Teaching Online

Teaching Online

at BCIT and other Polytechnics

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Unit III. Unit 3 Being an Online Instructor

Introduction

This book was created to support instructors at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) to teach online. The book in its entirety is used to support POLY 1025 Fostering Learning Online, part of the Associate Certificate in Polytechnic Teaching.[1] It is meant to be used as notes to support the activities that take place in that course, rather than exist as a stand-alone textbook.

You might not be teaching at BCIT but the contents will still be useful to you, especially if you are teaching in a vocational, technical and professional education setting. One of the advantages of focusing on a particular teaching institution is that it provides specific context for the teaching decisions that we make.

Looking ahead to future initiatives, I have intentionally organized this book so that units may be drawn independently of it to support more narrowly focused faculty development opportunities. As with anything to do with teaching, the categories are never neatly bordered.

Online teaching in the context of this book means an instructor is facilitating learning that is mediated by an online learning environment. As such, I focus on using specific tools that are typically available in digital learning spaces such as discussion forums and web-conferencing tools. With these tools, instructors must lean on their teaching skills to interact with their students in a way that using other tools, such as a quiz tool, do not. Therefore, this book focuses on the areas of online learning that require instructors to respond to emergent and dynamic learning environments.

The book is divided into 5 units as follows:

1. https://www.bcit.ca/programs/polytechnic-teaching-associate-certificate-part-time-5175acert/#overview

Unit 1: Building and Sustaining Community Online

In this unit, the Community of Inquiry framework is introduced in order to provide the conceptual language of good online learning experiences and what they might look like when applied to practice.

Unit 2: What's Online: Defining and Designing Digital Learning Spaces

It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss online course design but online course design is an integral element to how a course gets taught. The different course delivery modes are discussed in this unit, and a brief overview is shared that describes a course development process based on quality concepts.

Unit 3: Being an Online Instructor

This unit is divided into two parts. The first part is about the instructing-side of being an online instructor: pedagogies conducive to the affordances of the online environment and providing feedback to students through assessment and evaluation. The second part of the unit offers typical practices in providing support and assigning tasks that lead to positive student learning outcomes.

Unit 4: Planning and Facilitating Effective Synchronous Learning

Post-pandemic (2020-2022), synchronous learning opportunities via web-conferencing tools have been demystified to the extent of becoming normalized. This unit attempts to provide some advice on good practices.

Unit 5: Planning and Facilitating Effective Asynchronous Learning

Back in the early days of online learning, online discussion forums changed forever the students' experience in traditional correspondence courses by making student-to-student interaction possible. This unit shares the good practices and teaching techniques learned over the decades.

Attributions

Some of the materials were inspired by and draw from previous faculty development initiatives developed and delivered by the Learning and Teaching Centre[1] at BCIT. These initiatives include: Facilitating Online Discussions (2002-3), Skills Enhancement Facilitator Training (2004-5), Fostering Learning Online (2009 – 2016), and the Blended Learning Seminar (2015 – 2019).

I have also curated shared original materials from other sources and have cited them as appropriate as well as listed them below. I take responsibility for any errors, and please contact me (Bonnie_Johnston(at)bcit.ca) in order to make the correction(s) .

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- "Learning through Direction Instruction" is summarized from Huitt, W.G., Monetti, D.M., & Hummel, J.H. (2009) 'Direct

1. https://www.bcit.ca/learning-teaching-centre/

Approach to Instruction' in Riegeluth & Carr-Chellman, Instructional Design Theories & Models III. Pg.73-97

- "Learning through Discussion" is summarized and quoted from Gibbon, J.T. (2009) 'Discussion Approaches to Instruction', in Riegeluth & Carr-Chellman, *Instructional Design Theories & Models III. Pg.*99-116
- "The key to successful group work" is quoted from Farrell, O., Brunton, J., Ní Shé, C., Costello, E., (2021). #Openteach: Professional Development for Open Online Educators. Dublin: #Openteach Project. 10.5281/zenodo.4599620
- "Learning through Experiential Learning" is summarized and quoted from Lindsey, L. & Berger, N. (2009) 'Experiential Approaches to Instruction', in Riegeluth & Carr-Chellman, *Instructional Design Theories & Models III.* Pg.117-142
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UNIT I

UNIT 1 BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY ONLINE

Your Role as a Facilitator of Learning Online

In any distance education course, whether it's a fully online course, a paper-based correspondence course, or a blended course combining both distance and on-campus elements, the tasks and duties you perform often differ from that of the traditional face-to-face instructor. For example, course materials and learning activities are often prepared before the course begins. In fact, you may not have been involved in the course design itself. Your role, especially in synchronous and asynchronous digital spaces, is often to be the knowledgeable expert guiding novices through an exploration of the course materials and activities in support of the learning outcomes.

Further, the role of the online instructor encompasses multiple components. It changes as the course progresses, as students begin to grapple with the material, and as discussion becomes more focused and mature. A course has a beginning, a middle and an end, and there are different duties that we perform in our roles as facilitators that are linked to students' success at the different stages in an online course.

An example of stages within a course when the instructor uses facilitation as a teaching strategy

This table below is just one example of showing student roles and instructor's roles at the different stages of a course that is centred around the use of discussion forums (and we will see this table again in Unit 3 Being an Online Instructor, where we discuss in further detail these roles in the context of taking a facilitative approach):

Stage	Students' Roles	Instructor's Roles
Stage 1: Access and motivation	Getting into the course: successfully logging on	Encouraging, welcoming Clarifying role of conference
Stage 2: Online socialization	Moving beyond browsing the learning environment to feel at home	Creating an atmosphere where people feel respected. May include contacting individuals by email or responding to their postings as they "arrive" (or fail to) in the conferencing spaces
Stage 3: Information exchange	Deal with potential information overload. Work at finding information online. Discuss content and issues in the conference area	Present linkages in interesting ways. Ensure that contributions are not lost or ignored.
Stage 4: Knowledge construction	Begin to analyze/ interpret what they are learning. Experience different perspectives. Become authors, based on their own reading and personal experience, not just transmitters of facts	Begin to move out of the way.Encourage critical thinking.
Stage 5: Development	Experienced participants may share the moderator's role. May challenge position of moderator. Take responsibility for own learning. Clearly demonstrate critical thinking. Often reflect critically on role of the technology in learning, as well as on topic area	Be prepared for challenges from participants. Don't interfere too much with discussion, but don't become obviously absent either

(*Based on Salmon, G. (2000) E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning*)

Matching instructor's actions with students' needs is taking a

student-centred approach. A student-centred approach is where we assume students are responsible for their own learning, while instructors are responsible for creating an optimal learning environment to enable student learning. In an online learning environment, while the space of the environment is digital, the role of the instructor remains: to determine how to optimize the environment for student learning.

And take a look at this infographic below, (or click on this link to download your own copy: Instructor Tasks that Encourage Participation Infographic [1]) which contains detailed lists of what an online instructor can do at various stages of their course to promote participation (we will talk more about this list and these varied tasks in this unit and Unit 3: Being an Online Educator).

1. https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/teachingonlineatbcit/wp-content/uploads/sites/2109/2023/10/Instructor-Tasks-that-Encourage-Participation-Infographic.pdf

INSTRUCTOR TASKS THAT ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

BEFORE THE CLASS STARTS

- Set clear outcomes and clear expectations
- Adjust the mark allocation to give weight to participation if appropriate
- Make the policy on plagiarism clear to all
- Indicate when it is best to contact you
- Provide criteria for contacting ("Be sure to contact me if...")
- List assignments info: (When/how to submit...)
- Indicate expectations for adult learners – what they have to do to succeed
- Make it clear in the course description that there is group work if that's part of the course
- If material is being mailed, ask students to check for completeness a soon as they receive the package.
- Provide "How to study" information at appropriate levels – this may be different for high school grads than for those who already have degrees
- Provide a list of extra reference materials
- Introduce yourself with a biographical message
- Requirements for computer skills and communication ability should be clear and should also make it clear why the skills are required.
- Set an expectation that students will keep in touch
- Create a space to invite introductory questions in order to initiate student-to-student interaction
- When planning discussions, frame discussion questions that actually are discussable.

