

Student Engagement

The more time a student spends online, the greater the potential is for distractions. This concept applies in particular to the academic time when students complete online coursework. Disturbances ranging from social media to digital entertainment to online retail can quickly capture a student's attention and derail the intended learning.



Student Engagement Techniques

***The following instructional practices can be helpful keeping online learners focused and engaged:**

Create "mini-modules"

Online learners may quickly lose interest in learning objectives and tasks if they are lengthy. It is better to divide the components of a larger unit into smaller sub-components that students complete in about five minutes each. Every sub-component is recommended to be entered around a particular learning point that keeps the students engaged before their attention wanders. By the time other online distractions tempt a student; the task is complete.

Gamify the learning

Online learners are more engaged with content when they have the option to use a variety of skills and understandings to progress through the "game." As opposed to traditional instruction that primarily involves students reading texts in isolation, games offer online learners of all ages the chance to interact with the content in a meaningful, yet entertaining, way. The content goals are mastered through games.

Challenge the learner

Humans are naturally inquisitive. Online learners can be motivated to engage with the content if they are challenged. Whether it be a problem in which students are asked to take a stand and defend that choice or prompted to prove that they are right, a well-crafted challenge can provide the kind of focus necessary to help online learners interact with your content.

Provide timely, meaningful responses

All students need to be made aware of what they are doing correctly, as well as what needs to be corrected. One of the most effective ways to do that is to provide specific and consistent feedback for students' learning. Students are not motivated by "good job" or "excellent work," and they do not improve their skills by "this is wrong" or "try again." Motivate students using by specific feedback such as "your argument on topic #1 was very well-defended by accurate facts" or "your argument was not well-supported. Have you tried evaluating the websites where you are finding your facts?" This routine use of meaningful responses will motivate and encourage students to continue to work. The use of audio or video to provide such feedback is an excellent way to make personal connections to your online learners.

Be creative in content delivery

Traditional routines of content delivery--e.g. lists, long stretches of texts, minimal or simplistic images--are not inviting or motivating for today's online learners. Interactive presentations that allow students to manipulate and maneuver through the content in ways that may involve voice-overs, videos, and high-definition images (as seen below in screenshots from www.raptivity.com) are bound to be more engaging to the students. There are a plethora of options for making presentations and assessments of the content more engaging for your learners.

Give the learner autonomous navigation

One of the key factors in motivation is autonomy. When the learners are given a choice of how they can navigate through the content, they are being allowed to learn in a way that best suits their learning preferences. As long as you have embedded checkpoints along the way to ensure that students are meeting the course goals, the students will be meeting your learning objectives. Remember that it is much more engaging for a student to be able to chart their path through the learning.

