

RSI and Third-Party Tools

Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) is key for quality online teaching and **a requirement for accreditation**. Federal and state regulations, as well as accrediting bodies such as the ACCJC, require clear evidence that instructors are **initiating meaningful academic engagement with students throughout a course**.

One of the challenges faculty face is when the interaction happens outside of the college's Learning Management System (LMS), Canvas. Tools like **publisher platforms, Zoom and other third-party apps** can support rich teaching and learning experiences, but the record of instructor presence and engagement in those spaces is often **invisible to auditors and accreditors**. Without proper documentation, valuable RSI can go unrecognized and **courses may appear out of compliance**.

What Is a Third-Party Tool?

Third-party tools are any digital platforms **external to Canvas**.

- Publisher homework systems (e.g., MyLab, Connect, ALEKS)
- Communication apps (e.g., Pronto, Discord, MS Teams)
- Collaboration tools (e.g., Padlet, Flip, VoiceThread)
- Video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom)

While using third-party tools, **instructors are required to maintain all RSI standards presented in the RSI Training Hub**. This quick guide is designed to help faculty understand how to **document RSI activities that occur in third-party tools**. By following these practices, instructors can make their teaching more visible, protect themselves and the institution during accreditation reviews, and most importantly, **demonstrate the meaningful ways they are supporting student success**.



Third Party Tools Pose Challenges

- **Overreliance on automated grading.** Automated grading is not equivalent to instructor-led feedback.
- **Accreditation Scrutiny.** Accreditors may specifically question third-party activities if documentation is incomplete or unclear, raising compliance risks.
- **Difficulty Demonstrating Instructor-Initiated Contact.** Even if meaningful RSI occurs, it may look like student-only activity unless the instructor's role is clearly documented.
- **Inconsistent Data Retention.** Some tools delete records after a set period, limiting the ability to retrieve historical evidence for accreditation.
- **Misalignment with RSI Standards.** Tools may be designed for practice, assessment or collaboration but don't inherently show the *instructor-initiated, regular and substantive* aspects required.



Quick Tip: *When using a third-party tool, always screenshot your instructor-initiated interactions and upload them into the RSI Forms right away.*

That single step solves multiple issues at once. It creates a permanent record, makes invisible RSI visible to accreditors and keeps you aligned with the standards in the RSI Training Hub.

Quick Tips to improve RSI when using third-party tools

- Create a clear Communication Plan and stick to it.
- Provide regular zoom student hours or study sessions. Post recording in Canvas.
- Include current “how to” video with directions or tips.
- Create opportunities for students to engage with each other.
- Go beyond automation. Provide substantive feedback to individual student work.
- Facilitate and engage with students through discussion forums.
- Provide Pronto Q & A student hours days before an exam.
- Monitor student engagement and success. Follow up with students.
- Offer assistance to students that are falling behind.
- Create videos to start the week with suggestions on how to be successful on the material.

How to Document RSI with Third-Party Tools



Track Interactions Manually When Needed with Screenshots

- This is especially important if you use third-party tools
- Take plenty of screenshots of pertinent engagement with students
- Insert screenshots to RSI forms
- Maintain a communication log (date, time, topic)
- Note personalized outreach and follow up



Use LMS Tools to Anchor Communication

- Post weekly announcements grounded in RSI Training
- Customize messages to demonstrate presence
- Create and moderate discussions in Canvas
- Record synchronous sessions and upload to Canvas



Include RSI Communication Plan

- List all required third-party tools
- Describe how RSI will be implemented within the tool
- Explain how, when and where instructor-led interactions will occur



Provide Individualized Feedback

- Use the gradebook in Canvas to include comments or audio/video notes
- After an exam with automated scoring, create a “zero point assignment” and write individualized feedback in the comments
- Reference student work completed in third-party tools
- Offer improvement strategies and resources