

Opportunities for Social Interactions with Your Online Students

In the online learning environment, interactions fall into three categories: student-to-content interactions, student-to-instructor interactions, and student-to-student interactions.

Student-to-Content Interactions*

**Rated as most important by online students*

Reliance on course design

- Your site should be intuitive **to students**. Is it easy for someone who's never seen your site before to find and access your materials, submit assignments, and navigate through your course site, etc.?
- Students need direct guidance on how to navigate your site (especially at the beginning of the semester). Create how-to videos demonstrating how to locate the important aspects of your site.

Student Visualization of Instruction

- Providing narrated lectures — share personal experiences, real-world examples
- Creating skill-building videos and/or how-to videos (e.g., answering test questions, creating a bibliography or references page for a paper, etc.)
- Seeing/hearing instructor = physical presence and creates strong instructor presence, creating connection
- Remember to keep videos at 10 min or less (or insert breaks—activities, concept checks) to allow for students to make connections with your content

Provide Opportunity for Student Engagement with Materials

- Are the activities and assignments you assign relevant to your students' career paths or daily lives? Relevance increases engagement and critical thinking skills.
- Provide intentional opportunities for students to share their own experiences and reflections
- Use the active learning process (see [Active Learning in Online Classes resource](#) for more information)

Instructor-to-Student Interactions

Communication Tips:

- Make initial contact at the start of semester, and remember to consistently communicate over the term!
- Provide prompt responses to your students, but set boundaries of reasonable response times
- Use friendly, positive language in emails, announcements, and feedback
- Provide consistent (at least weekly) announcements
- Intentionally check in on any disappearing students

Are You Available to Your Students?

Being transparent about your availability helps provide stability and structure for you class, as well as a means of support for any students that may feel isolated or anonymous in the online environment.

- Consider virtual meetings, synchronous online office hours, or review sessions
- Post your office hours on your Overview page in Sakai
- Communicate the best times students can get in touch with you

Invite Student Participation

- Discussion forums — provide a starting point and then fade out to allow students to lead the discussion
- Your physical presence enhances connectedness (by means of video and audio)

Feedback Tips:

- The purpose of feedback should be to focus on helping students increase their cognitive skills, performance, learning efforts, and provide support

- Adopt a bubble-wrap/compliment sandwich style of communication: Acknowledge specific examples of what the student did well, then provide feedback on one or two focused points of improvement, and then share resources for how the student can make the improvements.
- Create audio or video feedback to provide overall class performance and/or individualized activity feedback
- Announcements can include general observations of students' work

Encouragement and Continuous Support

- Provide frequent and positive communications
- Post Welcome messaging in Sakai
 - Introduction/Orientation Videos
 - Virtual Office Hours

Student-to-Student Interactions

Discussions

- Provides a social environment to exchange ideas
- Use content-based prompts -- enhanced through debate, structured and engaging
- Consider implementing media-enhanced discussion: In Sakai Forums have students post their [student-created Warpwire video or audio responses](#) to each other

Groupwork ideas:

- Brainstorming activities
- Reflections/Sharing information and/or experiences
- Student book groups (small groups select a book from an instructor-provided list and then determine their own weekly meeting schedule to discuss book throughout the semester).
 - Provide means for instructor follow-up or check in with book groups.
- Peer reviews/critiques

Collaboration/Teamwork (instructor may check in when necessary)

- Helping each other to understand material
- Helping each other to understand instructions on assignments

Additional Resources

Social Presence Information

- [Tips for Instructor Presence in Online Courses \(PDF\)](#)
- [Impact of Educational Videos on Student Success \(PDF\)](#)
- [Webinar: This Course Isn't Taught by a Robot: Creating Instructor Presence in Online Courses \(YouTube\)](#)

Tools for Providing Social Presence in Online Classes

- [Preparing to Teach Online](#) resource page
- Information about the [Sakai Meetings tool](#)
- Information about the [Warpwire tool](#)
- How to [Narrate PowerPoints and Share them on Warpwire \(PDF\)](#)
- [Best Practices for Making Videos \(PDF\)](#)
- [Sakai Help for Students](#) (videos and handouts you are welcome to use in your classes!)

Need more information about teaching with Sakai?
Visit go.durhamtech.edu/sakai-instructors to learn more!