

TEACHING ELEMENTS: STUDENT-STUDENT INTERACTION ONLINE

INTERACTIVE ONLINE ACTIVITIES

1.0 | OCTOBER 2014

Research has shown that a high level of student-to-student interaction results in a positive impact on learning in online courses. In addition to introductions and the exchanges of personal information, your online course should include instructional activities that encourage reflection and discussion. These activities require students to work with one another and share results, going beyond the typical course discussion.

DISCUSSIONS

It is important to design online course discussions that promote interaction. Provocative, open-ended questions will stimulate divergent thinking and reflection, and generate interest so students will *want* to read each other's ideas. It is important that you model support and encouragement for diverse points of view so there is a feeling of "safety" in fully engaging in these discussions. You can also promote student interaction by requiring students to reference ideas from discussions in graded assignments.

Along with assessing student comprehension through discussion questions, you can develop questions that require analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation. For example in a political science course, you can ask students to read a recent article about a natural disaster and, in a discussion:

- Describe one social and one economic impact of this disaster.
- Share their opinion on how might this disaster affect national policy, using the sources from the course to support this opinion.

ACTIVITY CONTINUUM

One strategy to build deeper interaction in an online course is to move from *cooperation* to *collaboration*.

Cooperation

Cooperative activities require students to *do things together*. Two typical structures for cooperative online activities are:

- **Pair-share**
Students complete a short assignment, such as summarizing an assigned reading. They share their work with a partner to identify commonalities and differences in their work.
- **Peer critique**
Students exchange work on a short assignment with a partner and critique each other's work. You can provide a rubric that, for example, requires students to identify three effective elements of their partner's work and three elements that could be improved.

Collaboration

Once students have had experience cooperating with partners, you can introduce activities that require *collaboration*. Collaborative activities require students *to share ideas, co-create work, and reach consensus*. Collaborative activities can be for pairs or groups of three to five students. Examples include:

- **Case analysis**
Students individually complete an analysis of a case study you provide. Next, they work together to compare their work and arrive at a group analysis that synthesizes all of their perspectives. Students can receive partial credit for their individual work, with the remainder of the grade based on the group's work.
- **Collaborative writing/presentation**
Assign groups to write a paper or develop a presentation together. To encourage true collaboration, require members of the group to assume defined team roles and use a formal mechanism for team members to provide feedback about and to each other. The feedback mechanism ensures that team members have an opportunity to modify their behavior, and provide a method for assigning individual grades. (myCourses include a peer evaluation tool called [PeerEval](#).)

Debate

Students work in pairs or groups to analyze and share either the pro or the con of a given situation or issue. Then pairs are required to respond to the opposing viewpoint.

Modified pair-share

Students complete a short assignment and share their work with one another student. Together, they must arrive at consensus on their work to deliver a joint product. In addition to submitting their shared work, students can comment on their experience of coming to agreement.