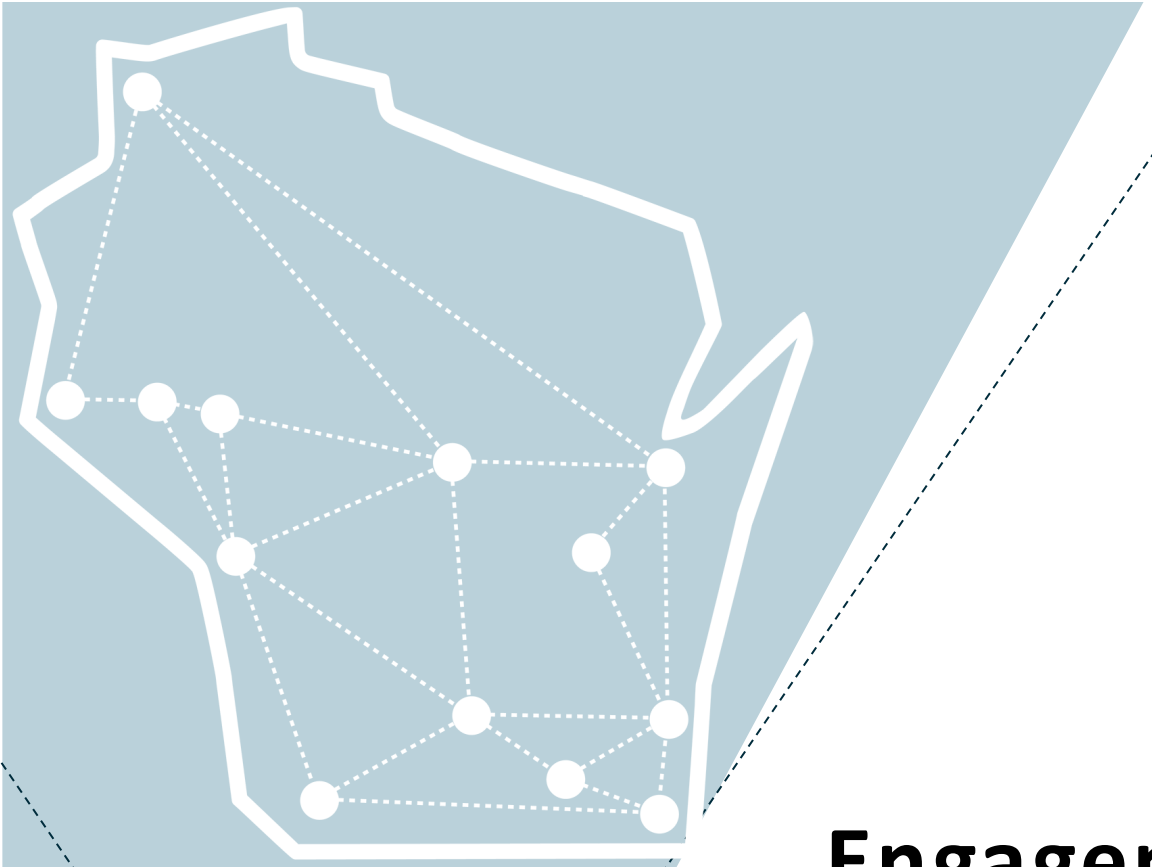


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Engagement in the Online Classroom:

A Regular & Substantive Interaction (RSI) Workshop

What Is Distance Education (DE)?

Department of Education Code of Federal Regulations:
Title 34 C.F.R. 600.2

Education that uses one or more defined technologies [the internet] to **deliver instruction to students** who are separated from the instructor(s) and to **support regular and substantive interaction** between the students and the instructor(s), either synchronously or asynchronously.

Two Parts of RSI: REGULAR

Regular Interaction

- Instructor-initiated
- Predictable and scheduled
- Occurs throughout the course
- Instructor provides prompt and proactive interactions with students based on monitoring their academic engagement and success

Examples of Regular Interaction

- Weekly instructional announcements
- Scheduled discussion facilitation (i.e. scheduled office hours)
- Mid-week clarification posts
- Timely feedback (3-5 business days)

Only interacting with a student when they email an instructor, is not sufficient.

