

Distance Learning Systems

Teaching Tips #3 – Fostering Interactivity with Videoconference Delivery

The sheer novelty of using videoconferencing for the first time will serve to engage learners... for a while. What can you do to foster interaction and increase the quality of your distance class?

First, it is useful to define a few terms. By *interaction*, we refer to learner involvement. This involvement can be between student and instructor, student and material, or student to student. By *quality* interaction we refer to a concept aptly summarized this way:

“[It] necessitates students working on real-world problems, students working in teams to find solutions, and consistent dialogue among class members and with the instructor. Additionally, the questions posed should involve higher-order thinking skills such as evaluation, analysis, and synthesis rather than rote memorization.”

Parker, A. (1999). Interaction in Distance Education: The Critical Conversation. *Educational Technology Review, Autumn/Winter 1999, No. 12*, 13-17.

The visual nature of videoconference delivery inherently increases interactivity in basic ways formerly limited to face-to-face interaction. But there are a few fundamental ways to explicitly engage the medium and various accoutrements available to you at UAF.

Charge Up Your Physical Material Delivery. Make use of the camera to provide more than just a talking head. You can use props and physical demonstrations with any videoconference setup. If available, utilize document cameras—but be sure to provide the material in advance or use LARGE TYPE (24pt type, landscape) so it is legible onscreen.

Provide Explicit Structures for Interaction. Multi-modal delivery can seem chaotic to teacher and learner alike. Everyone involved will appreciate an explicit structure for interaction. Simply accommodating and facilitating round-robin discussions is a simple way to get started. Assigning graded team work that can be completed using email, chat, break-out rooms, or discussion boards might also make your class more effective.

Go Digital. A document camera, where available, is a fine way to show three dimensional objects, book covers, and properly prepared papers. The same document camera might be used with a laptop for rudimentary PowerPoint presentations. But to really make use of materials in a fashion that engages students in the learning process, a complementary tool like Horizon Live is essential. With its set of whiteboard, chat, annotation, and polling features you can banish passive learning from your course.

Next week we will shift gears and discuss best practices using audioconference—the tried and true workhorse for distance education in Rural Alaska. If you have suggestions, comments or other feedback past or future Teaching Tips topics, please contact Chris Lott (chris.lott@uaf.edu).

For more Teaching Tips and other Distance Education information, please visit the new and enhanced Center for Distance Education Distance Learning Systems website at:

<http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/>