

# Fostering Engaged Learning Online

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Cleveland State University is the home of engaged learning. If engaging students in the classroom and getting them to participate can be difficult, then engaging students online can be downright challenging. As higher education faculty educators it is paramount we master engagement, both in-person and online.

According to Kuh (2008), in his article High impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter, “engagement increases the odds that any student-educational and social background notwithstanding - will attain his or her educational and personal objectives, acquire the skills and competencies demanded by the challenges of the twenty-first century, and enjoy the intellectual and monetary gains associated with the completion of the baccalaureate degree” (p. 22). Here are four steps to fostering engaged learning online:

## 4 Steps to fostering engagement online

1. Be Present
2. Establish Trust
3. Display Compassion
4. Encourage Collaboration

### > Be Present

Perceived instructor presence has been found to have a direct positive effect on student engagement and student satisfaction in online courses (Park & Kim, (2020). Students need to know you are “there” even when they can’t see you.

There are simple ways to be present in an online course that do not take much effort. First is to explain and post office hours and be available during those times to answer students’ questions. You would be surprised how many students do not know that office hours are for them. Secondly, post announcements about what is happening on campus or remind them about deadlines. You can also share a funny video or meme. Finally, respond to their emails and calls in a timely manner. If you can not answer completely, let them know when they can expect an answer. These simple tricks help students to feel your presence while online.

## Being Present Online

- Explain and post office hours
- Post bi-weekly announcements
- Share a fun video, link, or meme
- Respond in a timely manner

### > Establish Trust

Trust is the foundation of any healthy, high functioning team. Courses and majors are filled with students that eventually, over time, form small learning communities. Encouraging the formation of these learning communities of students starts with trust building. Incorporating trust building activities among the students early on and throughout the semester fosters communication which leads to relationship building and expansion of each student’s learning community.

Students who establish and participate in a learning community “are more engaged with teachers, peers, and the intellectual content of their course. Their engagement contributes better attendance with fewer absences. And better attendance contributes to higher grades” (Bonnet & Waters, 2016, p. 229).

## 3 Easy Trust Building Prompts

(Break student into small groups)

### Beginning of the semester

1. Student Introductions -

Share Name, Major, Goals

Middle of the semester

2. Ask students to share an accomplishment they are most proud of.

Near the end of the semester

3. Ask student to share 3 Truths and a Lie and have the other students guess the lie.

### > Display Compassion

A recent article in the Chronical of Higher Education entitled “Let’s Add Compassion to Our Online Curriculum” reminds us that we need to be integrating empathy and compassion into our courses now more than ever (Head, 2020). Compassion is the capacity to be sensitive to the needs of others and feel called to ease their distress. One simple step to display compassion is to have a one word check-in at the beginning of each class and a one word checkout at the end of class to check how students are feeling. Students appreciate these check-ins as they show that faculty care. Here are additional suggestions to show students you care about them, during a pandemic and long after:

## Showing You Care

- Learn student’s names
- Use student’s names when grading
- Check for understanding
- Consider your words
- Be kind and show grace



### > Encourage Collaboration

Collaborative learning requires planning. Faculty at Cleveland State University are lucky to have a large variety of instructional tools available to help encourage collaboration and monitor engagement in online courses. Tools such as Zoom Breakout Rooms help faculty create smaller learning communities within the larger class. Zoom Polls can be set up in advance and can be used in each session for the one word Check-in and Check-out activity. VoiceThreads allows both faculty and students to ‘hear’ or ‘watch’ discussion responses which promotes thoughtful responses and dialogue between students. Facilitate and Kahoot are gamification tools that allow faculty to create Jeopardy-style games or trivia to check for student understanding quickly and easily.

## Tools For Collaboration

- Zoom Breakout Rooms
- Zoom Polls
- VoiceThreads
- Facilitate or Kahoot

Remember, “Engaged students are 2.5 times more likely to say that they get excellent grades and do well in school, and they are 4.5 times more likely to be hopeful about the future than their actively disengaged peers” (Hodges, 2018, p. 1). By incorporating some or all of these steps will foster student engagement online. Happy teaching!

Bonnet, G., & Waters, B. R. (2016). High Impact Practices: Student Engagement and Retention. *College Student Journal*, 50(2), 224–235.  
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