

Suggestions for Teaching a Synchronous Class

Synchronous Class

Synchronous classes offer real-time instruction and learning interactions online. This requires both students and instructors to interact in a specific virtual learning environment at a specific time.

The table below provides suggested instructional strategies for engaging students:

Before the class	During the class	After the class
<p>Reconceptualize your course Think about redesigning some (or all) of your course content, so you have a discussion during your session instead of presenting content. For example, require students to complete a learning activity before the live online session. During the synchronous lecture, you may ask students to participate in a group discussion.</p> <p>Collect information before class Send a quick email or a 1-3 question survey a day or two before class asking students about their experiences or opinions relevant to the session topic. Collecting information from students in advance will help you prepare appropriate questions and materials. It will also show students that you're interested in what they have to say, which will help spur discussion in the synchronous environment.</p> <p>Tell students what to expect Email students before each synchronous session and tell them what topics or questions the session will cover, how they should prepare, and what they'll be expected to do. Be as concrete and specific as possible, (e.g., "Please come prepared to ... briefly describe your research problem). When students have time to prepare, they are often more invested in the discussion and willing to participate.</p>	<p>Provide technology orientation During the first live online session, be sure to use video and text tutorials to help students understand how to use the technology. This increases the students' comfort level and reduces the number of technology-related questions they ask.</p> <p>Limit each synchronous session to one to two hours Online students, particularly working adults, have busy schedules. Keep the synchronous sessions brief and engaging. You may consider developing a script for your session from start to finish, but make sure to be flexible to student needs. The practice is also part of the preparation, especially if you are new to this environment.</p> <p>Set an agenda for each synchronous session Creating an agenda will keep you and students on track. Make sure your synchronous session offers novel content, insights, or activities and avoid duplicating what is covered elsewhere in the course, e.g., readings, videos, discussion boards. While synchronous sessions should connect to other elements of the course and build toward common goals, there should always be added benefit to attending the synchronous session, such that students don't like to miss class for fear of missing something important.</p>	<p>Create an archive of each session Most synchronous online learning platforms can record sessions for future use. This is a great benefit for students who are unable to attend the synchronous event. It also enables students to review materials as needed. Archives of individual group sessions are also helpful in assessing participation.</p> <p>Sharing a recap After the synchronous session ends, you should consider sending out a recap to your students using the course announcement tool or email. The recap should highlight the key discussion topics, reminders, and any important information. You also should send out the link to the recorded live sessions for the students who missed the synchronous session.</p> <p>Checking-in during the week A few days after the synchronous session, you should send an email or create an announcement to check in with your students. Ask them if they have any follow-up questions. Remind them of your virtual office hours and encourage them to complete the assignments before the due dates.</p>

Ask students to come to the class with preparation

Ask students to come with one burning question about the topic at hand—something that frustrates them, confuses them, or that they want a chance to ask you and/or their classmates. Start the session off by giving some or (depending on class size) all of your students the opportunity to ask their questions. See what answers or insights the class can provide before answering the question yourself.

Building an online community

Research suggests building a community in an online course is one way to increase motivation. Since synchronous sessions are also online, allowing students to interact with each other as well as the instructor in real-time can help build community. Students have the opportunity to get to know their peers, which can provide them with internal supports to learning as well as motivation.

Gaining attention at the beginning

Do a quick social check-in at the beginning of class. Ask students what's new and interesting in their lives, what their holiday plans are, etc. You might consider pre-loading a slide that features a current event, cartoon, or trivia question to spark conversation in the minutes before class begins.

Ask questions throughout the session

Pose a thought-provoking, relevant question and give students a few minutes to write down their thoughts/answers. Or, ask questions that require students to pick a side. When students are asked to state an opinion, they become more invested in discussing it.

Use synchronous sessions as consultations

If it suits your topic and students' developmental level, rather than using synchronous sessions for didactic purposes, have students bring challenging dilemmas or problems and get the group's input and advice. This can be particularly effective with adult students or in project-based courses.

*Adapted from Faculty Focus article, [Synching up with Your Asynchronous Learners](#)