

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

RSI Defined

The [US Department of Education](#) requires that all online courses for which students may receive federal financial aid “involve regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors.” The Department of Education has the authority to review distance learning offerings at colleges and universities that receive federal funds.

Regular and substantive interaction is more than a federal requirement, it is also a hallmark of effective teaching. Decades of research have established that teacher-student interactions are an essential component of learning.

For interactions to be considered RSI, they need to meet the following characteristics:

- They should be mostly instructor-initiated
- They need to be regular, scheduled and predictable, and
- They must be substantive, i.e. focused on the course subject.

[Suny Empire State College](#) provides definitions, examples, course design and delivery strategies.

Webinar Recording: [Regular and Substantive Interaction: Regulatory & Pedagogical Implications](#), presented by WCET

As greater numbers of students move into online and competency-based education programs, we have seen new interest in understanding the Department of Education’s regulations. Faculty and administrators seek to understand how the Department interprets rules requiring courses to include “regular and substantive interaction,” especially in distance and competency-based education. [WCET Frontiers](#) shares an interpretation and origin of RSI. WCET has also provided [answers to FAQs](#) for further clarification.

Strategies and Activities for RSI

There are as many ways to promote regular and substantive interaction online as there are approaches to teaching face-to-face courses. [Northern Illinois University](#) has provided recommendations as general suggestions for incorporating interaction into your course, but you are encouraged to adapt and personalize them to support course objectives, the needs of students and teaching goals.

[Mesa Community College](#) shares strategies on how to implement RSI, helping to clarify what it is and what it is NOT.

[Online Learning Consortium](#) Webinar, “How to Increase Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) in Online and Distance Learning”

[Grand Valley State University](#) 10 Effective Practices for Digital Teaching “Be Regular and Substantive, Using Both Synchronous and Asynchronous Activities”

[Tarrant County College](#) shares a downloadable RSI checklist that includes expectations and suggestions. It is not an all-inclusive list, but a generator of ideas for effective RSI in a course design.

[Umpqua Community College](#) also offers RSI guidelines and a checklist.

[University of Houston](#), checklist for your asynchronous course.

[Riverside Community College District](#), Guide to Recommended Best Practices to Achieve Regular and Substantive Contact in Distance Education.

D2L Tools Used to Leverage RSI

Gradebook	Intelligent Agent
Discussion Forums	Release Conditions
Email / Instant Message	Assignment Feedback
News Tool	Survey Tool