Regular & Substantive Interaction (RSI) Instructor Checklist & Best Practices

Universities of Wisconsin Online Collaboratives & Flexible Option Programs

RSI is federally required, instructor-initiated interaction that is regular and substantive. RSI is the primary mechanism proving academic engagement and is essential for federal financial aid eligibility in all online courses.

INSTRUCTOR CHECKLIST

Regular Interaction (Predictable & Ongoing)

- ☐ Provide scheduled opportunities for interaction (e.g., published weekly office hours)
- ☐ Instructor presence is consistent and sustained across the course
- ☐ Students know when and how to expect interaction from me (e.g., grading within 3-5 business days, responding to questions within 48 hours)

Substantive Interaction (At Least Two Required)

- ☐ Provide direct instruction (synchronous instructional activities)
    - UW Flexible Option and Online Collaboratives are not direct instruction
- ☐ Provide timely, specific, and improvement-focused feedback on student work
- ☐ Respond to content-related questions by clarifying and expanding understanding
- ☐ Facilitate academic discussions with prompts and guided dialogue
- ☐ Other approved instructional activities (aligned with program/accreditor expectations)

Substantive interaction can be fulfilled through posted feedback, recorded video, discussion facilitation, announcements, and written responses.

Proactive Engagement & Monitoring

- ☐ Student engagement and progress are monitored
- ☐ Proactive outreach occurs for students who are struggling or disengaged
- ☐ Responses to student requests are prompt
- ☐ Engagement is adjusted based on student needs

Evidence of RSI in LMS (Canvas)

- ☐ Timestamped instructor posts
- ☐ Differentiated feedback in graded assignments (feedback unique to the student's activity)
- ☐ Discussion facilitation beyond "good job" comments
- ☐ Instructor presence across multiple weeks
- ☐ Syllabus explicitly described engagement expectations

What Does NOT Meet RSI Requirements Alone

- ☐ Posting grades without feedback
- ☐ Automated messages only
- ☐ One-way content delivery without interaction
- ☐ Only responding when students initiate contact

Governance & Oversight Checklist

- ☐ Institutional policy defines RSI
- ☐ Faculty training includes RSI requirements
- ☐ Periodic internal audits of online courses
- ☐ Documentation retained for at least one audit cycle

General RSI Reminders

- Regular & Substantive Interaction compliance is directly related to federal financial aid eligibility: without RSI, online/distance education courses may be reclassified as correspondence courses which are not eligible for financial aid.
- Documentation of RSI is critical.
- Self-paced and competency-based education programs have greater scrutiny.
- RSI provides a better learning environment and improves student outcomes.

BEST PRACTICES

Interaction Type	Frequency	Best Practice Standards	Specific Examples
Assessment Grading & Feedback	Within 5 business days	• Reference specific student work using direct quotes or examples • Map comments to rubric criteria • Include on forward-looking improvement focus per submission	• "Your analysis of [concept] in paragraph 3 is strong because…" • Annotated rubric with category-specific narrative • Screenshare video walkthrough for complex work (Loom, Kaltura)
LMS Messages & Email	Reply within 48 business hours	• Address content questions substantively • Never leave student messages unanswered • Distinguish instructional questions (respond fully) from procedural ones (redirect)	• Flag all unread LMS messages at start of each login • Use message templates as a starting point • Send proactive outreach if student misses 2+ activities
Content Delivery	Every module	• Post a 2-3 min. instructor-narrated module intro • Connect to prior learning and real-world application • Do not rely solely on static content or publisher materials	• Module overview video: objectives + what to look for • Weekly 'Expert Perspective' post connecting readings to current events • Instructor-created work example or case study
Weekly Announcements	1-2 per week (instructor-initiated)	• Preview week's content and purpose • Acknowledge class trends or common questions from prior week • Personalize tone • Avoid generic auto-reminders alone	• "This week we move from theory to application – here's why…" • "I noticed many of you asked about X – here's a resource…" • Short 90-second welcome video posted in Canvas • Post about a current event that ties to the curriculum.
Discussion Facilitation	1-2 posts/week	• Pose Socratic follow-ups • Synthesize student ideas • Connect threads to module learning outcomes • Appear across multiple login sessions, not all in one day	• Replay asking, "how does this connect to X?" • Mid-week synthesis: "I'm seeing two themes emerge…" • Close thread with a concept bridge to next module

FEEDBACK TEMPLATES

Assessment Feedback: strengths + targeted growth

"[Name], your work on [topic] shows clear command of [skill/concept], especially [specific example]. To level up, sharpen your argument in [section] by connecting explicitly to [rubric criterion]. See my rubric note for a concrete suggestion."

Assessment Feedback Via Video

"Hi [Name], I recorded a brief walkthrough of your submission – easier to show than write. The main themes are [strength] and [area to develop]. Link: [video URL]. Feel free to reply in Canvas or meet with me during office hours if you have questions after watching."

Check-in Request: proactive outreach

"Hi [Name], I've noticed [observation: missed posts/strong performance/question pattern] and wanted to connect individually. Are you able to join me during my office hours next week? If not, please let me know if there's another time we can connect. This is optional but I think it would be valuable."

Non-responsive Student Outreach: proactive outreach

"Hi [Name], I noticed you [haven't logged into the course since __/haven't participated in discussion X this week/haven't submitted an assessment since __] and wanted to check in. If anything is preventing you from participating, please reach out. Here's a suggestion for getting back on track: [specific step]. Your Success Coach and I are here to help."

Assessment Feedback: forward-look

"Solid progress this module, [Name]. As we move into [next module/topic], consider how this connects to [upcoming concept]. If you'd like to talk through your approach before the next assessment, please join me at my office hours or book a time via [scheduling link]."

Q&A Thread: substantive content response

"Great question, [Name], and I suspect others have wondered the same thing. [Direct answer.] The key concept here is [explanation tied to learning objective.] For a deeper dive, see [resource]. If this opens more questions, post below – this is how understanding deepens."

Discussion Facilitation: Socratic follow-up*

"[Name], you've identified [concept] well. To go deeper: how does your argument hold up when we apply [Module X principle]? I'd push you to consider whether [peer's point] supports or complicates your claim. This is exactly the analysis we're building toward."

Weekly Announcement: instructor-initiated*

"Hello [Class], great engagement this week, particularly around [topic]. Heading into [Week X], we're shifting to [focus]. A pattern I've noticed: [common question or gap]. I've posted a resource in [location] to address this. Post questions in the Q&A forum."

** Not compatible with the UW Flexible Option model.*

PRACTICES TO AVOID

Reactive-only engagement

- Responding only when students message you does not satisfy RSI. Instructor-initiated contact is required.

AI replies in discussion

- Posting AI-generated responses in discussion boards fails the instructor-presence standard. Your voice must be authentic.

Auto-grading without personalization

- AI/LMS auto-feedback on written work, without instructor commentary, fail the substantive threshold. Every student deserves individual feedback.

Generic or vague feedback

- "Good work" or AI boilerplate language is non-compliant. Feedback must reference the students' specific ideas and work.

Single login day per week

- Posting all content on one day doesn't demonstrate regularity. Spread interactions across at least 2 login sessions weekly.

No documentation

- Undocumented RSI cannot be verified in audits. Log all substantive interactions in your course record.

Undisclosed AI in grading

- Any AI-assisted evaluation process must be disclosed to students and comply with your university's AI use policy.

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