

ACC Guidance

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI)

In Alternate Modality Course Proposals

(Working draft)

The Department of Education provides regulations guiding online education. All institutions who receive Federal financial support, including student financial aid, must comply with these regulations. The ACC has prepared this document to guide the preparation of any proposals for Alternate Modality Courses so that they comply with the federal regulation's requirement for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) in online education. RSI is not only a regulatory requirement, it is a hallmark of the high quality education students have come to expect here at WWU.

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) includes the following qualities:

Regular Interaction must be:

- Instructor initiated.
- Frequent, consistent, and scheduled.
- Consistent with the contact hour requirements of the course. Note that contact hours should be equivalent to the course credits (e.g. 4 hours per week for a 4-credit course).

Substantive interaction must be:

- initiated by the instructor.
- Focused on engaging students in the teaching and learning process.
- interactive, including dialogue between the instructor and students.

RSI Level of Engagement can vary, but the majority of the RSI should be of High or Medium engagement and no more than 20% should be of low engagement. Examples of variations in engagement include:

- **High Engagement:** Live interaction between instructor and students through face-to-face communication. Can be in person or using online communication tools where instructors and students are visible to each other.
- **Medium Engagement:** Communication that is initiated by the instructor, includes dialogue between the instructor and students, and takes place over a specific time span. A few examples: Lecture video viewing with required post-viewing instructor monitored discussion; instructor-initiated discussion board requiring student responses *that the instructor responds to frequently* within a specific time frame.
- **Low Engagement:** Passive watching of video content, including lecture videos or videos providing an overview of correct responses to assignments or exams. This level of engagement can be enhanced with required instructor-initiated interaction

- **Office Hours are not RSI.** Office hours are optional opportunities for student-instructor engagement and do not count as RSI.

Examples of activities related to RSI and Level of Engagement:

Activity	WITHOUT RSI (Low/No Engagement)	WITH RSI (Medium or High Engagement)
Lecture	Recorded lecture	Live lecture (High) Recorded lecture followed by instructor-initiated activity requiring student engagement and instructor follow-up (Medium)
Class Discussion	Online discussion board with other students only	Live discussion (High) Discussion board initiated by instructor with frequent instructor feedback and engagement (Medium)
Feedback on homework assignment/exam	Instructor recorded general feedback for all students	Instructor feedback provided to students live (High) Recorded or written feedback individually tailored to each student's performance (Medium)
Watching a film	Assigned film watching on own	Live film viewing preceded by or followed by instructor input and engagement (High) Viewing a film online preceded or followed by instructor input and engagement with students in discussion board (Medium)
Demonstration of software, lab, or activity	Recorded demonstration	Live demonstration with interactive Q&A (High) Recorded demonstration with instructor-initiated Q&A and required student engagement (Medium)
Group activities	Student group meets on their own	Live student breakout discussions with periodic instructor monitoring and engagement (High) Student group meetings with required follow-up reporting to instructor where instructor responds to reporting (Medium)

Demonstrating RSI in a syllabus:

A good quality syllabus is a contract between the instructor and their students. From reading the syllabus, students will have a very clear understanding of what to expect when taking the class in terms of workload and interaction with the instructor. Instructors can demonstrate RSI in the syllabus by providing:

- **An outline of hourly requirements** for the class based on the credits allotted. This can be done by the week or for the entire quarter (if the workload is spread evenly throughout) or by learning activities. An effective outline will include:
 - An accounting of both credit hours and hours of work outside of the credit hours for a total of $3 \times \text{credits} \times 10$ (e.g. 4 credits means 40 credit hours and a total of 120 hours of work throughout the quarter).
 - A breakdown of what hours are RSI (see above regarding quality of RSI) and what hours are other work (e.g. preparation assignments such as readings, viewing videos, or worksheets; preparing assignments; external project work; studying for exams).
- A clear summary of the credit hour RSI composition, with a minimum of 20% low-quality RSI.
- A commitment to regular and substantive feedback provided to individual students.
- A commitment to initiating contact with students who are not responsive to instructor-initiated communication.

Additional resources may be helpful. Here are some links for more information and examples of effective RSI (these documents may include additional linked content):

- [Oregon State University's "Quick Reference" document for RSI](#)
- [Northern Illinois University's guidelines for RSI](#)
- [NWCCU Policy on Distance Education](#)
- [WCET summary of DOE Regulation update](#)