THE CRITICAL FIRST TWO WEEKS

- Make personal contact by any means possible
- Make sure technicalities of contact are possible
- Introduce yourself, and ask students to post an introduction including reasons for taking the course, related experience and other substantive comments.
- Provide a dedicated forum for technical problems, one for questions re: assignments and a "water cooler" or lounge forum for more casual conversation
- Indicate expectation that students will not just 'vanish' on business trips etc.
- Make sure everyone knows what group they are in, and how to post to the group and the whole class
- Make sure they know the instructor can see everything, including postings in groups
- Provide phone numbers for technical emergencies
- Be specific about when you will check and reply to email.
- Make sure all students are registered
- In cases with multiple tutors/instructors in one course, make sure students know who their instructor/tutor is
- Be clear on marking schemes, especially for participation, and the timing of marking
- Encourage participants to submit "am I on the right track" drafts

THROUGHOUT THE COURSE

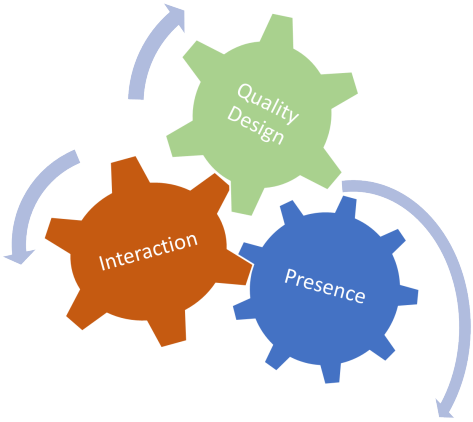
- In online courses, request contributions specifically (and perhaps publicly) from participants. ("Jo, Antoine and Lynn, you all work in acute care settings. What do you think about this issue?"
- Encourage students to comment on each others' contributions
- Include some discussion starters that are experience based, and some that are content based
- Keep in touch – a "how's it going" email or call can help a struggling participant to complete the course
- Add a "how are you doing" note to the home page
- Give groups power to resolve group problems – let them try to resolve problems first, then come to you if required.
- Allow students to submit drafts for early direction
- Send out general comments about the assignments. For example, when the assignment requires application of theory to personal life or practice, let them know what you learned reading the papers
- Send a summary of the week to private emails outside the course to encourage/entice those who have not been participating to return
- Point out current issues and articles in newspaper, etc. to encourage spontaneous mini-discussion (these activities work well in the lounge).
- Set reminders for yourself of when and what to check
- Keep generic postings to a minimum and keep most of your postings course and student specific
- Offer detailed and constructive comments on assignments

Regardless of the teaching subject, most of the tasks detailed in the infographic are required for all instructors who are fostering learning online (and all of them if you are using teaching approaches such as learning through discussion and/or collaborative learning). While your course might use different activities in order to achieve different outcomes, the idea that what we do as instructors is linked to what students need to advance their learning remains valid. We attempt to meet students where they are at during the phase of the course (at the beginning of the course, in the middle of the course, and at the end of the course). We meet them with these tasks that support their learning needs that are directly related to the academic outcomes of the course.

This idea of looking at online students' global needs (not just specific academic needs related to the learning outcomes) informs the approach we take in this and subsequent units. We explore key concepts in the context of linking students' needs to instructor duties.

Students Need:	**Online Educator Does this:**
Motivation to engage and complete	Tasks and Techniques that foster INTERACTION
Engagement with learning, instructor, & peers	Reduce the distance via PRESENCE
Clear direction & pathways through course elements	Design-related forms and functions (structure) aligned with standards of QUALITY

And while we break each element down to help you understand them, these elements are not independent and not discrete, nor do they flow in a linear progression.



As you will discover, each informs, affects, and is informed by the other, something like these interconnected cogs.

Thinking about the Needs of our Learners

Let's start by thinking from the perspective of our learners. Think about all the course-related and non-course-related obligations you have while you take a course. How have all these various obligations affected you as you attempt to be successful at all of them?

As adults, we can't escape our responsibilities when we sign up for a course. Adult learners, as we know, have many demands on their time, energy, and attention.

We also know that adult learners:

- continue to learn after completing their formal education.
- learn in purposeful, self-directed ways.
- need to know why they need to learn something.
- need to learn experientially.
- approach learning as problem-solving.
- learn best when the topic is of immediate value.

Further, at BCIT, we know from past surveys about our distance education students that they:

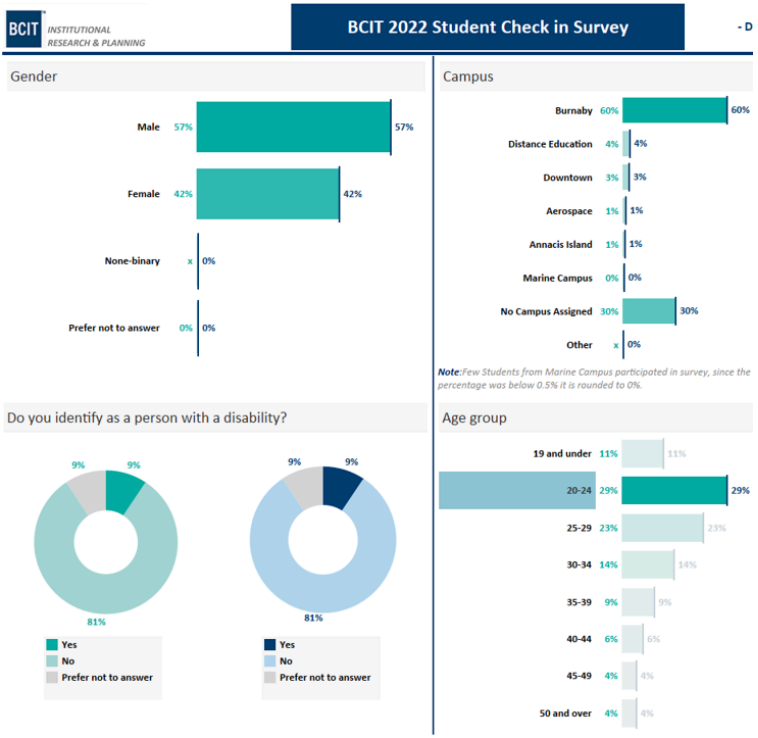
- are sometimes very succinct (in online postings) and sometimes very lengthy.
- don't always read information about expectations, formats, etc.
- are busy, facing multiple demands.
- can find the course pace hectic.
- sometimes are challenged in their level of English expression.
- are responsible about learning.
- represent a broad age range (from 18 to 67).
- find the course workload heavy.
- find their workload heavy in general.

- have high expectations.
- have a range of computer skills, from novice to expert.
- are working professionals, very busy and with limited time.
- are sometimes away attending to family matters, on business, etc.
- have varied academic backgrounds, from grade 10 to university grads.
- sometimes have experience in the field and sometimes not.
- are anxious, especially at the beginning, facing packets of material with little sense of an instructor present.
- are sometimes waiting for guidance from the instructor.

(*from an internal Learning & Teaching Centre survey for the* TWEET *workshop series*, 2004)

More recently, we have the results from the Institute's 2022 *Student Check-in Survey Final Report*[1] to give us another picture of who are students are.

1. * In the fall of 2022, BCIT's Institutional Research sent out a survey to 21,625 students enrolled at that time across all schools and programs and received 3,222 responses (15% response rate after accounting for bounce-back emails). The purpose of the annual survey is to reach out to current students (full time and part time) and learn more about their needs, challenges, and future considerations.



Copyright 2022 BCIT, BCIT 2022 Student Check in Survey

Our students are not a homogenous group; they come to our courses with different values, expectations, and experiences. While all students are different, they have some common characteristics that they share when they start a course. They are all starting at the same time, they all want to learn, and they all want to succeed.

They will most likely share the same concerns too: Will they be able to cope with the work? Will they be able to get along with other students? Will the instructor be approachable?

