



10 Strategies for Engaging Learners with D2L Brightspace

Overview

This document outlines 10 strategies for engaging learners with D2L Brightspace. This is not a how-to document; we simply describe some of the types of activities and strategies that may be useful in your course.

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Strategy #1: Building Connections in a Digital Space

The basics: At its core, D2L Brightspace allows instructors to provide a range of course materials to students. Brightspace provides a relatively easy way to create a course web site that allows "anytime, anywhere" access to course materials.

Variations on the Strategy: Upload syllabi, readings, multimedia files, electronic dropboxes, online quizzes, email, grading, student progress reports, project files, etc. for student and instructor use. Even in face-to-face courses, the ability to have a shared, collaborative space for students and instructors is a powerful way to connect.

Strategy #2: Design: Quality Matters

The basics: Studies by Song, Singleton, Hill, and Koh (2004) show the importance of course design in engaging learners. They imply that "...there is a need for effective instructional design for online courses. The design should focus not only on the technological aspects of the course, but also on the goals, objectives, and expectations for the learners. Continuing to explore design models that are most effective for online learning will also help facilitate this activity."

Variations on the Strategy: IT Solutions suggests a course design that meets [Quality Matters](#) (QM) standards based off of Quality Matter's Nationally recognized Rubric. To aid you with this, IT Solutions has substantial resources available to help you design your online course with quality in mind. For instance, IT Solutions has a Quality Matter's Template available for you to apply to your D2L course. If you would like to see the QM Template, please watch this [overview video](#).

Strategy #3: Quizzes

The basics: The Quiz tool in D2L Brightspace allows the instructor to create a variety of assessments for students. This tool can be used for exams, surveys, and/or homework assignments. Instructors can also create short-form lecture segments no longer than 15 minutes each. After each lecture segment, ask a series of questions using your Brightspace quizzing features to gauge student understanding.

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Variations on the Strategy: Use a variety of quiz questions (multiple choice, short answer, matching, etc). Use open-ended/short answer questions, and then allow learners to read/view an expert's response to compare/contrast their answer. Offer immediate remediation opportunities if learners do not answer correctly. Many of the questions can be graded automatically and then automatically entered into the Grades tool. Quizzes can be released conditionally based on date and time, or upon completion/access of content items.

Strategy #4: Grading/Evaluation*

The basics: Evaluating students' learning takes a new meaning in an online or blended environment as the physical interaction is missing and evaluation is done according to how active a student was in the online environment. D2L Brightspace offers the ability for the Instructor to view Topic/content item Statistics. This feature in Brightspace allows the instructor to keep track of students' activity in Discussion Forums by determining how many times the student reads his peers' postings and how many times he posted himself.

Variations on the approach: The Grades tool in D2L Brightspace allows the instructor to establish an online grade book. Items in the grade book can be tied to other Brightspace tools such as the Assignments and Quizzes tools so that a grade entered in one of these tools is automatically updated in the grade book. Question items from the Quizzes tool such as multiple-choice, true/false, matching, ordering, etc. can be set to grade the items automatically and then update the grade book. Students can use the Grades tool to check their grades anytime during the course.

Strategy #5: Personalized and Private Feedback (Remediation)*

The basics: "Formative feedback can foster student engagement, improved achievement and enhance motivation to learn" (Crisp & Ward, 2008) This becomes especially important in online learning, when the learner may need more direction from the instructor to proceed through the course.

Variations on the approach: D2L Brightspace allows instructors to give personalized and private feedback for each learner, based on their individual strengths and weaknesses. The feedback goes with the grade mark, thus justifying the grade earned by the learner and giving more instructions for further improvement. For instance, the Assignments feature in Brightspace allows students to upload specific files/assignments into that digital space. Once uploaded, instructors can offer personalized and private feedback directly to the student using the Assignments area. This also allows the instructor to grade the item and, if setup correctly, transmit that information to the student and the Brightspace gradebook simultaneously.

