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Course Activities and Learner Interaction

Instructional materials are closely tied to course activities. Online activities require some form of written explanation or documentation since instructors can't be physically present to deliver this information to students in real time. These are very similar to the activities found on campus but still contain important differences.

- **<u>Discussion boards:</u>** students must reply to a question posed by the instructor and comment on a set number of their classmates' replies.
    a. Discussions frequently follow assigned readings, enhancing student engagement with the ideas and information they've read.
    b. Discussion questions hold students accountable for completing the assigned readings, especially if the response requires them to cite evidence from the text.
    c. Students are used to treating online communication very casually. If you hold a higher standard, you'll have to teach your expectations, such as prohibiting "text speak" or insisting on the use of proper English in discussion posts.
    d. Make your expectations for students' participation in discussion very clear. For example, you might want students to respond to two of their peers in every online discussion and require that those responses be at least 100 words long in order to receive full credit.
    e. You might require students to include a reference to the week's lectures or provide support for their statements by citing external sources.

- **<u>Written assignments and individual projects:</u>** students can generally post their written work to the online classroom in one of two ways: 1) post to an assignment submission area where the instructor alone can see their work, or 2) post to a shared forum such as a discussion board where classmates can see one another's work and comment upon it. The same is true in our face-to-face classrooms: sometimes students give their work to us directly, and sometimes we display it or ask them to present it to the class. It's up to the instructor to determine which method is the most beneficial.

- **<u>Non-graded activities:</u>** Not everything we do in an online classroom must be graded. Just as in our face-to-face classrooms, we can provide for many types of experiences and interactions.
    a. Opportunities for students to interact with course content reinforce or extend their learning, such as practice quizzes over assigned readings that prepare students for important exams.
    b. Many instructors provide a "student lounge" or "chat room" – basically, a discussion board where students can interact freely with one another.
    c. A discussion board titled "Questions and Answers" or "Problems and Solutions" lets students reach out to one another for help. The instructor should check this forum every day and chime in alongside students' contributions.
    d. A discussion board with "Questions for the Professor" gives students a way to seek the instructor's help without sending an email. The instructor should check this at least daily.

We take interpersonal interaction very much for granted when we teach on campus. Online, we need to be a bit more thoughtful and intentional, building our course content to encourage students' interactions with one another and with us. This reduces their sense of isolation and maximizes their online learning experience.