Actively exploring these differences with students helps to create a safe and inclusive space in which students can start learning together. If students can relate to other students, by means of

shared values, experiences, and backgrounds, they are on a good path to start learning together. And if they have different views, experiences, and perspectives, this can initiate interesting discussion, negotiation, and reflection. A good place to start is right at the beginning of your course. Think about how you can encourage participation and how you can create safe opportunities for shared learning amongst your students.

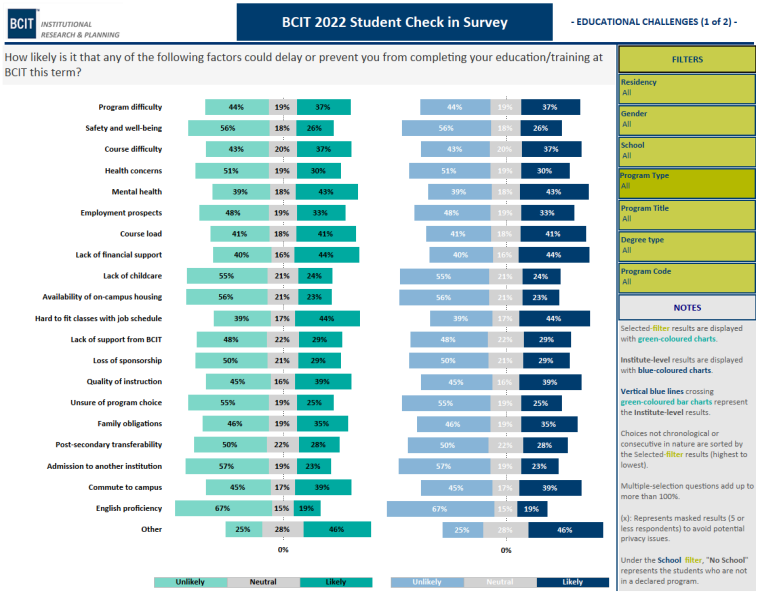
But having these things in common doesn't mean that a cohort of students in a particular course exists as a community of learners. They do not yet have common learning experiences to draw on, nor do they necessarily share the ways of thinking that characterize the field of study. Therefore, an important task for you at the earliest stage of a course is to build a learning community by consciously creating lots of opportunities for students to connect with each other, with you, and with the topic on different levels, which in turn fosters belongingness.

Participation does not just happen in an online course. If you build it, there are still no guarantees that they will engage. There are many reasons for this:

- Participants may be unfamiliar with online courses.
- Participants may associate post-secondary classes with a lecture/listen model.
- Participants may feel very exposed commenting on something to people they cannot see and do not know.
- They have the sensation of being watched, which can be especially acute when participants sense that many are 'lurking' without posting and may inhibit participation.
- The value of participation may not be clear.
- There may be too many people in the group, so participants' comments get lost… or too few, so conversation is slow.

From the BCIT 2022 Student Check-in Survey, when asked, "How likely is it that any of the following factors could delay or prevent

you from completing your education/training at BCIT this term?", students responded as follows:



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As illustrated in the table, along with a lack of financial support, having it hard to fit classes in with a job schedule ranks as the top challenge our students face in completing their courses. Online learning delivery modes can overcome this challenge through distributed timing and delivery. We know that our students sign up for online learning opportunities because of its flexibility. However, if done poorly, online learning delivery modes also have the potential to make a challenging and complicated student schedule even more difficult.

When we attempt to match our instructional actions to our students' needs, we do so in order to promote optimal learning conditions and guide our instructional decision making.

Student Motivation to Engage With and Complete Courses

For learning to take place, students need to be motivated to engage in the work of the class. One of the principal jobs of an educator is to create learning environments that encourage student motivation. Motivation, at the heart of learning, requires our attention regardless of our approach to delivery (online, blended, or in-person).

And we don't want to confuse student engagement with student's ability to manage themselves.

> "The students who are the best at navigating distance learning environments are not necessarily the most tech-savvy. Instead, they are the most self-directed. They are the students who have developed the soft skills needed to be self-starters and self-managers. These students engage in project management and time management. They problem-solve when tasks get challenging. They find necessary scaffolds when they need help, and they engage in meaningful peer collaboration. These students are constantly engaging in peer and self-assessment."
>
> Spencer, J. (2020) The Real Issue Isn't Student Engagement[1]

Assigning good grades to those who perform well is one approach to motivation, tapping into our learners' extrinsic motivation by rewarding their behaviour with external rewards. But when we tap into our learners' intrinsic motivation drivers, the results are more

1. Retrieved November 1, 2023 from http://www.spencerauthor.com/student-ownership-online/

effective. When we tap into our learners' internal need for autonomy (choosing pathways and behaviours), competence (succeeding at existing tasks and mastering new skills) and relatedness (connecting with others socially), we respect the drive for self-determination and self-direction (Ryan and Deci, 2020).

Getting out of the way of student's desire to learn

Despite our best intentions, we may do things while we are facilitating a course, or have inadvertently built issues into the design of our online courses' elements that get in the way of our students' desire to learn. You might see some students stop participating in discussions or missing assignments. As we first discussed at the beginning of this unit, students must juggle their life and study responsibilities, learn to manage their time, and stay on track with their course. We can help them by building elements into our course design and using teaching techniques that are flexible enough to accommodate their challenges while at the same time keeping them engaged.

But when we, for example, dump large amounts of content on them (creating cognitive overload), without giving them sufficient time to interact with the material, nor with you, nor with other students, or when we give them online activities that do not seem to have meaning or urgency, especially in terms of getting better grades, we start to inhibit their motivation for completing our courses. We de-motivate them.

What is Required to Motivate Learners

Let's look at what is required to motivate learners. The role of the online facilitator, as content expert and motivational coach, is directly connected to student success. Facilitation and motivation

may, depending on the context, seem easier to accomplish in a face-to-face environment.

John Keller[2] delineated the motivational elements of instruction as encompassing four necessary components:

- engaging and maintaining student interests,
- relating course content to student interests,
- enhancing student confidence in understanding course content, and
- satisfying students' inquisitiveness related to information thus encouraging students' active involvement in learning.

These elements are summarized as (**A**) attention, (**R**) relevance, (**C**) confidence, and (**S**) satisfaction in order to create the "ARCS Model of Motivation".

2. http://www.arcsmodel.com/#!motivational-design/c2275

Attention

Attention has to be aroused and sustained for students to really engage in your course. What are some ways you can pique your students' curiosity or get them excited when at a distance? Varying the elements of instruction and using surprising or less predictable teaching strategies can be a fun way to gain their attention. Stimulate information seeking by posing questions or problems to solve, or have students pose them.

Relevance

If the learner believes the training is not relevant to them, then efforts regarding attention will be wasted. Make sure you let the learner know what's in it for them. Don't assume students perceive value. One way to address this is to make clear the relevance of your course by exploring *why* it matters. We discussed, and you practiced, writing outcomes during your time in the Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW). These outcomes are part of the learning equation, but providing contextual benefit to achieve these outcomes is also required. Keep in mind that this might be different for one learner than it will be for another.

Confidence

This aspect is important to nurture so that students feel positive about putting a good faith effort into your course. Help students develop a sense of competence. Foster motivation by giving students wins and a sense of progress throughout their studies. If you leave them with the impression that they will not be successful, their motivation will decrease. By giving students estimates of the time required to complete lessons, or a measure of their progress

at frequent intervals throughout the course, their ability to succeed and their incremental achievements can be gauged.

Satisfaction

The final piece is a learner's satisfaction or reward from the learning experience. This can be a sense of achievement, whether it is a learner's high score, a completion certificate, or simply a praise email from you. Ultimately, the best way for learners to achieve satisfaction is to connect new skills/achievements to their benefit.

These four elements of the ARCS model of motivation are relevant regardless of your classroom environment (face-to-face or virtual). Thinking about your own teaching, what techniques have you used, or will you use, that fit within each category?

Concepts of Transactional Distance: Getting Closer to our Distance Learners

Before there was online learning there were paper-based correspondence courses. Correspondence courses, which provided the basis for early theorizing in distance education, have a long history in Canada and provided an alternative educational delivery model for both non-traditional students (e.g. adult learners) as well as learners who lived in rural and remote areas.

