



WHAT IS SWAY?

Sway is an educational chat platform that pairs students who disagree into one-on-one, text-based conversations about discussion topics chosen by their instructor or program. Students share their opinions on these topics, and Sway matches each student with a peer who holds a different perspective. Students then chat synchronously or asynchronously on their phones or laptops.

An AI facilitator called Guide joins every conversation: it can pose challenging questions, surface implicit assumptions, and de-escalate tense moments—without ever taking sides. When a student writes something unconstructive, Sway suggests a better way to make the same point, providing real-time coaching in clear, respectful communication.

From the humanities to STEM, more than 11,000 students at over 100 institutions have used Sway to practice constructive disagreement. No extra staff time, facilitator training, or coordination is required. After each discussion, Sway delivers anonymized reports to instructors on how student positions evolved and how well students understood each other's reasoning. Sway is grant-funded and provided for free.

Builds the Skills FYS Is Designed to Develop

- **Critical thinking:** Students question claims, evaluate evidence, and reason through disagreements.
- **Effective communication:** The text-based format lets students compose and revise arguments before sending, building habits of clear, considered expression.
- **Intercultural competence:** Every conversation is a structured encounter with someone who sees the world differently.
- **Civil discourse:** 91% of students feel comfortable sharing their honest opinions; 93% report their partner was respectful.

Used across 16+ disciplines from philosophy to health sciences to STEM.

Minimal Instructor Effort, Maximum Engagement

- No training, no facilitation, no grading posts. Sway handles pairing, moderation, and assessment.
- Works as homework—students chat synchronously or asynchronously, on any device.
- Students find it fun! See their written feedback and survey data.
- Behavioral evidence of learning, not just self-report.
- Conversations are encrypted and private. Student data is never used to train AI models. Privacy policy →

Chronicle of Higher Ed Coverage →



"The engagement aspect is just a million times better than discussion boards. The ability for students to have a back and forth and actually have a real conversation was fantastic." — Patrick Ryan, Professor of Philosophy, Fullerton College (more from instructors)

What Instructors Do

- **Create an assignment** with 3–10 topic statements—debatable claims connected to your course materials that students will agree or disagree with.
- **Set deadlines:** an opinion deadline for when students rate each topic, and a completion deadline for when they finish their chat. Most instructors assign Sway as homework.
- **Review your Instructor Report:** where students found common ground, where they persistently disagreed, misconceptions to address in class, and how students' opinions evolved.
- **Per-student data for assessment:** assignment progress (0–100%), Understanding Quiz scores, and timestamps for opinion submission and first/last messages sent.

Setup takes about 5 minutes. Browse discussion topic samples →

What Students Do

- **Rate the topics** on an agree–disagree scale. Sway automatically matches each student with someone who disagrees.
- **Chat** for the instructor's assigned discussion duration. Guide pushes both students to reason carefully, give evidence, and engage with the strongest version of the opposing view. Both students must actively contribute for the pair to make progress towards completion.
- **Take a personalized Understanding Quiz** on their partner's reasoning—not their own opinion, but whether they actually understood the arguments their partner made.
- **58%** discover their partner's reasoning was stronger than expected.

See real student conversations →



"Students know that Guide is AI and they find it not at all partisan, not at all biased. That was never an issue."

— Diana Mutz, Samuel A. Stouffer Professor of Political Science & Communication, UPenn (more from instructors)

Sway is free for individual instructors and their students. Get started now or book a 20-minute demo to learn more.