

5 Ideas for Increasing Student Engagement Online



You have your content ready to go ([7 steps to get your class online](#)). Now you are ready to get your students actively involved with you, each other, and the content.

Need more help? [Please sign up to talk to a UW Instructional Designer!](#)

Idea 1: Use VidGrid In-Video Quizzes to Make Recorded Material More Interactive

You can make your videos more interactive by inserting questions into your videos. Click [HERE to access VidGrid's quick overview to this process](#).

Also, you can set up an Assignment within WyoCourses that will **automatically** capture student quiz scores from VidGrid. [Access a TUTORIAL VIDEO HERE to learn how to have VidGrid pass grades back to WyoCourses](#). (Note that this process doesn't currently allow weighting of responses.)

Pedagogy pro-tip: Consider using quizzes for *formative* assessment. This means creating questions (in VidGrid and/or elsewhere) that allow you to **learn more about students' questions and misperceptions so that you can create additional follow-up content** to help students clarify their understanding. Since students can't ask you questions while they're watching a video, using quizzes to gather information can help you better and then respond to their confusions. (One difference in online teaching vs. real-time face-to-face teaching is that you may need to create more back-end/follow-up content as you discover where students are struggling.)

Pedagogy pro-tip: Consider breaking your videos into shorter segments. [The evidence about student attention during video lectures](#) in online settings is compelling: **After about 9 minutes, student attention drops substantially**. If you're uploading your entire 50-minute lecture as a single file, your effort is probably less effective than it would if you thought about how to break that lecture into 5 or 6 shorter segments.

Idea 2: Incorporate Better Discussions

Synchronous Discussion

Students not talking, one student does *all* the talking? Here are some tips for getting students engaged in live discussions:



1. Greet everyone when they come online. Say hello, maybe make a comment about their background picture, their cat, ask about their weekend, whatever. This lets students know you recognize them as humans, not just a face on the screen.
2. Set clear guidelines, and make sure all students can find/use the functions within the application. If you're using zoom, this means deciding whether you want students to use the "Raise Hand" feature, for example, as a way of facilitating discussion. If you don't want students to be able to send private chats, disable this feature.
3. Encourage everyone who has a camera to use it, and ask everyone to use the gallery view in Zoom (the one that looks like the Brady Bunch for those of you who remember that show). This gives a feeling of everyone being in the same room. You wouldn't have students hiding their faces in class, so don't do it online either.
4. A main key to successful discussions, both in person and online, is to ask questions. Good questions. What is a good question? I'm glad you asked. Here are some tips:
 - a. Ask open ended questions. Ones that can not be answered with just a yes or no. (This is harder than you think, but you can do it!)
 - b. Call on students who are quiet. Not with a 'test' question, but a simple, "Ben, you've been quiet, what are you thinking?"
 - c. Connect student comments to each other and encourage students to ask each other questions rather than you being the only one they are talking to. For example, "Olivia, what do you think about Josh's idea?" or "Cody, what question can you ask Katy to understand more about her thinking?"
 - d. Remember, YOU do not have to give all the answers! If you ask questions and get students to think, they will often come up with answers on their own, and they will

remember them better that way. Feeding them the answers (that would be called a lecture) doesn't always make the learning stick. Again, this is also harder than you think. It requires patience and letting go of some power. It's worth it!

Asynchronous Discussions

Mix and match the following strategies for increasing student engagement and investment in asynchronous discussions.

1. The Foundation: Follow these [best practices](#) for creating and facilitating asynchronous discussions.
2. Building Community
 - Use audio, video, [images](#), and/or external links in discussion prompts and responses -- and encourage students to do the same!
 - Try this easy way to [quickly embed links and content](#).
 - Ask students to create their own videos/audios or images for discussion responses. Here is a Canvas guide to creating videos/audios:
<https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10627-4212710345>
 - Ask students to identify and build on the strengths and creativity in their classmates' discussion posts.
 - Use discussion prompts to connect course content to students' personal and/or work experiences and to draw on students' expertise.
 - Ask students to create scenarios or case studies as their initial discussion post
 - Respond frequently to students' posts, both within discussions and in follow-up lectures/videos. Remember to use students' names in your posts and comments.
 - Use discussions as a space for students to [share files](#).
 - Assign students to [create](#) and facilitate discussions.
 - Provide prompts not only for students' initial post but also for their responses.
3. Create discussion groups of 4-6 students so students can develop discussions both deeply and further. See below for group instructions.

Idea 3: Integrate Group Projects

Divide students into groups to apply the content you are presenting in a variety of ways, e.g., discuss case studies, work complex technical problems, connect theory and practice, etc.

Here's how:

- [Create groups](#)
- Create group [assignments](#) and [discussions](#).

Remember, clear guidance, outcomes, and your presence are doubly important in the online environment. Be sure to [visit groups](#) periodically to offer direction, to respond to questions, and to let students know you are invested in their learning.

Idea 4: Consider Gamification and Mastery Grading

Gamification can be anything from a full gamified class to just using some of the ideas below. Basically we are focusing on using game principles to help students engage in your course!

Here's a video talking all about [Gamification for Student Interaction](#)

Pedagogy pro-tip: If gamification or mastery grading don't seem quite right, also **consider related approaches**. You might explore [specifications grading](#), [contract grading](#), or [labor-based grading](#) (full book [here](#)), for example! Though some of these models are oriented towards written assignments, they can be adapted for many kinds of disciplines/courses/activities.

Idea 5: Ask Students to Contribute to Discussion and Content through Presentations

There are MANY ways for students to do presentations below you will find three that are easy and effective for you and your students. One thing to remember is that some of your students have incredible technology skills so creating an assignment that is open-ended but contains a rubric telling them what they need to show is helpful. Some students will jump at the chance to create a video, a song, interactive webpage. Let them show you what they can do!

VidGrid

Using the VidGrid Guest Recorder students can create the videos in the same way that you did when [creating your videos](#), except they do it through a Guest Recorder. They can easily upload a video or create a screen capture that can then be put into a Discussion. (See 'Asynchronous Discussions' above.) Once there are students, they can view and comment on each other's submissions and you can easily grade them!

Give it a try! [Student presentations using VidGrid](#)

WyoCourses

A simple way for students to create a short video of themselves is actually embedded right within WyoCourses. There are some limitations with this method compared to VidGrid: the videos can only be 2 minutes in length, it will only record the student and not the screen, and the videos are only available within that discussion thread and can't be moved nor edited.

How to: [Student presentations using WyoCourses](#)

Zoom

All students have a Zoom Pro account, just like you do. They access/activate it the same way, through WyoWeb. They can schedule a meeting with group members or record a presentation to share with the class via a discussion or submit to you as an assignment in your course. Here is a tutorial for them - [Student presentations using Zoom](#).

Still have questions? [Please sign up to talk to a UW Instructional Designer](#)

Late Breaking Addenda

[Facilitating Virtual Meetings - Quick Start Guide](#)

[Countermeasures for Common Virtual Classroom Limitations](#)

[What \(Some\) Students Are Saying about the Switch to Remote Teaching and Learning](#)