Before the advent of the networked computer, the majority of distance education programming was comprised of paper-based course materials sent to learners by mail. Learners completed assignments according to a schedule and sent their work to a tutor by mail. The tutor/instructor would assess the assignment and provide feedback and then mail the assignment back. If there were final exams, they would be invigilated by various means, such as contracting with a local invigilator or requiring all students to come to a central location at the same time to complete the exam. Some courses were supported by audio cassette or television programming (the Knowledge Network in BC got its start supporting educational programming offered through BC's former Open Learning Agency).

If you have never experienced a correspondence course yourself, perhaps you can imagine how alone you might feel as a learner in such a course: there are no other students to interact with and you can only contact your tutor by mail. You must account for the waiting time between asking your questions and the responses, as well as account for the delay in receiving the results and feedback on your assignments. Over the decades, the design and production of learning materials, activities and learning design improved

overall, and much improvement was informed by a growing field of research in distance education and by the notion of transactional distance.

The notion of transactional distance originated out of these experiences with correspondence courses. Transactional distance "is the gap between the understanding of a teacher (or teaching team) and that of a learner" (p. 34, Moore, 2018). One of the goals of improving learning design was to mitigate the inherent features of being at a distance, where communication is spread out across time, to improve learning. Distance education is "the methodology of structuring courses and managing dialogue between teacher and learner to bridge that gap through communications technology" (p. 34, Moore, 2018).

Flash-forward thirty years, and, even now, online courses can continue to be isolating. Students are alone when they work on course materials. They don't have easy opportunities to connect with each other and with the instructor as they would normally when classes meet in person. As social beings, we learn a lot from observing other people in addition to interacting with them, and we can be energized when others are around us. When that is not possible because of physical distance, it's harder for students to stay engaged. What is missing is the immediate presence of others, and the notion of transactional distance informs how we measure that.

When the affordances of digitally networked online learning became available, distance educators exploited the ability to decrease the communication gap between learner and instructors with email, chat, and web conferencing tools. Doing so increased the interaction opportunities, having, for the first time, the ability to bring a group of students together in the same digital space, with the potential for student-to-student interaction in asynchronous discussion forums and shared digital workspaces such as wikis. Further, online learning provided opportunities to remediate course materials from strictly paper-based formats to other media forms which therefore created opportunities for student-to-learning interaction.

When we make a deliberate effort to increase interaction in online classes, we can help students learn and be successful. Having the ability to bring groups of students together in the same digital spaces within the timeframe of a course fosters a learning community. This notion of community, and the sense of belonging to a learning community for the duration of a course, is our next topic.

Presences and the Community of Inquiry Model

Thinking about "presence" emerged in the 1990s as a measure of how the newly developed virtual environments differed, or not, from regular, in-person environments.

As we saw in the previously, discussion emerged in the literature on distance education around transactional distance, and the goal of a well-designed and well-executed correspondence course was to reduce the transactional distance between the learner and the learning. Transferring this same goal to the online distance education environment, the Community of Inquiry Framework attempts to further analyze the different elements that go into reducing the transactional distance between the learner, the learning and the mediating learning environment.

Think of presence as the sense of connectedness to others, and how that sense might be affected in an online environment. Instead of a feeling of "being **there**" in a virtual world, virtual presence is the sense of "being **with**" someone. Virtual presence is quite different from face-to-face presence. It's more work as few or no nonverbal cues are available, and virtual communication can by asynchronous while face-to-face cannot.

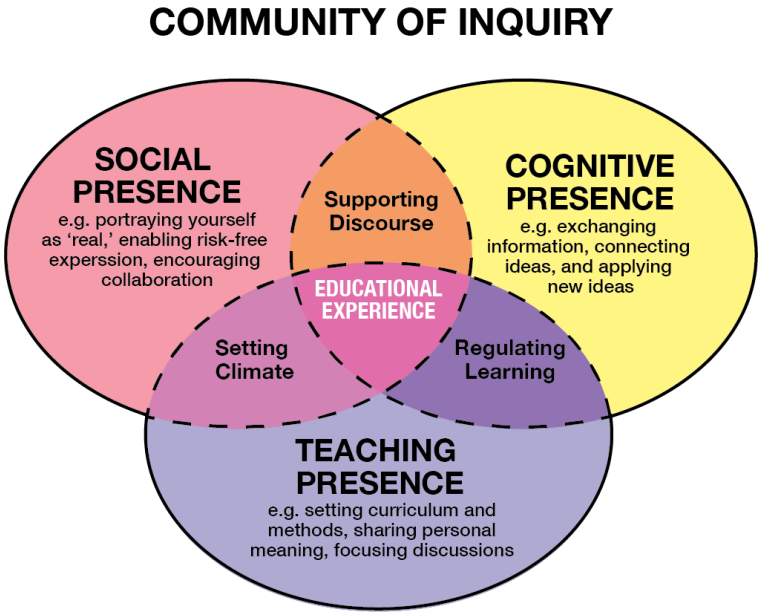
Translating the idea of presence to the online learning environment has provided us a way to consider the multiple dimensions of being an online participant. Specific to our role as teachers and instructors, the Community of Inquiry speaks to the dimensions that relate to successful online learning environments.

> "The Community of Inquiry theoretical framework represents a process of creating a deep and meaningful (collaborative – constructivist) learning experience through the development of three interdependent elements—social,

> cognitive, and teaching presence." (*Community of Inquiry Framework, Athabasca University*)

Simply using digital tools to present content is not enough to fully engage students in blended learning or online learning. Content alone may promote some degree of cognitive presence – engagement with learning content. But learning can be significantly enhanced when it is combined with other forms of engagement in a learning experience. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) landmark work landed the Community of Inquiry model at the forefront of program and instructional design thinking for blended and distributed learning over the past two decades.

The Community of Inquiry Model identifies three dimensions to the idea of presence, calling them Social Presence, Teacher Presence, and Cognitive Presence, and describes where they intersect. All three of the critical presences depicted by the Community of Inquiry model must be addressed and nurtured in order for everyone to get the most out of technology-mediated teaching and training.



From Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text- based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education model. The Internet and Higher Education, 2(2-3), 87-105.

We will next examine each presence and what they mean in practice.

Social Presence

Social presence is the ability of participants to identify with a community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships through projecting their individual personalities (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Social presence is establishing an ongoing connection using synchronous and asynchronous communication to humanize student-instructor and student-student interactions in on-line courses. It is the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally as 'real' people (i.e., their full personality) through the medium of communication being used.

Humanizing our online teaching also means showing emotions and deliberately attempting to foster a connection with our students in a safe learning environment. We can lose the less obvious verbal and non-verbal cues that we take for granted in our classrooms when we move to the online environment. Intentionally cultivating social presence means finding ways to overcome the barriers created by the technology and the transactional distance that results.

Online learning platforms provide spaces for interaction which engender high levels of student-student and student-teacher interaction, and therefore support models of teaching and learning that are highly interactive.

Three categories of indicators of Social Presence that we can look for are:

- **Affective/Interpersonal** via the expression of emotion, feelings and mood, as well as the sharing of personal information
- **Open Communication** that occurs when mutual trust has been established
- **Group Cohesion** occurs when individuals identify with and attach to a community

Teaching Presence

Teaching Presence is the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).

Teaching Presence begins before the course starts as the instructor, acting as instructional designer, plans and prepares the course of studies. Teaching presence continues to be felt during the course, as the instructor facilitates student learning via discourse and provides direct instruction when required (Anderson, et al., 2001).

You develop Teaching Presence in your course in three main ways:

1. **Design and Organization** in the planning of your course, where you decide how your course works in terms of activities, assessment, and communication strategies.
2. **Facilitation of Discourse** during the delivery of your course when your course is in session, and Teaching Presence can be expressed and enhanced when you facilitate discourse through asynchronous and synchronous means.
3. **Direct Instruction and Giving Direction** during the delivery of your course and is enacted when you directly teach (both in the synchronous spaces and as through pre-developed presentations), when you share subject matter knowledge, when you provide directions for tasks, activities, and assignments, and when you assess student work by providing instructive feedback, clarifying concepts, and referring students to additional resources or practice opportunities.