Two Parts of RSI: SUBSTANTIVE

Substantive Interaction

- Engages students in teaching, learning, & assessment.
- Must include at least two of the following:
  - Direct instruction (synchronous instruction)
  - Assessing or providing meaningful feedback on students' coursework
  - Responding to academic questions
  - Facilitating group discussion
  - Other approved instructional activity

Substantive Interaction: Meaningful Feedback

Meaningful Feedback examples:

- Comments tied to rubric criteria
- Explanations of strengths/weaknesses
- Suggestions for improvement
- Feedback that advances learning

Meaningful Feedback is not:

- A numeric score only
- “Good job” or “Mastery” without additional feedback
- Auto-graded assessments without instructor feedback
- Auto-graded assessments that use programmed responses

Substantive Interaction: Facilitating Discussion

Facilitating Discussion examples:

- Instructor posts prompts and engages with multiple students
- Instructor synthesizes themes
- Instructor encourages deeper thinking

Facilitating Discussion is not:

- Instructor posts prompt and never returns to discussion
- Replies only with “good job”

Federal Regulation Compliance

- Without RSI, course may be classified as correspondence education — hence, it may not be eligible for financial aid
- Both “regular” and “substantive” must be present in each course
- Competency-based education courses have higher scrutiny

Federal Regulation Compliance

Institutions must document presence of RSI.

Auditors look for the following in the LMS (Canvas):

- Timestamped instructor posts
- Instructor comments in assessments
- Discussion facilitation across multiple weeks
- Syllabus describing engagement expectations

Syllabus Statement Examples

- Instructor will respond to content questions within 48 business hours.
- Assessment feedback will be provided within 5 business days.
- Instructor will post weekly module guidance.
- Office hours will occur every Monday from 4:00-5:00pm CST via this Zoom link.

RSI Improves Student Outcomes



RSI Practices



Learning Processes



Better Student Outcomes

BEST PRACTICES BY INTERACTION TYPE + FREQUENCY + EXAMPLE

- Assessment Grading and Feedback
- LMS Messages and Email
- Content Delivery
- Weekly Announcements
- Discussion Facilitation

Examples of best practices by interaction type: **Assessment & Grading Feedback**

Within 5 business days...

- Map comments to rubric criteria, or
- Include forward-looking improvement suggestions, or
- Reference specific student work, such as: "Your analysis of [concept] in paragraph 3 is strong because..."

Examples of best practices by interaction type: **LMS Messages & Email**

Within 48 business hours

- Address content questions substantively
- Never leave student messages unanswered
- For example:
  - Flag all unread messages at start of each login
  - Use message templates as a starting point
  - Send proactive outreach if a student misses 2+ activities

Examples of best practices by interaction type: C**ontent 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
- For example:
  - Module overview video: objectives + what to look for
  - Weekly "Expert Perspective" connecting readings to current events

Examples of best practices by interaction type: **Weekly Announcements**

1-2 per week

- Preview the week's content and purpose
- Acknowledge class trends or common questions from prior week
- Avoid generic auto-reminders alone
- For example:
  - "I noticed many of you asked about X—here's a resource..."
  - "This week we move from theory to application and here's why..."
  - Post about a current event that ties to the curriculum.

Examples of best practices by interaction type: **Discussion Facilitation**

1-2 posts/week

- Pose Socratic follow-ups
- Synthesize student ideas
- Appear across multiple login sessions, not all in one day
- For example:
  - Reply asking, "how does this connect to X?"
  - Mid-week synthesis: "I'm seeing two themes emerge..."
  - Close thread with a concept bridge to the next module

Examples of feedback templates

Assessment feedback with 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."

Examples of feedback templates

Instructor-initiated weekly announcement:

“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.”

