

# Six Ways to Get Your Online Students Participating in the Course

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Have you ever worried about the level of participation in your online courses? Perhaps you have difficulty encouraging students to interact with one another, or maybe you find student responses to be perfunctory. Surely there must be a way to encourage the kinds of participation that really supports learning.

During a recent online seminar titled [Improve Participation to Enhance Learning in Online Courses](#), Joan Thormann, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Technology in Education at Lesley University and author of *The Complete Step-by-Step Guide to Designing and Teaching Online Courses*, shared six techniques for encouraging interactions that boost learning in an online class.



1. *Optimized use of introductions*: Encourage students (and the professor) to share personal information like hobbies, interests, and demographic data. This will build community, raise interest in the students in the class, and make for a friendly online environment. This is an easy first assignment.
2. *Use of the instructor as a model*: As an instructor, consider giving students feedback about their assignments using a template that details the expectations for the assignment. Model good communications by adding personal comments tailored to the student, thereby giving an example of substantive writing.
3. *Use of a clear grading system*: Encourage the students to give helpful contributions by grading their discussions every week. Give them guidance on what sort of contributions are expected, such as in-depth analysis rather than simply “I agree.”
4. *Use of student moderators*: The instructor does not have to be the only one to encourage valuable contributions from students in the course. Use student moderators on a rotating basis to manage discussions. This practice will increase the sense of ownership of the course and help students learn to support each other and deepen their content knowledge.
5. *Use of voice conferences*: In some cases, a live voice conference can be a valuable addition to the online course. These opportunities let students get to know each other and strengthen their overall communication.
6. *Development of supportive forums*: Develop some online forums where students can go for support, assistance, and an exchange of information with other students. Don’t respond right away to inquiries; give students time to help one another and build community.

Online courses can have the kind of vibrant interaction you find in the best of courses, both online and traditional. All it takes is the use of some simple tools that encourage students to engage with one another in substantive ways.