A strong online teaching presence makes for a strong online learning experience and a sense of community for your students.

Also note that Teaching Presence does not refer to the

instructor's formal role as a "Teacher", because, within the Community of Inquiry definition, Teaching Presence can be 'owned' by students as well. Based on the design of the course, students may have opportunities to co-contribute to the delivery of the course, such as through peer-evaluation, peer-led teaching and facilitation, and self-directed activities. In such cases, the instructor's role facilitates students' leadership in contributing to Teaching Presence.

Further, Teaching Presence can exist in a self-directed online course that is not instructor-supported. How? Teaching Presence exists if the course has been designed to include instructional elements, which can include directions on how to proceed, learning activities, and learning assessments. As you can imagine, a great deal of effort should be made to ensure that these instructional elements are appropriated situated within the course and communicated clearly and at appropriate moments in order to enable success for the self-directed learner.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive Presence is the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Cognitive Presence is the central thinking and meaning-making aspects of this presence, the "Inquiry" part of the Community of Inquiry.

Cognitive presence is central to successful student learning. The quality of cognitive presence reflects the quality and quantity of critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and construction of meaning occurring in student ↔ student and student ↔ instructor interactions. You can model and support cognitive presence in your interactions with students in discussions, assignment feedback, and other communications.

Cognitive presence is tied to how you plan the structure of your teaching. And how you structure your teaching is connected to the kinds of pedagogies you believe in, what pedagogies are typical of your teaching discipline/subject area, and what approaches you might use to match with a particular outcome. Just as we plan how we structure our lessons for in-person teaching, we do the same for online teaching.

If you have already taken the Instructional Skills Workshop, the BOPPPS model[1] will be familiar to you. The BOPPPS is one example of an instructional model for structuring lessons amongst various others.

However, there is an underlying structure to most well-known instructional models, and it has four key phases: discovery, exploration (divergent thinking), integration (convergent thinking), and resolution.

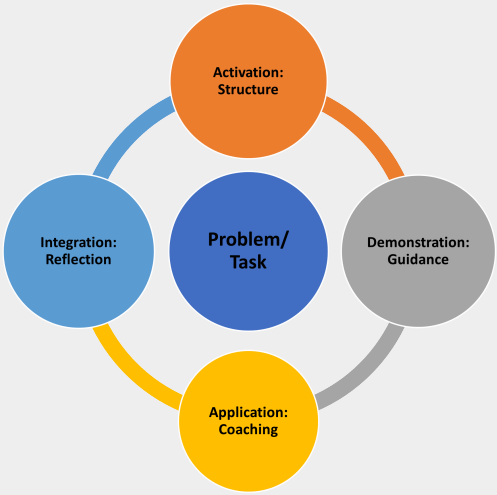
1. https://libguides.usask.ca/ld.php?content_id=34167685

Reviewing Instructional Models

Let's take a moment to review models of structuring learning.

Models are tools to help you plan your instruction and their benefit is to ensure use of best practices that will support and facilitate student learning.

The instructional model illustrated below gives the main phases in instruction, that provide optimal learning:



(based on Merrill, D.(2009), First Principles of Instruction, in Riegeluth and Carr-Chellman, Instructional Design Theories & Models, pg.52)

Each phase and the roles of the instructor and learner in each stage:

Task-Centred

In general, learning is promoted when learners engage in task-centred or problem-centred instructional strategies. When planning your lessons, think about what it is that learners will be engaging with. It could be a thinking-task (such 'identifying signs of hypoxia') or a doing-task (such as 'cut low carbon steel using freehand techniques'). This task, no matter how simple or complex, is the centre of the instructional cycle and grounds the learning.

Activation/Triggering Event

The purpose of this phase is the activation of background knowledge for the learner, where the instructor creates the structure. Learners come with pre-existing ideas and mental models, and they may not be correct or very sophisticated or complex. A well-designed lesson will prompt learners to access their prior knowledge, which literally means digging around in that part of their brains where they are holding onto it. In asking learners to do this, the instructor is facilitating the learner's development of knowledge structures.

Demonstration

The purpose of this phase is demonstration of an outcome to the learner where the instructor provides guidance. Learning is promoted when learners observe a demonstration and where learners have the opportunity to apply the new knowledge, skill, or behaviour that is the goal of the lesson. Sometimes the task requires the instructor to demonstrate before learners have the opportunity to apply it, while in other situations, it might be more meaningful for the learners if they attempt to apply at the same time or make an attempt to apply the skill before the instructor provides a demonstration.

Application

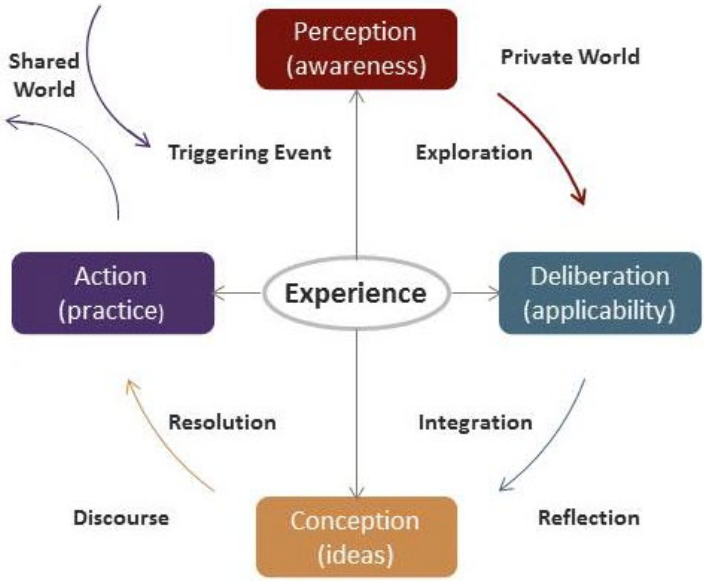
The purpose of this phase is application by the learner, where the instructor provides coaching. Learners need time to apply their learning and practice. The instructor's role in all cases is to sequence tasks appropriately to create successful learning in stages and to provide guidance and coaching to learners.

Integration

The purpose of this phase is integration by the learner, where the instructor promotes reflection.

Learning is promoted when learners integrate their new knowledge into their everyday world, their already established practice, and their pre-existing understanding of the concepts. What this means is a moment to step back from focusing on the learning task or problem, and reflect on how the specific task fits into the larger understanding. Doing so greatly facilitates our retention of learning. The instructor's role is to promote and model reflection.

Cognitive presence in the context of the specific teaching methods that we focus on in this course, direct teaching and learning through discussion, is based on the iterative relationship between **personal understanding** and **shared dialogue**



License: Cognitive Presence[2] by IU-Teach Online[3] licenced under CC BY NC SA

The diagram above shows a model that integrates these two aspects in a cycle, beginning with a question or puzzle – called a triggering event – or just a general awareness that something is not making sense. The learner then explores the available information and alternatives to make sense of the problem and connects this new information to previously learned concepts. Finally, the learner takes action to solve the problem or answer the question based on their newly integrated understanding.

2. https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/34528/pages/types-of-presence-cognitive-and-social-presence?module_item_id=5004
3. https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/34528

Establishing a Community of Inquiry

Your course has the potential to bring together all three presences and how you ultimately do it will be guided by your teaching preferences, the various teaching practices of your discipline, and the learning outcomes guiding your course. When we invest deliberate time and effort into building a community of inquiry in online learning, the evidence shows that students will be more successful.

Being intentional about incorporating elements of each of three presences can foster conditions for an effective learning experience. Activities and assessments that promote engagement should be meaningful and intentional, otherwise they can be perceived as busy work that learners find burdensome, rather than helping to create a sense of community in the course.

