Key RSI Resources



Course Design RSI Checklist



Ensuring Regular & Substantive Interaction in Online Courses

RSI CHARACTERISTIC	EXAMPLE
<p>Initiated by Instructor Interaction should be started by the instructor to count as regular and substantive. There should be an active presence in initiating and guiding a range of interactions with students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor actively moderates online discussions <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor actively facilitates Q&A sessions focused on a particular course topic <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor participates in discussion forums every {insert timing} <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor asks a student to visit during office hours <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor provides individualized substantive comments through audio, video, or writing on student assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Instructors should use the syllabus to key information: communication preferences, email address, phone number, office hours, best way to reach instructor, brief introduction, and interaction expectations <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<p>Frequent and Consistent Interaction should be reasonably frequent and consistent throughout the course. Once the term begins, there should not be more than one week that passes without interaction with students in some form. The mode of interaction may vary throughout the course, but there must be a presence the entire term. Daily communication is not required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Courses should have at least one substantial interactive activity or communication per {insert timing}; 2-3 are expected for accelerated courses <input type="checkbox"/> Course announcement posted every {insert timing} <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly summaries or highlights of discussion posts <input type="checkbox"/> Post when and how students can reach you -- weekly office hours <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly scheduled online review or help/ tutoring sessions <input type="checkbox"/> Provide personalized written feedback to students on at least one assignment {insert timing} <input type="checkbox"/> Post course announcements, send emails, or other messages in support of instruction at regular intervals throughout the semester: at least {insert frequency} <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

RSI CHARACTERISTIC	EXAMPLE
<p>Focused on Course Subject Interactions should pertain to the course content and contribute to the students' progress towards the course outcomes. Routine procedural reminders aren't substantive on their own, neither are numerical grades unless accompanied by personalized feedback or suggestions for improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send a message or post an announcement to students previewing concepts introduced in the next unit and/or listing questions for students to consider while reading the textbook chapters <input type="checkbox"/> Post an example of how a real world situation relates to the assigned content <input type="checkbox"/> Provide feedback on written work or annotated feedback on multimedia <input type="checkbox"/> Design and incorporate scaffolded assignments in which students can revise and resubmit assignments based on instructor's feedback <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<p>Central to Student Engagement Building <u>positive online learning environments</u> for students using learner-to-content, learner-to-learner, and learner-to-instructor engagement strategies enable communication in ways that support RSI and directly impact student learning online.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explore a variety of content delivery mechanisms, including video <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage instructors and their students to use multiple modes of expression: text, video, image, audio <input type="checkbox"/> Cultivate community and foster safe spaces for increased communication <input type="checkbox"/> Courses incorporate online learning tools and technology to regularly engage students <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<p>Facilitation Techniques Instructors can use a variety of techniques, including milestones or multiple due dates, to increase and improve interaction with students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The instructor regularly conveys his/her presence and interest by initiating communication with students as a group and as individuals, providing direction and feedback when necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor provides structure and expectations on communication, interaction, and due dates. <input type="checkbox"/> Courses are organized in weekly or standard course modules that support a sequential scaffolding for meeting course objectives and facilitating student learning <input type="checkbox"/> Collect feedback from students. Use surveys or polls to find out how student's feel about the quantity and quality of interactions they have experienced in the course so far. Make adjustments as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

Instructor RSI Self-Assessment For Online Courses

As you prepare for your course, this self-assessment will help you answer the question:

Do I Already Have RSI built into my Online Course?

Instructor: _____

Course: _____

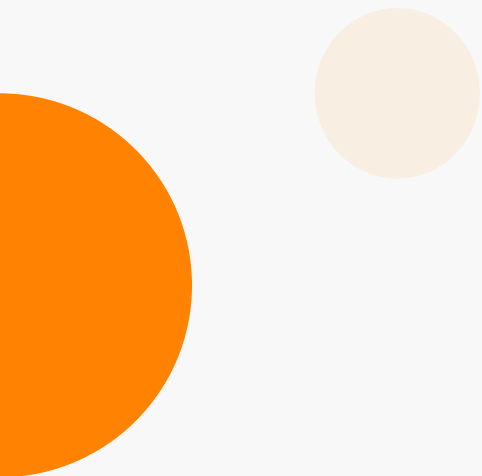
Date: _____

Program: _____

Substantive interactions engage students in teaching, learning, and assessment relevant to the subject matter. Regular interactions are frequent and consistent throughout the duration of the course. Use this assessment to evaluate if your course activities count as RSI.

Your planned learning activity / interaction	Is it instructor initiated?	Is the subject of the interaction focused on the course?	Will it be frequent & consistent (regular)?	Is it substantive? (must check at least 2)	Is it RSI?
Ex: Scheduled online meetings with each student to provide personalized feedback on each key assignment and to answer questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Is it <u>direct instruction</u> ? <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework <input type="checkbox"/> Providing information / responding to questions about course content or a competency <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitating a group discussion regarding course content or a competency <input type="checkbox"/> Other activities approved by the institution or program's accrediting agency	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Ex: Providing a weekly pre-recorded video accompanied by assigned readings, recorded webinars, podcasts, videos, and reading materials.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Is it <u>direct instruction</u> ? <input type="checkbox"/> Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework <input type="checkbox"/> Providing information / responding to questions about course content or a competency <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitating a group discussion regarding course content or a competency <input type="checkbox"/> Other activities approved by the institution or program's accrediting agency	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Your planned learning activity / interaction	Is it instructor initiated?	Is the subject of the interaction focused on the course?	Will it be frequent & consistent (regular)?	Is it substantive? (must check at least 2)	Is it RSI?
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Turning non-RSI Activities RSI

If some of your activities don't count as regular & substantive interactions, that doesn't mean they aren't important. It simply means you have an opportunity to create additional interactions throughout your course that can enable meaningful connection, engagement, and community. Here are some simple ways to turn your non-RSI activities into RSI.

