

Live Interaction in Online Courses

The loss of the personal touch—live student-teacher and student-student interaction—is a concern often expressed by faculty regarding teaching online. Roblyer and Wiencke (2003) found that social variables enhance interaction and online student engagement. According to a study conducted by Swan et al. (2000), the “instructor who interacts frequently and constructively with students” is important to student success. Instructors provide the encouragement, guidance, and reassurance needed in an online course.

Technology cannot substitute for an effective instructor. However, technology may provide an avenue for student-teacher and student-student interaction. There are many ways to interact with students in an online course—email, discussion forums, chats, and so forth. For the purpose of this discussion, let us consider the use of synchronous, or live, real-time interactions.

Indicators that live, or real-time interaction, may be a choice for communicating with learners online include the following:

- Lessons are best learned from group discussion or collaboration.
- Sparking deeper appreciation for and understanding of the subject matter is desired.
- A safe environment for exploration and sharing and a sense of community are vital to achieving learning objectives.
- Learning involves the rehearsal, demonstration, and assessment of particular skills.
- Information is complex and guidance is necessary.
- There is a need to adjust the level or complexity of material on-the-fly based on learner feedback.
- Comprehension must be ensured before learning proceeds.
- Questions and trouble spots cannot necessarily be predicted.
- Information is fast-changing.
- Ensuring participation and improving learner retention is paramount.
- A guest expert is available to interact

Additionally, assessment of some aptitudes and skill areas may be best handled in a synchronous, live environment. Such types of aptitudes and skills may include the following:

- Public speaking or presentation skills.
- Real-time problem solving and analytical thinking.
- Listening and reading comprehension in native and second languages.
- Composure in reflecting and responding under pressure.
- Well-reasoned conversations on discipline-specific topics; offering cogent responses in a timely manner.
- Persuasive, well-articulated, and well-spoken oral arguments; practicing the art of oral rhetoric.
- Storytelling skills.
- Debate
- Proficiency in software skills or other real-time applications or processes.
- Demonstration of how certain results are achieved in math or accounting or other fields where it is essential to be able to “show your work” and consciously replicate results.
- Effective use of one’s voice to convey shades of meaning or to perform, such as with music, in drama, or poetry.
- Fluency in a second language, including proper pronunciation.
- Immediate application of material learned to real-world problems or contexts
- Role-play in simulated situations in preparation for real-world scenarios.
- Ability to work well and collaborate with others in team activities.

In your online courses, a synchronous tool, ClassLive Pro, is available to you for use in your fully online courses (01W, 02W, etc.). This tool will allow you accomplish the types of aptitudes and skills mentioned above. Contact one of the Instructional Design Unit team members if you would like to learn more about the use of ClassLive Pro in your online courses

- learner retention is paramount.
- A guest expert is available to interact with learners for a limited time.
- Dialogue or debate among learners is required.
- Distance-based learners and campus-based learners need access to the same experts.
- The situation calls for personal, real-time attention.

Teaching and Learning Online. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Roblyer, M. & Wienche, W. (2003). Design and use of a rubric to assess and encourage interactive qualities in distance courses. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 17(2), 77-98.

Swan, K. Shea, P., Fredericksen, E. Pickett, A. Pelz, W., & Maher, G. (2000). Building knowledge building communities: Consistency, contact and communication in the virtual classroom. *Journal of Educational Computing Research* 23 (4), 359-383.

Online Courses—Summative Surveys

Students in online courses (01W, 02W...) are required to complete a summative survey approximately two weeks prior to the close of the term. Survey administration dates and delivery of the survey results to faculty and department heads is provided in table below:

Term	Dates Surveys are Administered to Students	Results to Faculty/ Department Heads
Jan 31-May 9 (14 Weeks)	Feb 15 - Feb 22	February 25
Feb 4-May 9 (13 Weeks)	Feb 15 - Feb 22	February 25
Mar 24-May 9 (7 Weeks)	Apr 3 - Apr 7	April 11
May 12-May 27 (2 Weeks)	May 23 - May 26	June 4

Assessing the Design of Your Online Course

A well-planned and constructed online course can provide a meaningful educational experience for students and a fulfilling teaching experience for instructors. Here are a few basic questions to help you “assess” your online course:

- Do the homepages contain a Course or Unit Title in large, bold, colored font?
- Are Announcements used effectively on the Course Homepage?
- Are Course and Unit navigation guidelines clearly presented to students?
- Is there a team/group assignment in your course, if appropriate?
- Is there an Introductions discussion item under Course Home that requests students to introduce themselves?
- Are short audio or video clips, or PowerPoint slides, used where appropriate?
- Is material “chunked” appropriately?

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**A PDF version of this newsletter is available at www.tamuc.edu/itde under the Instructional Design link.