Strategy #6: Formative Assessment*

The basics: "Integrating [formative assessment](#) techniques, formal or informal, can assist students in their

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help-seeking process and enable self-regulatory conditions and activities such as self-assessment and reflection” (Vonderwell & Boboc, 2013). D2L Brightspace facilitates a wide range of instructional activities, and means for formative assessment, from quizzes and reflective surveys to online discussions posts and assignment collection.

Variations on the approach: The flexible grading system and individual comment feature in D2L Brightspace allows the instructor to do formative assessment throughout the course. Divide the learning material into small chunks and include feedback for each completed task in the grading section thus providing a consistent representation of students’ gains in terms of knowledge and skills while offering directions for further improvement.

****Strategies 4, 5, and 6 have related and intersecting purposes, but we prefer to address them separately in our documentation for ease of description and examination.***

Strategy #7: Host Interactive e-learning

The basics: D2L Brightspace makes it possible to build course modules using interactive e-learning software such as SoftChalk Cloud and the Articulate suite, or 3rd party web-based content from publishers. This software allows the instructor to create engaging online courses with interactive exercises, quizzes and media materials that integrate seamlessly into Brightspace.

Variations on the approach: Presentation activities in SoftChalk cloud make the delivery of new material interesting and effective by suiting the different learning styles of the learners. Scoring activities provide ways for formative assessment. Quizzes make grading and evaluation easy. For more strategies regarding interactive e-learning, please see our [10 Strategies for Engaging Learners with Interactive e-Learning Software](#).

Strategy #8: Multimedia Resources, such as Podcasts, Videocasts and Screencast

The basics: Recorded video or audio materials help students visualize difficult concepts and navigate easily through the course. If you have multimedia products (presentations, videos, audio files) hosted elsewhere on the web, you can offer links directly to that content from D2L or embed those materials seamlessly into your course content.

Variations on the approach: Pre-recorded lectures can be recorded using any number of MNSU or cloud-based services and then uploaded to a D2L course for student review. Videos can be sprinkled with mastery questions or even sequenced in D2L with questions or entire quizzes to ensure that everyone comes to class ready to participate. For more strategies regarding screencasts and lecture capture, please see our [10 Strategies for Engaging Learners with Lecture Capture](#).

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Strategy #9: Reflection Surveys

The basics: According to Lowenthal and Dobrovlny (2011) "...most students need some structure and encouragement to engage in reflection and that is where reflection surveys come in. Surveys engage students in reflection as many of the questions they are asked require them to carefully think about their learning experiences, how those experiences link to their prior experiences, and what additional questions or concerns they have about the new information they are trying to learn." Instructors can create surveys and use the statistics tools to monitor current course trends, seek opinions, and assess user satisfaction. Surveys are an excellent way to solicit feedback from users regarding any aspect of your course. For example, they can be used as a method of collecting course evaluations, mid-year reviews, or researching users' learning style and content delivery preferences.

Variations on the approach: The Survey tool in D2L allows instructors to create assessment items such as multiple-choice, true/false, arithmetic, fill-in-the-blank, multi-select, matching, ordering, and long and short answers. The Survey tool allows the instructor to keep a record of the student's response or make the survey anonymous. Lowenthal and Dobrovlny suggest to ask Qualitative and Quantitative Questions in surveys: While quantitative questions can provide quick and easy feedback, the most useful and thoughtful information is received through open-ended qualitative questions.

Strategy #10: Encourage Student-Student Interactions through Meaningful Online Discussion

The basics: Brookfield and Preskill (1999) outline the purpose of discussion as a way to (1) develop a deeper understanding of the content domain, (2) to improve self-awareness and ability to critique self, (3) to appreciate diverse/different viewpoints emerging from the group, and (4) to trigger informed action and change. D2L's Discussions feature allows instructors to facilitate these purposeful discussions in secure and accessible online forums.

Variations on the approach: The literature offers a wealth of information on effective discussion strategies. In order to make this information more manageable, IT Solutions has documented a few of these practices. For detailed information on Online Discussions, please take a moment to look into the following documents, they detail strategies for properly structuring discussions, setting student expectations for performance and assessment, as well as building engagement and critical thinking.

- [Effective Practices for Teaching with Online Discussions](#)
- [10 Strategies for Engaging Learners with Online Discussions](#)

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