Establishing each presence can mean:

- Teaching Presence is established when an instructor considers their actual learners and builds up the course structure, feedback system and opportunities for learners to engage.
- Cognitive Presence is established when learning activities are designed so that they take students through the four phases of discovery/activation, exploration/demonstration, integration/application, and resolution/reflection. You do not need to construct activities where these phases are linear; for example, you might pose problems first, in order to stimulate and focus discovery.
- Social Presence is established when a well-designed course provides opportunities for learners to interact and learn with each other and build up a sense of community. This facilitates learners to engage in more thinking activities and collaborative

processes to construct new knowledge through cognitive presence.

Further, we can think of the different tasks we do when we facilitate learning in the context of the Community of Inquiry. For example:

- **When we are setting the climate, it is a crossover between Social Presence and Teaching Presence**

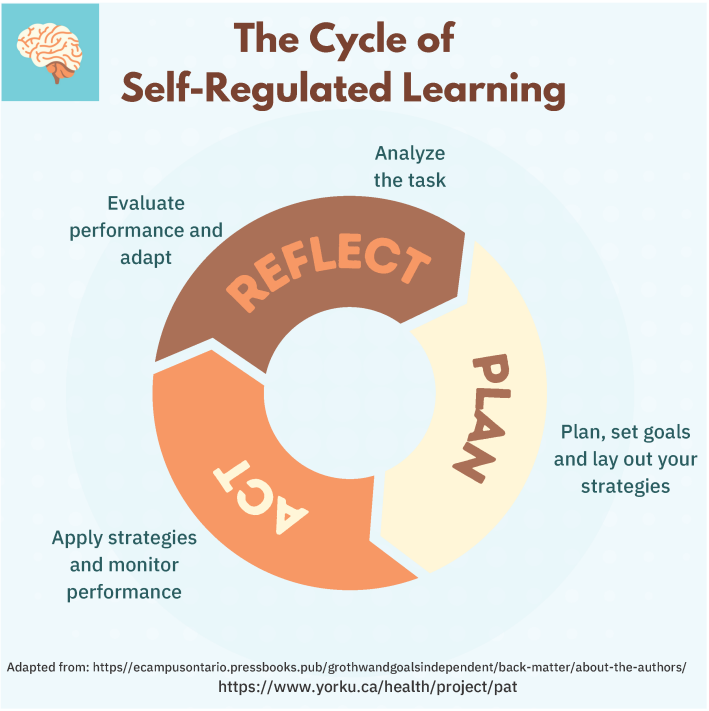
The facilitation strategies used to welcome and orient students at the beginning of a course are an example of actions that instructors used to set the climate of their course. Other examples are setting expectations of what is acceptable behaviour within the learning environment at the beginning, as well as being a model of this expectation throughout the course. We will talk more about setting the climate in Unit 3 Being an Online Education with suggestions for many more strategies.

- **When we support discourse, it is a crossover between Cognitive Presence and Social Presence**

Particularly when using teaching strategies that rely on facilitation, learning through discussion, and co-operative and collaborative work, the instructor's role draws upon facilitation skills that support and guide online learners. Facilitation is considered as a separate group of skills that are employed to support learners in critical reflection and inquiry and to keep them engaged in learning. These skills are also used by instructors to keep students engaged in their learning as they are getting through their course. We will talk more about supporting discourse in Unit 3 Being an Online Education with many more strategies. Additionally, Unit 4 Facilitating Synchronous Learning and Unit 5 Facilitating Asynchronous Learning will address specific techniques for each.

- **When we support students' ability to regulate their learning, it is a crossover between Teaching Presence and Cognitive Presence**

Tapping into students' motivation means students are actively managing their own learning, where they perform a cycle of planning, acting, and reflecting, and then planning once more. It means they are setting goals and setting out their own strategies to tackle course learning requirements, where they apply these strategies and monitor how they are doing, and where they then evaluate how they are doing in terms of their planning and application and make modifications as necessary. It is our view that incorporating course elements that are considered to be essential for a quality online course (the topic of Unit 2 What's Online), combined with instructional practices that set a positive learning climate, support discourse, ensure good channels of communication and an appropriate degree of interactivity, that when these conditions are present, students have what they need to do what they need to do in order to manage their own learning. Self-regulated Learning is the term that we use to refer to when students manage their own learning, and this diagram belows illustrates the concept.



Adapted from: https//ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/grothwandgoalsindependent/back-matter/about-the-authors/
https://www.yorku.ca/health/project/pat

Turning the Community of Inquiry Framework into Action

Breaking down the Community of Inquiry Framework into tangible and indicators helps us turn ideas into actions.

	Categories	**Examples of Indicators**
Social Presence	1. Open communication 2. Group cohesion 3. Personal expression	1. Learning climate/ risk-free expression 2. Group identity/ collaboration 3. Self-projection
Teaching Presence	1. Design and organization 2. Facilitating discourse 3. Direct instruction	1. Setting curriculum and methods 2. Shaping constructive exchange 3. Focusing and resolving issues
Cognitive Presence	1. Triggering event 2. Exploration 3. Integration 4. Resolution	1. Sense of puzzlement 2. Information exchange 3. Connecting ideas 4. Applying new ideas

(from Cleveland-Innes (2018) Guide to Blended Learning http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3095)

The rest of the units in this course book will go into more detail

about most of these elements but to give you some idea now of what it looks like, here are some examples of elements and tasks that support the development of each of the Community of Inquiry presences.

Developing Social Presence:

- Create course rules or 'netiquette' at the beginning of the course and have students contribute to them. This helps students to set expectations of themselves and others and develops buy-in.
- Structure learning activities that require students to work together to accomplish goals. For example, sharing key information from a core text on a single slide.
- Project your personality through your communications. Being a 'real person' online encourages others to do the same.
- Share emotions. Use emoticons in written communication. Don't be frightened to express emotion in audio and video communications.

Developing Cognitive Presence:

- Explore topics using prompts that stimulate curiosity and puzzlement. Seek different viewpoints on a particular problem or content area to stimulate divergent thinking.
- Create learning activities that require students to summarise, refine or otherwise conclude.
- Have students apply their conclusions to new problems or contexts.
- Encourage students to reflect on their earlier analysis of the problem or prompt and discuss how has their thinking moved on.

Developing Teaching Presence:

- Make everything more explicit than you think you need to. There are numerous ways in which instructions and

communications can be misinterpreted online, so over-explaining is better than leaving room for doubt.
- Check that your course is well organised, that students can navigate the materials easily and that links and activities are available with one click.
- Be active in asynchronous discussions.
- Express your personality. Demonstrate your interest, enthusiasm, and emotional connection to the topic.

How the Community of Inquiry Framework informs the remaining units in this book

Elements		Units in this book
Social Presence	• Open communication • Group cohesion • Personal expression	Units 3, 4, 5
Teaching Presence	• Design and organization • Facilitating discourse • Direct instruction	Units 2, 3, 4, 5
Cognitive Presence	• Triggering event • Exploration • Integration • Resolution	Unit 3

Ultimately

The ultimate goal is student engagement in your online, blended, and/or hyflex course. When students are described as being engaged in a course, the following can be observed:

- Students invest time and energy in their learning.
- The learning design is student-centred.
- The learning environment is supportive, inclusive, and

accessible.

- There exists a degree of flexibility in the teaching of the course.
- There are collaborative opportunities for students.
- There are assessment and feedback loops that help individual students progress.
- There is space and time for students to experiment, and to be curious, active learners.

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UNIT II

UNIT 2 WHAT'S ONLINE: DEFINING AND DESIGNING DIGITAL LEARNING SPACES

What's Online: Defining and Designing Digital Learning Spaces

The design, the structure and the actual contents of what you put online contribute to your teaching presence. The focus of this unit is on the core design elements that every online course should have, as well as a standard process to develop them.