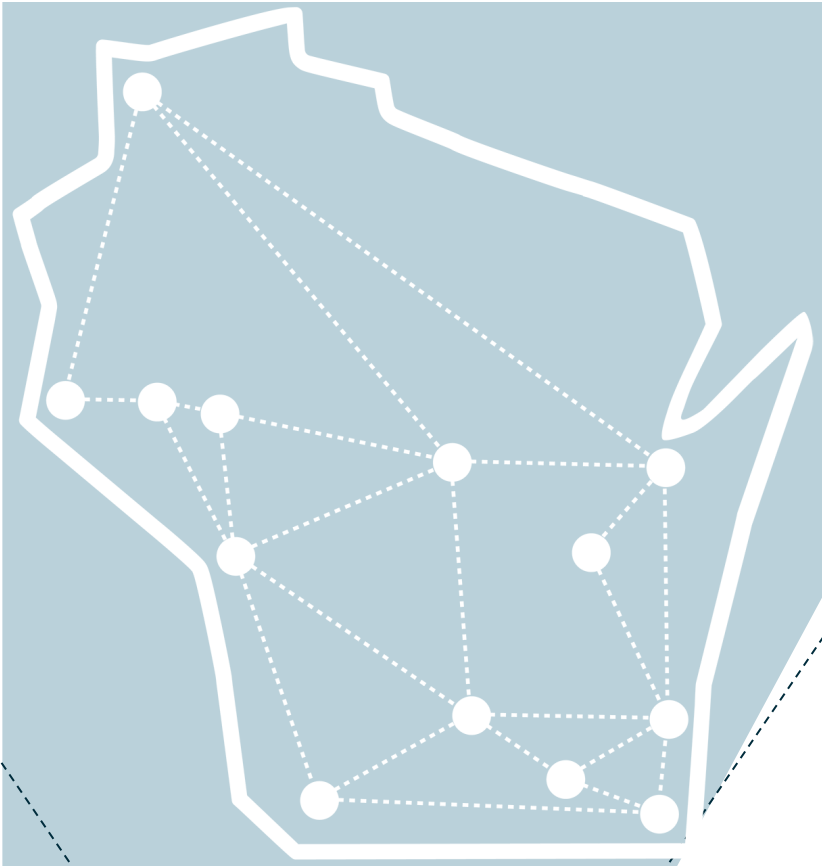
Examples of feedback templates

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.”

Practices to avoid

- Reactive-only engagement
- AI replies in discussion
- Auto-grading without personalization
- Generic or vague feedback
- Single login day per week
- No documentation
- Undisclosed AI in grading



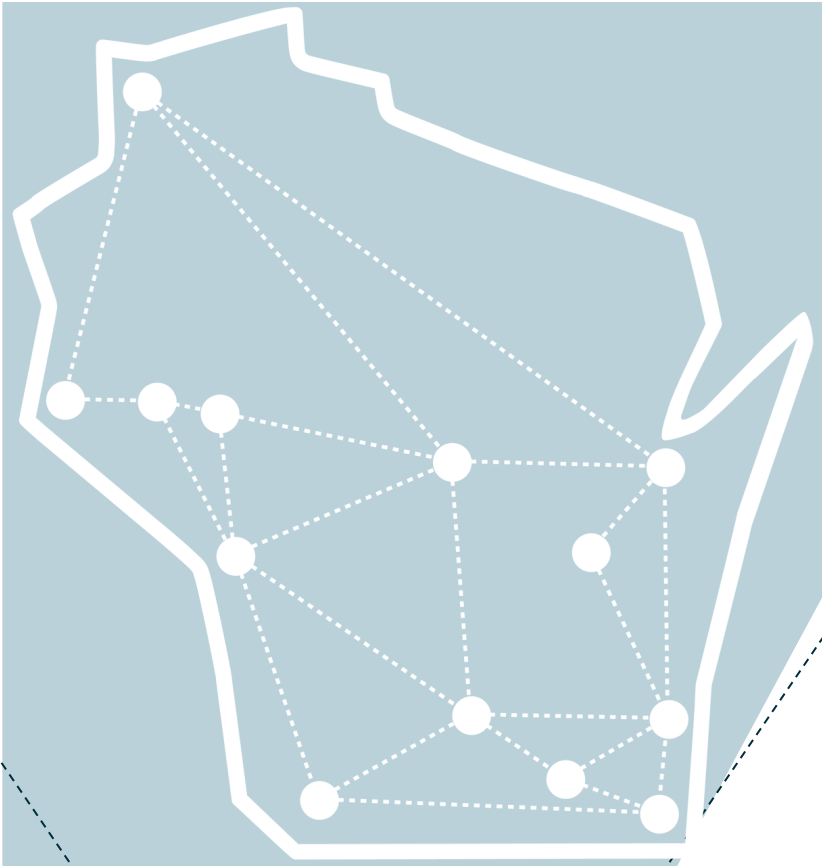
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Questions

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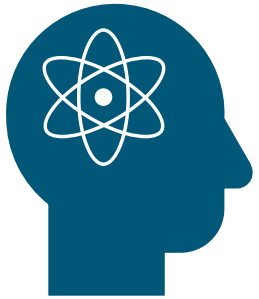
Breakout Discussions





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Discussion & Questions



Helpful Resources for Faculty

- RSI Instructor Checklist & Best Practices
- RSI Evidence List
- RSI Workshop Slides
- Instructional designers
- Program Manager