



## Fostering Interaction to Enhance Learning

### Overview

This fact sheet provides information to assist instructors with enhancing learning through fostering three types of learning interaction: learner-instructor, learner-learner and learner-content.

### Types of Learning Interactions

Interactions between learners, learners and instructors, and learners with course content all enhance the learning process and result in changes in the learners' knowledge, skills or attitudes. These kinds of interactions may be formally incorporated in the design of instruction or informally and spontaneously develop as a course proceeds.

Although finding the "right mix" of formal vs. informal interaction with the right type(s) of learning interaction is challenging, this "right mix" ultimately provides the richest learning opportunities. Selecting the best method or method(s) of interaction is based on the learning style, the targeted audience's education level, instructors' personnel and technology resources and audience needs. As a result, instructors should recognize that different delivery methods support different kinds of interactions. For example, eLearning courses, relying heavily on electronic communication, maximize the learner-content interaction because learners have the opportunity to interact with the content of the course without "in-person" distractions. On the other hand, classroom training maximizes the opportunity for learner-instructor and learner-learner interactions.

The most effective teaching fosters all three types of interaction through capitalizing on experiential learning activities, leveraging multiple interactive delivery systems, and promoting opportunities for learners to reflect on the training materials or to seek clarification from the instructors. As a result, the most effective instructors are approachable, adept at fostering interaction through this "right mix", positively reinforce learner interaction and consistently plan to formally and informally engage learners. The table below provides examples of the three types of interaction used to foster and enhance learning. The degree of interaction varies depending on the content, duration and level of the course. Interactions often occur naturally when learners discuss challenges with content or particular tasks, or when one person shadows another to observe and learn new or better techniques or methods to accomplish a task.

Learner – Instructor	Learner – Learner	Learner - Content
Class discussion board or chat room	Class discussion board or chat rooms	Class discussion board or chat room
Blogs	Blogs	Blogs
Virtual worlds	Virtual worlds	Virtual worlds
	Essays or papers	Essays or papers
Social networking/ Bookmarking	Social networking/ Bookmarking	
	Group work	Group work
Email/ Telephone/ Announcements	Self-introduction exercises	Simulations/ Self-assessments
Formal instruction/ Face-to-face meetings	Class seating arrangements	Guest speakers
Feedback on assignments		Examinations/ Journal writing
Web conferencing/Listservs		Games/ Internet/ Library research

### Summary: Why Interaction Matters in Training

The "right mix" and "dose" of learner-instructor, learner-learner and learner-content formal and informal interaction enhances the learners' development, comprehension and application of new information through increasing the variety of instruction delivery, incorporating the learner's learning style and pace and maximizing the opportunity for learners to meaningfully and experientially engage the learning experience. As a result, fostering these interactions is a foundational component for developing and delivering high-quality training.

### For Further Reading

Blumberg, P. (2009). *Developing learner-centered teaching: A practical guide for faculty*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Moore, G. (1989). Three types of interactions. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 3(2), 1-6. [http://www.ajde.com/Contents/vol3\\_2.htm](http://www.ajde.com/Contents/vol3_2.htm)

Beldarrain, Y. (2006). Distance education trends: Integrating new technologies to foster student interaction and collaboration. *Distance Education*, 27(2), 139-153. <http://www.dastous.us/edtechadvocate/2.pdf>

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