1. Introduction: E-learning continuum and definitions
2. Quality: Core design elements every online course should have (Quality)
3. Planning and preparing an online course elements

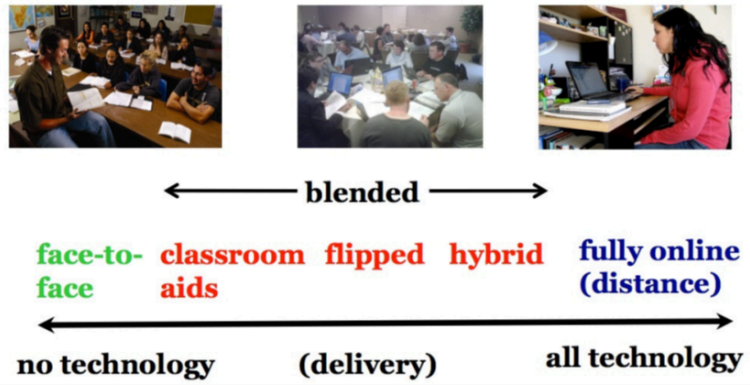
1. Defining Delivery Modes and elearning at BCIT

Defining Delivery Modes

Let's start by clarifying the terminology and clarify what we mean when we are talking about online learning. We take our definitions of delivery modes from the work done by the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association:

ONLINE LEARNING means all instruction and interaction is fully online (synchronous or asynchronous)
HYBRID LEARNING means a blend of online and in-person instruction (online instruction is synchronous or asynchronous)
HYFLEX LEARNING means instruction is available online and in-person and students can move between online and in-person
IN-PERSON LEARNING means all instruction takes place in an in-person setting
SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING means instruction takes place in real-time and requires student presence
ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING means instruction is available for students to access at a time that works best for them

In the field of educational technology, we often talk about how we use education technologies in varying configurations, such as in this image:



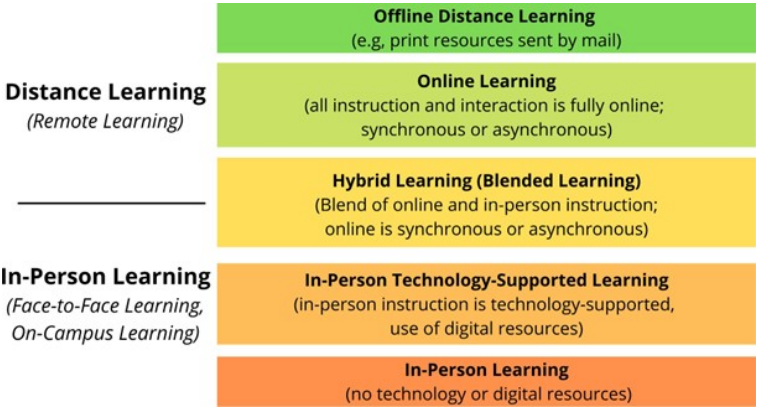
Source: BCIT Guidance for Course Delivery Decision-Making

However, this image conflates the use of educational technology with delivery models (or modes). Imagine twenty years ago when it was possible to use no educational technology during in-person learning – that's the fellow on the left, reading from his papers in front of his students. As we move to the middle of the continuum above, educational technologies are being to support in-person learning activities (the photo in the centre, where people are using computers to collaborate in-person). On the right, educational technologies are used to support the delivery of a fully online course (the photo on the right, where the learner is on her own interacting in the digital space with the learning environment). What is confusing is the image in the middle: even though the participants are using computers, the delivery mode remains in-person.

With the sudden switch to remote teaching during the pandemic, much work was done in the educational technology field to clarify definitions and find consensus regarding online learning. The focus of the definitions turned to defining the use of educational technologies for delivery modes. What has been clearly omitted

is all of the other reasons that instructors will use educational technologies to support their teaching.

The graphic below produced by the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association nicely illustrates a new continuum focused on delivery modes, which range from fully distance-based learning (online or offline) to in-person learning.



Source: From the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association's 2021 report, Evolving Definitions under a Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-ND 4.0) License

From their 2021 report, the Canadian Digital Learning Research Associate describes the modes of the learning spectrum as:

Distance learning is defined as all learning that takes place at a distance. Online learning (where the learning experience is delivered via the Internet either synchronously or asynchronously) is the predominant mode of distance learning; however, distance learning also includes offline distance learning (where the learning experience is fully remote but does not use Internet technology, such as a course being delivered in print format via mail)."

In-person learning is defined as learning that takes place entirely within a physical classroom with one's peers and instructor physically present. In-person learning may use technology within the classroom, or technology available on-campus, to facilitate learning and students may be expected to use technology (e.g., Learning Management System (LMS), digital textbooks, laptop computer) to complete course assignments. All instruction takes place in a physical classroom context.

The dividing line between distance learning and in-person learning is placed at the centre of hybrid learning.

Hybrid learning is a learning experience that is designed to combine both online and in-person instruction. While some institutions have separate definitions for hybrid learning and blended learning, it appears that these terms are used interchangeably for the most part. For

consistency's sake, the Modes of Learning Spectrum uses the term hybrid learning, but considers it to be interchangeable with blended learning.

Hybrid learning presents the greatest area of ambiguity, especially as different forms of hybrid learning have emerged. The term hybrid learning is an umbrella term that captures all different types of hybrid learning such as flipped learning, hyflex learning, and online learning with an in-person intensive component. There are varying definitions for these terms and further definitional work specific to types of hybrid learning is needed.

It is important to note that some forms of hybrid learning require students to participate in both an online learning mode and an in-person learning mode whereas other forms of hybrid learning provide both options, but leave the choice of learning mode to the student. For example, hyflex learning is emerging as an option at more and more institutions across Canada, in which students enroll in a course that offers them the ability to choose their mode of delivery (in-person or online) and shift modes of delivery during the course in accordance with their individual needs and preferences. (pg 7-9)

From the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association's

2021 report, Evolving Definitions[1] under a Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-ND 4.0) License

Hyflex is emerging

As mentioned above, Hyflex is an evolving and emerging approach. As of this writing, Hyflex currently means courses that are blended courses with the exception that students have the choice to participate in the synchronous portion either in-person, on campus, or online via web conferencing. Further variations also include a third option of participation, which is when the live session is recorded and students can access the live session afterwards.

HyFlex courses are meant to be student-centered course offerings that give students options. Students have the ability to choose their mode of attendance with flexibility each week and are not locked into the same format over the course of the semester. The belief is that if students have the freedom to choose which mode to participate in over their time in the course; they are able to create their own learning experience.

Hyflex delivery modes could be considered when there is a need to serve online students and face-to-face students in the same class sections, especially when there are limited resources. There are not many instances of Hyflex at BCIT at the moment, but it is has

1. http://www.cdlra-acrfl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-CDLRA-definitions-report-5.pdf

become a consideration in the planning of new on-campus learning spaces.

In summary, the University of Windsor created this very handy summary of the different modes:

