Rubric for RSI Assessment

Last updated 9/28/26

As of July 2021, the federal government has issued guidelines about what defines Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) in an online or distance education course. As per these guidelines, instructors are expected to interact with students in predictable and meaningful ways, monitor their progress and provide individualized feedback on the course subject matter throughout the semester.

These requirements align with best practices for high quality online course design and delivery. RSI speaks to ***instructor presence***, meaning that the professor is proactively monitoring and frequently engaging their students in an academic context. This is vastly different from so-called plug-and-play, automated, or self-paced courses where students feel they are in the course alone. Instructors should provide feedback to each student by using the asynchronous tools in Brightspace. RSI does not mean professors can require students to attend synchronous meetings to benefit from feedback or grades.

A course that does not meet the RSI criteria is considered a "correspondence course." Correspondence courses are not eligible for federal funds. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Inspector General (OIG) has audited institutions regarding RSI and those identified as being out of compliance must pay back federal funds. Therefore, it is important for administrators and teaching faculty to be proactive about ensuring RSI is demonstrated in all distance education courses at SUNY Suffolk.

Use the rubric below to assess or self-assess an online course in the Brightspace environment. Is there **observable** evidence that the teaching meets the requirements? Interactions should not exist solely in emails. Interactions should be evident in the course site. If you are not sure of meeting the requirements or would like to talk with a member of the **Center for Teaching and Learning** for a consultation, please email: ctl@sunysuffolk.edu and we will make an appointment with you.

To meet RSI, interactions must be:

RSI Interaction Criteria and Explanations

Criteria	**Explanation**	**Yes? No? Observable Evidence. Comments**
1. Initiated by the instructor.	This criterion states that the interaction must be faculty-driven. This does not include interaction that is optional or initiated primarily by the student. Examples of Instructor Initiated: • Individualized emails regarding course progress. • Personalized feedback on assignments in Brightspace. • Instructor-facilitated discussion forums in Brightspace. • Office hours that are initiated by the instructor for remediation	
2. "Regular" and sometimes frequent.	Interaction between students and the instructor is scheduled, predictable, and expected (at least once weekly), and interaction is of an academic nature. The interaction should occur with reasonable frequency considering the length of time the course is running. Examples: • Weekly course announcements that address the class as a group and provide group feedback on course progress. • Weekly summaries that react to and highlight student discussion posts. • Regularly scheduled online reviews or help sessions to supplement student learning. • Office hours that are scheduled at the course start date. • Professor feedback weekly assessments in Brightspace.	
3. "Substantive" of an academic nature.	This means students are engaged ***by the professor*** through teaching, learning, and assessment. This speaks directly to the professor as the assessor of learning, versus students having	

Criteria	Explanation	Yes? No? Observable Evidence. Comments

	interaction solely with a third-party publisher's materials. In addition, the course must involve **at least two** of the following five activities within meaningful timeframes:
	1. provide direct instruction.
	  ○ Videos are helpful but should not be the sole source of instruction.
	  ○ Offer model examples, etc.
	2. assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework.
	  ○ Limited feedback such as posting "good job" or just entering a numerical grade does not qualify as substantive.
	  ○ Feedback should be meaningful, both when a student is doing well and in describing areas where students could improve.
	3. providing information or responding to questions about the course content or competency.
	4. facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency.
	5. or other instructional activities approved by the institution or program's accrediting agency.	

4. With an instructor that meets accrediting agency standards.	Interaction must be provided by the institutional staff who meet accrediting agency standards in the subject matter taught. The definition of "instructor" has also been updated as an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency.	

Best Practices to Look for In High-Quality Online Courses

- The online course is set up in a logically organized manner, including assigned content in weekly modules.
- The online course contains a welcome message.
- There is a Start Here/Course Information module containing a syllabus that includes specific time frames describing when students can expect feedback for assignments and turnaround time for communication. Student questions and emails should be addressed within 24 to 48 hours. Assignment grades and feedback should be provided within 1 to 2 weeks. Exceptions are scheduled holidays.
- The syllabus is easily located on the course site and is in an ADA compliant format.
- There is a weekly announcement identifying where students can locate feedback on assignments, instruction for upcoming assignments, and other course or institutional reminders.
- Assignments create opportunities in the online course to assess student learning through substantive feedback from the instructor. Feedback is meaningful, both when a student is doing well and when they could improve.
- There is substantial interaction in the form of audio, written content, or video generated by the instructor.
- There is at least one assignment per week where substantial feedback from the instructor is provided, although exceptions may occur depending on the course and content area.

Student Complaints

Students should refer to the Student Complaint Procedure (https://www.sunysuffolk.edu/explore-academics/ online-education/student-complaint-procedure.jsp).