

Learning Activities that Foster Interaction

The charts in this document show examples of activities that you can do with your students in online classes. They are divided into the three “tenets” of online learning: Student-Instructor Interaction, Student-Student Interaction, and Student-Content Interaction. If you are looking for ideas for lesson plans, those can be found in the Student-Content Interaction section.

Please note that the list of methods of interaction below is not comprehensive. It represents only some of the more popular methods.

Student-Instructor Interaction

All courses shall include regular effective contact between students and the instructor.

Methods of interaction	Description
Email	Students can be encouraged to email the instructor with questions about the content, structure, grading, etc., of the course. Replies can be made as soon as possible.
Class discussion board	The instructor can facilitate discussions in the class discussion board. While it's impossible to reply to every student posting, the instructor can read each one and reply to selected postings. Replies can be substantive.
Announcements	Announcements can be posted to the class as often as needed. Announcements might include information on when assignments are due, changes in the syllabus, and exam schedules.
Chatroom	Chat allows the instructor to interact with students, textually and/or graphically, in real-time. The instructor can use a chatroom to conduct virtual office hours.
Webconferencing	Webconferencing allows the instructor to interact with students in real-time, over the Internet and with an audio connection. The instructor can use webconferencing to conduct virtual office hours and to deliver content live to students.
Blogs	Blogs can be used as an interactive writing tool for the instructor and students to discuss and give feedback on topics relating to the course.
Journals	Journals allow students a private space where they can communicate with their instructor. The instructor can comment on the students' writing, creating an interactive dialog and an opportunity to establish a student-instructor rapport.
Social networking	A social network can be set up for the course so everyone can communicate on any topic.
Social bookmarking	Instructors and students can share helpful web sites with one another.
Virtual worlds	Instructors and students can communicate with one another in a virtual world, which gives the sense of being together in the same place.
Telephone	The telephone can be used to interact with students individually to answer questions, review student work, etc.
Face-to-face meetings	Students can come to campus during face-to-face office hours to discuss any facet of the course.
Listservs	The instructor can communicate with all students simultaneously via an email listserv. Student and instructor responses can also be emailed to everyone in the class.

Student-Student Interaction

Regular interaction among students is necessary to design a collaborative, student-centered environment in which a community of learners is created.

Methods of interaction	Description
Email	Students can be encouraged to email each other to ask questions about the course, including assignments. They can complete at least one assignment in which they use email to facilitate a peer-editing lesson.
Class discussion board	Students can post to the discussion board in each module, answering questions posed by the instructor. They can also reply to each others' postings.
Group work	Students can work in teams to complete a group project. This project can then be shared with the rest of the class in the discussion board.
Blogs	Students can use blogs to discuss topics in the course. They can also use blogs in a writing assignment in which groups collaborate to write a paper.
Social networking	A social network can be set up for the course so everyone can communicate on any topic.
Social bookmarking	Instructors and students can share helpful web sites with one another.
Wikis	Wikis allow students to work collaboratively to build a web site. This can be particularly useful when groups have to create a product to share with the class.
Chatroom	As an adjunct to the group discussion board, students can use the class chatroom to discuss their group project in real-time.
Google Apps	Google Apps is a suite of online tools that allow students to create, share, store and collaborate on documents with other students. Google Apps includes Google Docs (word processing, spreadsheets, presentations) and Google Sites (creating web sites).
Virtual worlds	Instructors and students can communicate with one another in a virtual world, which gives the sense of being together in the same place.

Student-Content Interaction

All student activities, including assessments, should be aligned to the outcomes of, and objectives within, the course. Activities should also be designed to meet the needs of students with different learning styles. The content must cover all of the content detailed in the course outline of record.

Methods of interaction	Description
Class discussion board	Each module can contain at least one class discussion relating to the topic(s) of the module. Students can be required not only to post their opinions, ideas, and experiences, but they can also be required to reply to their classmates' posts. The instructor can pose questions relating to the textbook, online presentations, web sites, etc.
Group work	There can be at least one group project during the semester. Students can collaborate in private groups to solve problems, become experts on certain topics, etc. They can then present their findings to the class in the class discussion board. These presentations can be in the form of writing, PowerPoint presentations, or web sites. Web sites can be created using wikis.

