

Tips for Creating an Engaging Online Course

To ensure online teaching success, student engagement is of paramount importance. As the saying goes, an engaged student is a motivated student.

Studies show

- If students aren't engaged, they can't perform at their best.
- A sense of belonging to a group enhances student performance.
- Online study groups help students to stay focused.
- Having a place to discuss issues with other students increases student effort.



First impression

Start the first class with a brief video introducing yourself as the instructor and your course.



Engaged = active and timely participation

In a 2016 survey of students taking online courses at Penn State World Campus, a student [defined engagement](#) this way:

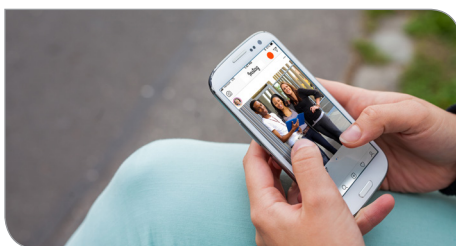
For an instructor, engaged = active participation and timely response/feedback with the end goal of helping a student succeed. For a student, engaged = active and timely participation in an effort to understand the course material for more reasons than to pass an exam or get an A on a test, and to feel supported by the instructor to learn the material.



Respond to student postings in a timely manner—in less than 24 hours, for example. Make yourself available to students during set office hours.

Use video chat for face-to-face talks with students.

- Tech tools: [Skype](#), [Zoom](#)



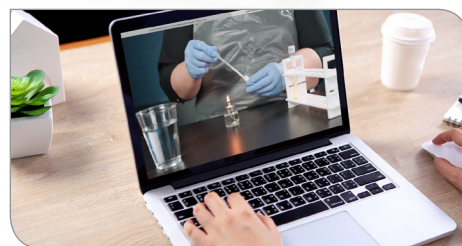
Amplify social presence

Post pictures of yourself and your students. It helps students understand they're interacting with real people in real time.

Message Board	
Student AJ Prof. Mendell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I'm having some problems opening the container of peas. Can you help? Prof. Mendell: Firmly grasp the container in one hand and slowly rotate the stopper with the other. Moving it back and forth should help.
Student AJ Prof. Mendell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thank you. That really helps.
Student OT Prof. Mendell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My cat has gotten hold of some peas. Is that safe? Prof. Mendell: Peas are harmless to cats. Just make sure he doesn't choke.
Student BC Prof. Mendell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I place this experiment in the window to take pictures? Prof. Mendell: Sure! Also, having good light will help to show your work. Please remember to put your name, student ID, and the date on your work.

Plan for collaboration

Provide a platform that enables students to talk among themselves. Have a way for students to collaborate on projects. Your assignments can draw on a variety of digital formats, including [infographics](#), video recordings, [digital canvases](#), and portfolios.



Conversational content

Are you using instructional videos to deliver content? Types include **demonstration** and **screen capture** videos. In a demonstration video, you can demo a technique while talking to the camera. Consider hosting your videos through YouTube.

- Tech tools: video camera, smartphone camera, or webcam

In a screen capture video, you record yourself as well as your desktop.

- Tech tools: webcam and software ([Camtasia](#), [Snag-It](#), [Screencast-O-Matic](#))

And finally . . .

Make sure the education is solid. Be prepared, concise, innovative, unique, and available, recommend online educators Amy Rottmann and Salena Rabidou.

Have fun! When you enjoy what you teach, students can tell—and it's inspiring.

Related reading

[10 Tips for Developing and Teaching Online Science Courses from Distance Learning Pros](#)