**What is RSI?**

Regular Substantive Interaction (RSI) in distance education refers to meaningful and consistent engagement between students and their instructors or the educational content. It's about ensuring that students aren't solely asked to passively absorb information but are expected to actively participate in the learning process.

The [U.S. Department of Education now requires](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED593878) that all online courses for which students may use Title IV funds (federal financial aid) "ensure that there is regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty."  In online teaching and learning environments of any kind, (asynchronous, synchronous, blended/hybrid), regular and substantive interactions should:

* Be **with an instructor**
* Be **initiated** by the instructor.
* Be **scheduled and predictable**.
* Be **academic** in nature and **relevant** to the course.
* Substantive interaction assumes ***direct interaction between the learner and the instructor*** including:
* Providing pre-recorded lectures and videos contextualizing course content
* Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency
* Hosting live class sessions
* Engaging students with interactive activities curated by the instructor
* Facilitating collaborative group projects with instructor guidance
* Scheduling one-on-one virtual meetings between students and instructor
* Assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework
* Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course

RSI is essential because it keeps students engaged, helps clarify uncertainties, promotes deeper understanding of the material, and allows instructors to gauge student progress and provide necessary support. RSI encompasses a wide range of evolving practices for creating active learning communities in a digital space.

**What Advantages Does Assessing for RSI Have Over Direct Instruction?**

First and foremost, as mentioned above, U.S. Department of Education has shifted its focus from direct instruction and toward RSI as way of distinguishing correspondence education from distance education, for the purpose of consumer protection and upholding federal laws related to administering federal education funds and student financial aid. The language of *Regular Substantive Interaction* is now being included in [definition of distance education used by accreditation bodies](https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html#regularsubstantive) and [State of Ohio Statutes relating to higher education](https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-3332-1-06). Regular and substantive interaction is more than a regulatory requirement, however. It is also a hallmark of effective teaching. Decades of research have established that teacher-student interactions are an essential component of learning, and that students learning in digital environments succeed when engaged effectively online.

From the perspective of curriculum development and fully leveraging the advantages of distance education to structure dynamic learning experiences, *direct instruction* has also been experienced as ambiguous as there are no broadly agreed upon definitions that delineate what is specifically direct versus indirect instruction in virtual learning spaces. This has created some confusion about curriculum expectations for online courses in the College of Arts and Sciences, especially regarding asynchronous courses, which continue to increase in student popularity. The transition to RSI as a measure of course quality assurance provides a more future-focused framework and more apt guidelines for developing and assessing distance learning courses.

**How Can RSI Be Measured and Evaluated in Online Courses?**

Just as with the concept of direct instruction, the amount of regular and substantive interaction in a course is related to the credit value and term of offering of a course. A general aim should be that the *student experience* of engagement with the instructor is commensurate with that of a student taking the same course in a traditional classroom setting despite the necessary difference in methods and practices for online learning. For distance courses that have synchronous online meetings that mirror in-person class schedules, the regular and substantive interaction is usually built directly into the course’s scheduled delivery.

In courses with significant asynchronous components, it is essential to plan a strategy for providing effective RSI as part of the course delivery plan and communicate this comprehensive RSI plan in the [Distance Learning Cover Sheet](https://ascode.osu.edu/asc-distance-learning-syllabus-template) submitted for curricular approval. This RSI plan should specify an estimated amount of weekly time spent on the course as part of that regular and substantive interaction.

RSI guidance will be applied in various ways by different academic disciplines, class enrollment sizes, and course level, but the general principles of having a well-articulated plan for frequent and predictable interactions, initiated by the instructor, that are substantive and focused on academic engagement with the course content, should be consistent for all distance learning courses.

**How Can I Improve RSI in My Course?**

(*I thought we could use an accordion here in the webpage to give examples of each of these perhaps?)*

Recommendations for promoting and ensuring interaction in online courses:

Set Clear Expectations: Communicate interaction expectations in the syllabus, including response times and explicit participation guidance.