Written papers	Papers can be written on various topics. Prior to students submitting their work, papers can be checked by an anti-plagiarism service to ensure that no plagiarism is involved.
Internet research	Students can use the Internet to research questions, problems, events, etc. Prior to students submitting papers, those papers can be checked by an anti-plagiarism service to ensure that no plagiarism is involved.
Quizzes, tests/exams	<p>Quizzes can be used in each module to make sure students completed the assigned reading and understood it. These quizzes can be “open-book”, but the questions can be randomized so different students get different questions.</p> <p>Tests and exams should include short answer and essay questions that require higher-order thinking, along with supporting factual knowledge. The questions can be randomized so different students get different questions. Time limits can be set, backtracking can be prohibited, and students can be forced to complete the exam in one sitting.</p>
Practice quizzes	Practice quizzes can be given periodically throughout the course so students can gauge their understanding of the content. Specifically, these ungraded practice quizzes can be given prior to the midterm and final exam. These quizzes should include only objective questions so they can be graded by the computer, enabling students to gain immediate feedback.
Journal writing	Students can maintain a journal to record reactions to topics being studied and to record personal reflections.
Mini-lectures	<p>Written lecture material can be divided into short, readable (“chunked”) sections with links to subsequent pages, if necessary.</p> <p>PowerPoint presentations—with or without audio narration—can be up to 5 minutes in duration but no longer than 10 minutes. Each module can contain one narrated PowerPoint presentation that covers the main points of the module. Deaf students should have access to the narration via a text transcript.</p> <p>Podcast lectures can be chunked and up to 5 minutes in duration but no longer than 10 minutes. Each module can contain one podcast that covers the main points of the module. Deaf students should have access to the podcast via a text transcript.</p> <p>All lectures are most effective when used in combination with other instructional strategies. For example, following a section of written material, you can add a practice quiz or an interactive review game (see below) to help with recall and comprehension.</p>
Mobile learning	Mini-lectures and other content can be processed so students can download them onto their mobile devices in order to learn wherever and whenever they want.
Simulations	Simulations can be used by students so they can participate in, and learn from, processes that might otherwise be less available because of danger, expense or logistical difficulties.
Guest speakers	Experts on specific topics can be invited into the class so they can present information and/or their experiences to students. This can be done via text in the discussion board. It can also be done in the chatroom or by posting podcasts. Students will interact with the guest speaker in the discussion board by posting questions and comments.

Video	Streaming video clips can be used to demonstrate procedures and to help students visualize concepts. These clips increase the modalities of learning offered to students and meet the needs of those who learn best by seeing and hearing content. Deaf students should have access to the videos via a text transcript.
Virtual field trips	Students can “attend” virtual field trips to places on web sites that are either too far away or too costly to visit in person. These field trips can be followed by activities, such as discussions.
Games	Games can be used as review activities to reinforce previously learned material and to prepare for exams. Jeopardy!-style games, crossword puzzles, flash cards, etc., can be created for online delivery.
Brainstorming	Brainstorming can be used to promote creative thinking via free association of ideas at the beginning of specific lessons. This can be done in the discussion board. It will work best in the chatroom, but because the class is asynchronous, students will better appreciate it being done in the discussion board.
Projects	Students can complete a capstone project that demonstrates the mastery of an outcome(s) of the course. This project can be submitted either as a written paper, a PowerPoint presentation, or a web site.
ePortfolios	Examples of student work can be uploaded to ePortfolios for each student. You can use ePortfolios to assess student work. Students can use them to show their work to prospective employers.
Peer-editing/critiquing	Students can work in pairs to edit each other’s paper and give feedback in order to improve their writing. Email or Google Docs can be used as the tool to accomplish this.
Blogs	Students can use blogs to discuss topics in the course. They can also use blogs in a writing assignment in which groups collaborate to write a paper.
Polling/surveys	In order to begin a discussion on a controversial issue, students can be polled to determine their stances. This can be done in the form of a survey. Results can be shared with students in an announcement or in the discussion board prior to the discussion.
Debates	Debates can be used to expand upon both sides of an argument. Assigned students present their arguments, and fellow students respond to them and to each other. Each reply can acknowledge a point made by a student and will respectfully refute it, citing factual sources. Debates can take place in the discussion board.
Case studies	Working in groups, students can evaluate real-world problems, situations, etc. They can then present their cases to the class in the discussion board for analysis.
Role-playing	Students can be divided into groups and assigned roles to “play” in a real-world situation. Each group can have its own discussion board, and students can “speak” by typing on behalf of their assigned role. This type of role-playing, obviously, can be discussion-based.
Student presentations	Students can prepare, and present, a mini-lecture on a topic being studied. These presentations can be in the form of PowerPoint presentations or web sites and can be posted in the discussion board for other students to view, question, and discuss.