Good Practice: *Common activities that reflect effective practices but alone would not meet the substantive interaction guidelines. Supplement these practices with items from the right column.*

How to Meet the Requirement: *Utilizing any of these elements from at least two of the key areas would qualify the course as meeting RSI.*

Key Area 1: Providing Direct Instruction of Course Content

Good Practice	How to Meet the Requirements
Pre-recorded video lectures of slide content presentation only.	Include video lectures or presentations with instructor-moderated follow-up discussions throughout the term.
Readings only, no instructor commentary.	Each week , post module video summaries reflecting the week's reading activities.
Web content, podcasts, videos, etc. no instructor commentary	Throughout the term , include instructor commented, curated, and/or contextualized readings, examples, videos, etc.

Key Area 2: Assessing/Providing Feedback on Student's Coursework

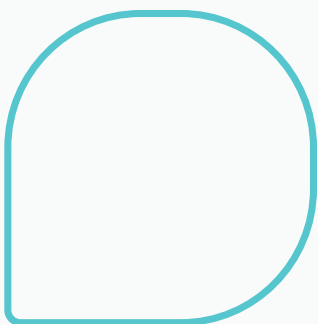
Good Practice	How to Meet the Requirements
Auto-graded quizzes with feedback for both correct & incorrect answers	If auto-graded quizzes, add an application question with individualized feedback.
Graded assignments with generalized, whole-class feedback	Using digital tools, provide whole-class feedback on common questions, strengths, and areas of focus at regular intervals.
Graded assignments only, without feedback	Include graded assignments with individualized feedback in alignment with syllabus feedback timelines.

Key Area 3: Providing Information/Responding to Questions About Course Content

Good Practice	How to Meet the Requirements
Weekly reminders of due dates via digital tools	Make weekly, scheduled announcements answering common questions or summarizing class progress.
Responding in a timely manner to student emails	Use digital tools to regularly check in on students regarding the academic aspects of the course and to provide additional information relevant to the course content .
Hosting regularly scheduled office hours	Hold weekly office hours for content/topic reviews, invite specific students , or record & post Q&A for the class to access .

Key Area 4: Facilitating a Group Discussion Focused on Course Content or Competencies

Good Practice	How to Meet the Requirements
Providing an open-ended discussion forum	Facilitate and moderated discussions throughout the course related to specific course topics or focused on course competencies.
Student-facilitated group discussions	Regularly post to course discussion boards using a variety of media, like images, photos, polls, or text, to pose guiding questions related to the course subject/concept being discussed.
Responding to student questions in group discussions	Pro-actively moderate peer-to-peer discussions



Regular & Substantive Interaction

References & Resources

- [Cliffs Notes: The DoE's RSI for Distance & Online Learning](#)
- [What Regular & Substantive Interaction Looks Like in Practice](#)
- [7 Ways to Win RSI with Harmonize](#)
- [Top 10 Best Practices for RSI](#)
- [Regular and Substantive Interaction \(RSI\) Examples](#) from Blue Mountain Community College
- [OLC and SUNY Online Update Course Quality Rubric](#) Based on New Federal Requirements for Distance Education
- [OLC OSCQR Course Design Review Scorecard](#): The OSCQR 4.0 scorecard is the first online course quality rubric to account for RSI regulatory requirements for online and distance education.
- [UPCEA's RSI Analysis](#)
- [Regular and Substantive Interaction Refresh: Reviewing & Sharing Our Best Interpretation of Current Guidance and Requirements](#)
- [Regular and Substantive Interaction: Regulatory & Pedagogical Implications](#) presentation by WCET (Recording)
- [Regular and Substantive Interaction in Online and Distance Learning](#) (OSU)
- [Regular and Substantive Interaction: Background, Concerns, and Guiding Principle](#). (2018, November 30). Retrieved January 19, 2021.
- [U.S. Department of Education Negotiated Rulemaking for Higher Education](#)
 - [RSI regulation](#) – see pp. 339-341. Found in Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Distance Education and Innovation
- [U.S. Department of Education Issues Final Rules](#) on Distance Education and Innovation: NC-SARA. (2021, January 11). Retrieved January 19, 2021.
- [U.S. Department of Education's fact sheet](#) on changes

About

Harmonize



Harmonize elevates the learning experience with a suite of LMS-integrated discussion & collaboration tools, proven to improve student retention and engagement. Learn more at [harmonizelearning.com](https://www.harmonizelearning.com)



Built for Social Learning

Purpose built, Harmonize promotes connection, community, and vibrant online collaboration for both synchronous and asynchronous learning



Rich Multimedia

Let students express themselves in the ways that work for them. Create video, images, audio, or text posts, and provide annotated feedback all in one post.



Key Integrations

Seamless integrations with learning management systems like Canvas, Brightspace, Blackboard, and Moodle create a cohesive instructor and student experience.



Streamlined Grading to Save Time

Assessing the quality and integrity of student work has never been easier with our plagiarism detection integrations as well as comprehensive student activity reports that put everything you need to assess on one dashboard.



Engagement Insights

Proactively monitor student engagement and respond to Regular & Substantive Interaction guidelines more easily. Gain visibility into how, when, and with whom students are engaging and offer a convenient way to reach out to struggling students.



Modern Interface, Modern Tools

A visually appealing grid layout with social media-like features, like tagging, commenting, and reactions, draws students in and helps foster a sense of classroom community.



Accessible & Inclusive Learning

Keep the interactions regular, consistent, and meaningful among instructors and students of all abilities and circumstances by allowing them to post from anywhere, at any time, on any device.

