Best Practice: Interactive Tools in Action

- **Suggested Uses**
  - Journals
  - Discussions
  - Blogs
  - Wikis

- **Tools in Combination**
  - Discussions + Wikis
  - Journals + Blogs
  - Discussions + Blogs

To build a successful online community, students need the tools to interact and have conversations. Through conversation, we learn about each other, ourselves, the topic, how to get along, and make group decisions. Though time and geography limit some of our conversations, the power of the connection using varied conversation technologies build community.

Students report that their satisfaction with online courses relates to instructor presence, and the collaboration and sense of community they experience. In a successful online learning community, students support one another and help each other accomplish what they might not have on their own. When the students interact and direct their efforts toward a common goal, collaboration exists.

Blackboard Learn offers **four communication tools** for self-reflection, collaboration, and communication. The **discussion board, blogs, journals, and wikis** tools allow you to provide rich assignments and evaluate students in authentic ways where students can share and create knowledge.

Each of the four interactive tools can serve distinct purposes. You can use one or all of them in your course, and they can work well in combination. Select the tools that meet your course goals and allow students to interact in the most efficient ways.

- **Suggested Uses**

  In the following table, find suggested uses for the tools to help you decide how they could play a role in your course. As you progress through the list of tools, the level of interaction required from your students increases.
**Journals**

Students can express their thoughts, questions, and concerns to you privately.

Examples:

- Ask students to record observations.
- Question the content.
- Identify areas for help.
- Develop a plan for improvement.
- Set goals.
- Evaluate their educational journeys.
- Submit prewriting for a graded assignment for guidance and feedback.

**Discussions**

Students can express their ideas, gathering feedback and help with refining their opinions and plans.

Examples:

- Post ideas for projects and papers, and ask classmates to weigh in.
- Share initial thoughts about a topic before it is discussed in-depth in individual blogs.
- Brainstorm ideas for a wiki project.
- Express opinions to help divide students into work groups.

**Blogs**

Students can interpret what they learned, showcase their grasp of the material, and present information to their classmates.

Students often incorporate rich media into their posts to entice and inform others.

Examples:

- Interpret a case study.
- Submit the final draft of a written, graded assignment.
- Analyze a topic, adding information over several weeks or the entire term.
- Deliver arguments and supporting evidence.
- Provide commentary on a subject.
**Wikis**

Students can create course content together. Divide students into pairs or groups, or generate work as a class unit. Because each course member is a trusted source of information, everyone may edit and organize the content.

Examples:

- Class summaries and outlines.
- Course glossary.
- Resources repository. Ask students to post links to pictures, articles, and media files that relate to the lesson and explain why they were chosen.
- Lab experiments.
- Group project presentations.
- Research notebooks.
- Connecting student writing to form a book, student solutions for scenarios and case studies.
- Final test reviews.

➢ **Tools in Combination**

Blackboard’s interactive tools provide the opportunity for you to build rich assignments and offer another means for evaluating students. With these essential tools, you can provide students with constructive comments, guidance, and assessment. You can also use the tools in combination to meet your goals.

💡 **Discussions + Wikis**

On the discussion board, students post their ideas for a course wiki assignment. As students present their ideas and posts develop, they narrow the topic and divide the work before they transition to the wiki. In the course wiki, students provide text, images, and rich media to support the course content and the topic they chose in the discussion board.

💡 **Journals + Blogs**

Assign a graded blog requiring students to fully explore a topic, adding entries as the term progresses. However, the topic planning begins in the journals tool where you offer guidance and support. Help students clarify the main points and ask for writing samples before they post their ideas for the entire class to read and comment on.
**Discussions + Blogs**

Ask students to post an internet source on the discussion board that expands on the most recent lecture. Next, in their blogs, students can select a source and synthesize that information with the course material, extending their understanding beyond the classroom. Ask all students to provide comments for at least two classmates’ entries that include potential test questions.