Communication and interaction is what brings your topic to ‘life’. You can prepare a topic for teaching and fill it with useful and engaging resources and activities, but until and unless there is interaction and communication within that topic, it does not really feel that anything is ‘happening’. This is doubly important when a topic is delivered fully online, where it is critical to maintain a social presence in the online space with appropriate tools. It is a learning and teaching principle at Flinders that students are active, engaged and collaborative in their learning. For this to happen it is important to incorporate interactive and dialogic approaches in teaching.

The big idea is to build in opportunities for connecting around the topic subject matter and the processes of learning. Strategies like this attend to the students’ sense of belonging and engagement with the subject matter. This might include building in opportunities for:

- Students seeing and commenting on each other’s work
- Students working together collaboratively on an aspect of the topic
- Student input, feedback and choices wherever possible

There are multiple configurations of teacher-student and student-student interactions and possible associated tools (further unpacked at the end of this tip sheet), which Diana Laurillard has mapped in her ‘Conversational Framework’ model. In which in their simplest form can be visualised like this:

![Diagram showing different types of teacher-student and student-student interactions](image.png)

There are multiple configurations of teacher-student and student-student interactions and possible associated tools (further unpacked at the end of this tip sheet), which Diana Laurillard has mapped in her ‘Conversational Framework’ model. In which in their simplest form can be visualised like this:

Usually a topic will have a mix of approaches appropriate to the topic’s teaching approach and the conditions of its delivery, which range along continuums of:

- **Time**: Synchronous and asynchronous modes (or a mix – see the Tip sheet - Using online teaching tools to optimise face-to-face time)
- **Scale**: Individual, paired, small-group and whole-class interactions
- **Intensity**: Modes of passive/receptive (eg announcements) and moderate (e.g. responding in forums) through to highly dynamic interactions (e.g. co-creating content)

**Two tips:**
Tip one: Keep communications in FLO as a default. FLO has a range of built-in tools for communication between teaching staff and students. Using the built-in tools keeps communications in FLO and is preferable to using ‘outside-FLO’ methods such as direct email or social media, because in-FLO communications are historically maintained. This is important for a few reasons: students can review past topic communications (accessible for one year afterwards); as a record of the active process of teaching and learning in a topic, useful when reviewing the topic, and in preparation for a next round of delivery; and for staff review if there is a grade challenge. However, there may be times when email is the most appropriate communication mode (for instance engaging in personal matters with the students).

Tip two: Design for accessibility and inclusivity; and scaffold the necessary literacies students need to understand and ‘do’ the work of the topic. Don’t assume prior skills or access to technologies; unpack tasks clearly. The basic ‘good design’ principles that apply to creating engaging online content can also be interpreted here.

Tools that support communication and interaction in FLO

- **The chat tool** supports text-based synchronous communications. It may be useful for commenting on a live event such as a presentation. There are no ‘threads’ like there are in forums; all text is organised in the order it is entered, so it can get messy if one chat stream involves multiple conversations. Ideal for curating comments or small group chats.
- **The choice tool** supports selecting from a range of choices. It can be used to collect opinions, preferences, or responses – for instance to select best times or preferred dates to help schedule a synchronous session.
- **Collaborate** is a live web-based interactive ‘space’ hosted in FLO that includes video sharing, file sharing, screen sharing, polling, and synchronous chat. It includes an always-on open room, or sessions can be scheduled for particular times. Sessions can be recorded for review or for viewing by those who can’t make the session live. With multiple options for active engagement, Collaborate is ideal for ‘open office’ drop-ins, tutorial-style interactive sessions, student small group or individual presentations, Collaborate enables a face-to-face alternative online.
- **The dialogue tool** is for one-on-one conversations between students and students, and students and staff, with both parties being able to initiate a message. You might also initiate a conversation with multiple people, but responses will be private back to you only. It differs to email as these messages are kept within the topic. For example, message a group of students who did not complete a task so you can catch up individually with them to provide support if required.
- **The feedback tool** allows you to survey or poll students using multiple questions and different question types - unlike the choice tool, where only one question is allowed. Feedback tool is the only tool that allows for anonymous responses. For example, set up Touchpoint surveys periodically to ask students how they are finding their topic and if they have any problems they need help with.
- **The forum tool** is ideal for asynchronous discussion. There are five formats to suit different kinds of activities. This tool allows students and staff to initiate posts and respond to others’ posts using text, embedded video, audio, images, tables, HTML code, equations, and more. Forums can be used to foster online discussion, or tailored for discussion around individual topics to enhance learning. For example, create a dedicated discussion forum for each assessment item. Forum posts can be rated by staff, linking to gradebook.
- **The scheduler tool** can be used to set up one-on-one or group appointments with students using the times you nominate. Students can then self-select according to their availability. For example, schedule catch-up appointments every Tuesday and Thursday morning so students can book an appointment with you if they need help, or schedule appointments for oral assessments and allow students to select the time they attend.
Tools that support collaborative work in FLO

- **The database tool** supports the **development of a shared collection**, according to pre-figured fields, which students can fill to build content - for instance, a literature collection.

- **Collaborate** enables students to **work synchronously in groups**. Students can self-organise to meet in the course room, which is always available, or, sessions can be set up on their behalf – for instance, a dedicated open-ended session for each small group. If students are given moderator role, they can choose to record their sessions as presentations (note that all recordings in Collaborate are viewable by all students.)

- **The forum tool** supports **discussion over time**. The forum can be open to the whole class, or restricted to groups, either with all-group view access only, or private groups visible only to themselves. Forums allow students to work together asynchronously, useful for extended discussion that might for instance accompany shared project work. Choose forum if you need to see students’ communications in FLO; ie if the development process is assessed, or if you also plan to be active in the forum.

- **The glossary tool**, like the database tool, supports the development of a shared collection, but features the ability to generate links between created glossary entries and text in the topic site. This makes it especially useful for **organising definitions and extra resources** associated to key subject-related technical terms.

- **The group self-selection tool** allows students to **enrol themselves into a group**. For example, students could nominate which laboratory session they will attend, then these session groups could be used for group projects throughout the study period.

- **The self and peer assessment tool** can be used for students to **assess themselves and each other** as part of the learning process. This tool scaffolds the process of submission, allocation, appraisal and moderation. For example, working in groups of four, students complete a role-play exercise, then use the self and peer assessment tool to provide feedback to each member of the group, and assess how they worked as a team.

- **The wiki tool** enables students to **co-create webpages** within FLO. Wikis can be constructed by individuals or groups and are good for tracking group work, as the version history for pages allows you to easily see who contributed what. For example, students working in a group must review a scenario, research possible solutions, and develop a wiki to communicate their chosen solution in depth.

**Resources**


Thinking about the students: Three essentials in the move on-line