Regular Announcements: Use frequent announcements not just for reminders but also to discuss previous topics, trends in assignments, or highlight key concepts.

Timely and Detailed Feedback: Provide prompt, personalized, and detailed feedback on student work beyond just assigning grades, including written comments, detailed rubrics, audio or video notes, and examples for improvement.

Facilitate Discussions: Actively participate in online discussions to pose questions, propose alternative viewpoints, connect ideas, and encourage struggling students.

Scheduled Online Sessions: Conduct regular synchronous sessions like review sessions or office hours and incorporate structured lessons when appropriate.

Choose Interactive Tools: Select user-friendly tools that engage learners, facilitate communication, and document interactions for future reference.

Mid-Course Feedback: Gather feedback from students about their experience with the course mid-class and consider making adjustments based on their input.

Seek Colleague Feedback: Invite colleagues to observe your course and provide constructive feedback to ensure meaningful interaction.

**What Additional Resources Are Available to Help Me Learn More About RSI?**

* [OSU Teaching and Learning Resource Center Article on Regular Substantive Interaction](https://teaching.resources.osu.edu/keep-teaching/regular-substantive-interaction-online)
* Education Resource Information Center’s pdf “[Regular and Substantive Interaction: Background, Concerns, and Guiding Principles”](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593878.pdf)
* [Online Learning Consortium Webinar: *How To Increase Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) in Online and Distance Learning*](https://onlinelearningconsortium.org/webinar/how-to-increase-regular-and-substantive-interaction-rsi-in-online-and-distance-learning/)
* [SUNY Online Course Quality Review Rubric Regular Substantive Interaction Standards](https://oscqr.suny.edu/rsi/rsi-standards/)

**Teaching and Learning Research that Supports RSI**

The value of regular and substantive interaction between instructors and students has a well-established basis in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Here is a small sampling of some of relevant research:

Baker, C. (2010). [The impact of instructor immediacy and presence for online student affective learning, cognition, and motivation](https://www.thejeo.com/archive/2010_7_1/baker). *The Journal of Online Educators, 7*(1).

Betts, K. (2023, March 2). [Regular and substantive interaction: Resources to support learning, neuroplasticity, and regulations](https://wcet.wiche.edu/frontiers/2023/03/02/rsi-resources-to-support-learning-neuroplasticity-and-regulations/). *Frontiers, WCET*

Boling, E. C. et al. (2012). [Cutting the distance in distance education: Perspectives on what promotes positive, online learning experiences](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.11.006). *Internet and Higher Education 15*, 118-126.

Dixson, M. D. (2010). [Creating effective student engagement in online courses: What do students find engaging?](https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/josotl/article/view/1744) *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 10*(2), 1-13.

Fink, L. D. (2013). [*Creating significant learning experiences: An integrated approach to designing college courses*](https://i-share-niu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CARLI_NIU/cojvjp/alma9925417189605871)*.* Revised and updated edition. Jossey-Bass.

Kerensky, K. (2021, August 26). [Regular and substantive interaction refresh: Reviewing and sharing our best interpretation of current guidance and requirements](https://wcet.wiche.edu/frontiers/2021/08/26/rsi-refresh-sharing-our-best-interpretation-guidance-requirements/). *Frontiers, WCET*

Kerensky, K. & Poulin, R. (2022, November 8). [Regular and substantive interaction update: Where do we go from here?](https://wcet.wiche.edu/frontiers/2022/11/08/regular-substantive-interaction-update-where-do-we-go/) *WCET Frontiers*.

Online Learning Consortium. (2019). [*Regular and substantive interaction: Background, concerns, and guidine principles*](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED593878).

York, C. S. & Richardson, J. C. (2012). [Interpersonal interaction in online learning: Experienced online instructors’ perceptions of influencing factors](https://dx.doi.org/10.24059/olj.v16i4.229). *Online Learning Journal, 16*(4), 83-98.