

IN THIS SECTION

## Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

### What is Regular and Substantive Interaction?

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is a requirement that all distance education courses must meet. RSI is defined in a federal regulation that distinguishes the difference between correspondence courses and distance education courses. Regular interaction refers to the frequency with which students and instructors communicate, while substantive interaction refers to the quality and depth of the communication. Both types of interaction are essential for creating a sense of community, promoting learning, and ensuring that students stay engaged and motivated throughout the course or program. Faculty are encouraged to use this resource and/or the Department of Distance Education to determine if their teaching practices meet the federal requirements of RSI.

### Regular & Substantive Definitions

An institution ensures **regular interaction** between a student and an instructor by:

- Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency.
- Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed, on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

**Substantive interaction** is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:

- Providing direct instruction
- Assessing and/or providing feedback on a student's coursework
- Providing information and/or responding to student questions about the course content
- Facilitating a group discussion regarding course content or competency
- Other instructional activities approved by SACSCOC

**Please note:** For purposes of this definition, an **instructor** is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency.

### Why is RSI important?

Regular and Substantive Interaction is a federal regulation and directly impacts Title IV financial aid eligibility. Students do not receive financial aid for correspondence courses, so it is vital that regular and substantive interaction is present in all distance education courses.

### How do I meet and document that my online course(s) are in compliance with this federal regulation?

The regulation states that institutions must ensure distance education courses are in compliance with the RSI expectations. For compliance reporting purposes, we ask that you self-assess and document RSI in your hybrid and online courses. For every distance education course section you teach in a semester, please complete the short fillable PDF below and send it to your department chair to file with course syllabi.

[RSI Fillable Form](#)

In order to meet the requirements for this federal regulation, the interactions in your online course(s) must be:

- Initiated by a qualified instructor
- Frequent and consistent
- Meaningful and academic
- Involve proactive monitoring

## Examples and Nonexamples

These examples of interactions **will** help you meet RSI:

- You post a discussion board question and actively facilitate the conversation by responding to students and redirecting as needed.
- You post weekly announcements that answer common questions, summarize class progress, and discuss relevant course content.
- You post a prerecorded video explaining concepts and posing guiding questions for the upcoming unit that require student responses.
- You define the response time for feedback and emails in your syllabus or communication policy.

These examples of interactions **will not** help you meet RSI:

- You post a discussion board question and give students points for participation.
- You sporadically post announcements as due date reminders.
- You post a prerecorded video about the main concepts of the unit.
- You provide a statement in your syllabus that feedback and help will be provided but do not include specific details on timing or expectations.

## References & Additional Resources:

- Negotiated rulemaking for higher education 2018-19. (2020, November 6). U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2018/index.html>
- Poulin, R., & Davis, V. (2019, April 23). Interpreting what is required for “Regular and substantive interaction”. WCET Frontiers. <https://wcetfrontiers.org/2016/09/30/interpreting-regular-and-substantive-interaction/>
- Regular and substantive interaction: Definitions of distance education and correspondence courses. (n.d.). SUNY Empire State College. <https://www.esc.edu/dlis/design-your-course/regular-and-substantive-interaction/>
- U.S. Department of Education issues final rules on distance education and innovation | NC-SARA. (2020, October 1). NCSARA. <https://nc-sara.org/news-events/us-department-education-issues-final-rules-distance-education-and-innovation>
- Regular and substantive interaction: An overview for instructors of online courses at Everett Community College. (n.d.). Everett Community College. [https://www.everettcc.edu/files/programs/elearning/Regular\\_and\\_Substantive\\_InteractionPrimer.pdf](https://www.everettcc.edu/files/programs/elearning/Regular_and_Substantive_InteractionPrimer.pdf)

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