

Step 5

Welcome back! I hope you enjoyed that exercise and can think of ways in which you could modify it for your purposes. We're going to look at two more obstacles to increasing student-content interactivity in online classes and how those obstacles might be overcome.

3. You are unsure of how to create media and don't have anywhere to turn for help from your institution. You may have felt that this is a big problem, but of all the problems an online instructor can face, this is small. Guess what? You don't have to create your own media. You may eventually want to after you gain more experience in this kind of thing and become more adventurous, but when you're just starting out, use what other people have created. There is a wealth of material that has been created by instructors and then put online for other people to use, free of charge. What a generous group! The very abundance of material can be a little daunting and make finding exactly what you want difficult, but what a nice problem to have. "Gee, do I want *this* fabulous bit on the American Revolutionary War or do I want *that* fabulous bit on the American Revolutionary War?" If you get nothing else from this module, remember this www.merlot.org. No, it's not a wine site. M-E-R-L-O-T stands for Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching. For other resources, you could do a lot of web surfing, or you could turn to a book about online teaching that has already compiled a list of quality resources. *Teaching Online* by Susan Ko and Steve Rossen has an extensive list of available resources starting on page 405 of the third edition.
4. You are uncertain about what kinds of digital resources your students have access to. This is a problem, potentially huge. Imagine that you've just spent a year and all of your grant funding to create a virtual reality experience of the mid-Cretaceous period for your Introduction to Dinosaurs course. You're very proud of it; you're convinced it will get you tenure. Then you realize that you have no funds left to buy the virtual reality helmets that are necessary for your students to experience your masterpiece. Wow! You've got a problem. With a little advance planning, this problem could have been avoided. Before you begin to create or buy any instructional media more complicated than a text document, you need to consider what digital resources your students have. It is possible that your institution has created a guideline for minimum computing resources, or it dictates what standard operating systems students in online classes need to be able to access in order to fully participate. If not, then you need to survey your students to find out what technologies are available to them (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012) and then stay within the least resources available to your students. This is another area where it really pays to know your students. If you are teaching students who have been digitally disadvantaged, you may need to ensure that they know how to use the equipment and software they've just bought. That doesn't necessarily mean you have to spend a lot of time training students in basic computing skills, but it does mean that if a student comes to you for help or you see that a student is struggling, you can direct them where they can go for help. Your institution may have training programs, or you may have found some good resources on the Internet, or you can recommend some good books. After all, remember that students who feel a connection with their instructor will do better in the course (Holmberg, 2007).

That's it for this step. Please return to the website for step 6.