

# When the Distance is Not Distant: Using Minimalist Design to Maximize Interaction in Online Writing Courses and Faculty Professional Development

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Online writing classes serve populations who face impediments to attending traditional college courses (e.g., rural students, working parents and caretakers, students with disabilities). Given these challenges, providing opportunities for interaction in these classes can seem like a daunting task. However, interaction in the online classroom is a key indicator of student satisfaction in online teaching and learning. According to the Noel-Levitz National Online Learner's Priorities Report (2013), three of the top five areas of highest importance to online learners related directly to interaction: "Institutions have opportunities to improve the interaction between online faculty and students with responsiveness, timely feedback, clearly defined assignments, and the perception of the quality of instruction" (9). In addition to the Noel-Levitz surveys, the Conference on College Composition and Communication Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction (CCCC-OWI) released its position statement on effective practices for online writing instruction in April 2012. The report, based on six years of research, also highlights the need for accessible, interactive instruction for students, opportunities for interaction in faculty professional development, as well as support for both students and faculty that maximizes the effective use of technology.

The CCCC Online Writing Instruction Principles and Example Effective Practices and the Sloan-C Five Pillars for Online Instruction provide frameworks for sound design and implementation of effective online courses that can lead to greater faculty/student interaction. In this chapter, we connect elements of the CCCC-OWI Principles and Example Effective Practices and the Sloan C-Five Pillars for Online Instruction to classroom practices that challenge online students and faculty to engage and collaborate through what we consider to be minimalist design: paring instruction down to its golden essence in designing and assigning tasks in order to maximize faculty-student and student-student interaction. In doing so, we connect specific principles to effective online practices for creating well-designed, operative learning environments in a variety of courses--from first-year composition to upper-division technical writing and rhetoric courses-- that promote peer collaboration and engagement for both students and instructors.