Five Easy Ways to Engage Students Online Transcript

Narrator: Welcome to Five Easy Ways to Engage Students Online. The video lesson covers five ways to engage students using collaboration tools. These may be available through your learning management system, through the University, or available online. In this session you will learn about social collaboration tools, polls and surveys, watercooler discussions, ad hoc check-ins and using short-form video. As we work through each of these, we'll be considering what you might already do in your face-to-face teaching and then matching the possibilities of how to take those online.

Let's start by looking at social collaboration tools for learning. Social collaboration is an important part of learning, helping students to build connections and relationships with one another. When you teach face-to-face, students have regular opportunities to connect about their learning in informal and casual ways. In class, you might ask students to talk to the person next to them, or get in a small group, to discuss a problem. You may be wondering; how would you do this online?

When teaching and learning takes place online there are a variety of tools you could use. There may be tools available through your university, for example, Yammer. Microsoft Yammer is often available as part of the Office365 suite and can be an effective space for those discussions. Check with your university about using more tools that they have available online.

- Twitter. Twitter provides a great space to encourage students to publicly share ideas and you can create a hashtag just for your course. Example: #KeypathElevate.
- Padlet is an online bulletin board where students can post ideas; share links, videos, and pictures; and join in with comments and conversations. Students don't need an account to access Padlet.
- VoiceThread. VoiceThread is an alternative you might want to check out, encouraging verbal posts from students.

Voting activities are a good way to gauge understanding across a large group or engage learners with the content you're presenting by asking them to answer a question or make a decision. In a lecture or seminar, you might ask students to put their hands up or use clicker technology to show what perspectives they agree with, to consider which answer is correct, or maybe decide which course of action should be taken.

Online there is a plethora of tools that you can use to achieve the same goal. Your LMS, Learning Management System, might have already a plug-in for this, such as the plug-in for Moodle polls. Or, you could search for free polling and survey tools online, for example, Poll Everywhere. Poll Everywhere can be used to set up a vote in a live session or share through a forum. SurveyMonkey, SurveyMonkey is one tool that offers the chance to gather quick input from your students.

Using a watercooler for community building. Student conversation doesn't have to always be about the course objectives. Just like in a face-to-face class students need a space to chat about more than just what they're studying. Also, on campus you will usually see students chatting on the way to class, or perhaps going for a coffee afterwards.
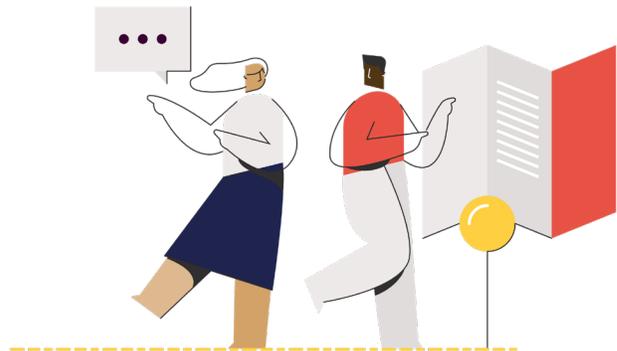
In the online space this type of activity usually takes place in an area called the 'Watercooler', where students can gather for discussions. Providing this space and starting some threads can help create a sense of connection, especially when working online for the first time. You might start a thread to share tips about studying at home, good books they've read, or just to share their favourite TV shows and pictures of their pets.

You can create a watercooler simply by adding a discussion forum to your online learning space, and labelling it 'Watercooler', 'Café', 'Social Space' and then providing a brief introduction about its purpose. And don't forget to participate in this social space yourself!

Scheduling "check-ins" is one way to be flexible and responsive to your students' needs and to help keep your students accountable. Face-to-face, you have lots of ways to check in with your students and can pick up on non-verbal communication cues, maybe during office meetings or caught in an informal conversation post class. You can likely tell by the look on a student's face, or the way they respond to a question whether they've understood, and/or how they're really feeling.

Online this is an element that differs from teaching face-to-face. It's also a connection that most students and faculty miss about not being in each other's presence. One collaborative way to check in with students is as simple as a ten-minute phone call or a video chat using a video conference tool. The benefit of a video is that you can actually see the facial expressions along with the vocal inflections. Adding these check-ins helps to ensure everyone has what they need and that they can focus on the learning material.

Encouraging students to share their ideas. We've discussed video use for conferences, students can also use video to collaborate and share their ideas. Online learning often involves a lot of writing and typing. Video is an alternative approach. In a face-to-face class, you may call on a student to share their thoughts, answers, or work through a problem with everyone on the board but how do you do this online?

You could ask students to post a response to a discussion; however, it can be easier (and sometimes faster) to explain an idea verbally. Instead, students could post responses in a discussion forum by recording and then sharing a link. A video of them talking through a concept, as they would in class, helps reinforce learning. Additionally, in technical, or skill-based courses, students can create a screencast showing how they solve a problem or demonstrate a skill. These videos allow you the chance to see where students are getting stuck in their learning so you can support them as you would face-to-face.

These have been five tips for engaging students online.

We, at Keypath, hope you find this resource useful as you continue to elevate your teaching online.