University of Windsor Overview of Course Delivery Modes

	Face-to-face	Hybrid	Hy-flex	Online	Supplemental
Description	Learners and instructors meet in real time in the same physical location to facilitate instruction and learning	Curriculum is designed intentionally and thoughtfully to integrate F2F and online learning experiences. F2F teaching time is reduced, but not eliminated, with the balance of learning being facilitated asynchronously or synchronously through digital/web-based technologies, or offline learning opportunities. Typically, 50%-80% of learning outside of class.	The curriculum is designed intentionally and thoughtfully to provide choice to learners in their mode of engagement with the learning. Learners have the choice to attend classes in F2F or online modalities. Remote learners can join real-time classes via digital/web-based technologies, and learning activities are designed to intentionally integrate remote and F2F learners.	Course curriculum is intentionally designed for, and facilitated, using digital/web-based technologies. Online courses may make use of asynchronous or synchronous (real-time) strategies for curriculum delivery	Additional options may become available as COVID restrictions are relaxed, allowing optional supplements for an on-campus experience e.g. Office hours in-person, co-curricular and other opportunities such as orientations, demonstrations, study groups or optional trips that are F2F
Place	On-campus learning space (classroom, lab, studio, etc.)	On-campus learning space **AND** online	On-campus learning space **OR** online	Online only	On-campus or workplace learning space **AND/OR** online
Time	Meets at scheduled class time in physical location	F2F meetings at scheduled times throughout the semester. Online work determined by instructor and may include scheduled real-time online meetings.	Meets at scheduled class time in physical location **AND** online through streaming	**Synchronous** classes meet online in real-time at scheduled meeting times. **Asynchronous** classes have no scheduled meeting times.	Meeting times are arranged between student(s) and instructor(s) or other organisers
Synchronous learning and teaching (occurs in real-time)	Engage with course activities and content (lectures, discussions, tutorials, seminars, labs, group work, etc.) at scheduled times F2F in a physical learning space	Engage with course activities and content (lectures, discussions, group work, etc.) at scheduled times in pre-determined modes, either F2F or online	Engage with course activities and content (lectures, discussions, tutorials, seminars, labs, group work, etc.) at scheduled times F2F in a physical learning space, **OR** online through streaming/webconferencing	Engage with course activities and content (lectures, discussions, tutorials, labs, group work, etc.) online at scheduled times	Learning and engagement activities (research group meetings, discussions, group work, office hours, orientations, WIL etc.) at scheduled times either F2F or online
Asynchronous learning and teaching (not at the same time)	Prepare for class, complete homework, independent study, research, simulations, etc. outside of scheduled class time. Online or in small groups. Access online content anytime.	Engage with online or offline interactive course activities and content (e.g. pre-recorded mini- lectures, assignments, discussions, self-guided field trips, simulations, etc.) at anytime.	Prepare for class, complete homework, independent study, research, simulations, etc. outside of scheduled class time. Online or in small groups. Access online content anytime	Engage with course content (e.g. pre-recorded mini-lectures, assignments, discussions, readings, self-guided field trips, independent study, research, simulations, etc.) at anytime	Learning and engagement activities and content extend beyond courses and accessed at anytime.
Assessment	Assessment can be held at a physical location, or facilitated online	May have assessment that requires attendance at a physical location, either on campus or at a designated remote location, but may also leverage digital technologies	All assessment should be facilitated and submitted online must not require attendance at a physical location. May hold assessment during scheduled class time.	Online learners **must not** be required to come to a physical location for assessment.	May or may not be assessments and should be in the spirit of the delivery mode

Adapted from Iowa State University Office of the Senior Vice-President and Provost

Last updated 29 March, 2021 by Nick Baker

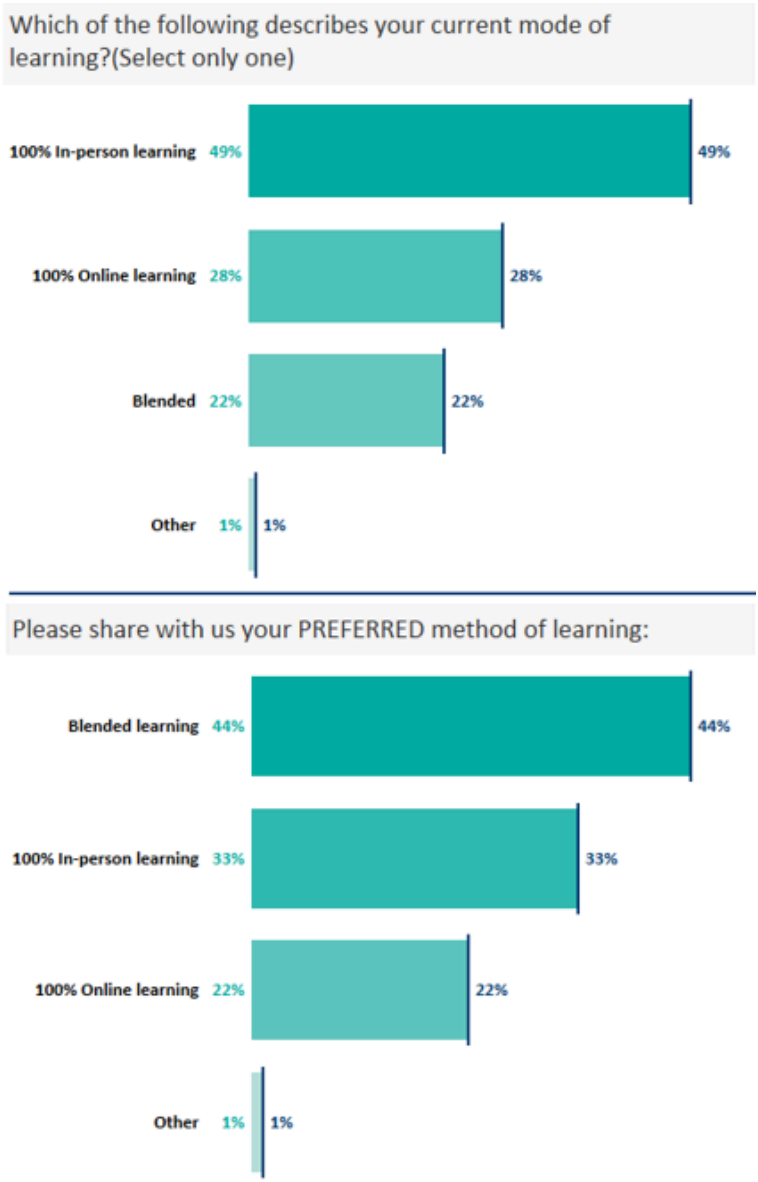
Source: University of Windsor, Overview of Course Delivery Modes

About our institutional context and BCIT students

As a polytechnic vocational institution, BCIT's mandate often makes us think that fully online learning is not popular nor suitable for our hands-on applied-focus education. However, we also happen to be one of the largest distance-education providers in the province, and that was before the introduction of online learning when courses were paper-based. With the advent of online learning capabilities, our capacity for increasing the number of course and program offerings available fully online has grown substantially. When it makes good business sense, we can and do put full programs online. However, not only has BCIT embraced online learning for fully distance-based online courses, but also individual instructors right across the institute integrate using the learning management system (the Learning Hub) in various ways to support their teaching.

And what do our students say about online learning at BCIT? They seem to be okay with it, according to the Institute's 2022 *Student Check-in Survey Final Report*.

In the fall of 2022, BCIT's Institutional Research sent out a survey to 21,625 students enrolled across all schools and programs and received 3,222 responses (15% response rate after accounting for bounce-back emails). The purpose of the annual survey is to reach out to current students (full time and part time) and learn more about their needs, challenges, and future considerations. The survey also provides an insight into the awareness, usage, and satisfaction of these students with the services available to them.



Copyright 2022 BCIT, BCIT 2022 Student Check in Survey

While only 22% of respondents were currently learning in a blended mode, 44% said a blended mode was their preferred mode. This feedback tells us that our students may be more ready than we think for shifting part of their courses online. With the return to campus-based in-person delivery after the pandemic, students are asking for those in-person courses to contain an online element. For students who are in a 100% online delivery mode, they would have made that choice before they registered, as programs that are 100% online and Flexible Learning courses that are fully online are communicated as such in advance. The take-away message for instructors and programs that have returned to 100% in-person teaching: our students are ready for us to introduce blended learning elements into our course delivery.

And it is because our students are asking for more blended learning elements into our course delivery that instructors should be prepared with the appropriate knowledge and skills to determine how best to integrate online learning elements into their courses, should they choose. While we often refer to facilitating *online learning*, we include blended learning delivery modes in that term. The intention is for all instructors to know what key elements go into a quality online learning course. In this way, instructors who decide to move to a blended delivery mode are prepared to design, develop, and deliver the online elements that best fit their course.

2. Quality Online

Core design elements every online course should have

As you look at the continuum between a fully face-to-face course and a fully online course, one key dimension at play is communication. We can't rely on contact time during classroom hours the way we can when we teach face-to-face. Because of the challenges of asynchronous communication, online facilitation requires us to think and plan more deliberately about how we communicate to our students, what we communicate, and when. Without a deliberate teaching presence, without your efforts to communicate the course organization, and your expectations, the result can be disorienting to students who are looking to instructors to provide value to their learning through guidance and feedback.

We tackle the communication issue on multiple fronts, and one of the key fronts is to ensure that our online courses have key elements that are considered by quality standards to provide the necessary supports students need to be successful. When we build and teach an online course, the more asynchronous the course, the more the presence of these elements become a priority for a quality learning experience. We move the communication of critical course elements into explicit learning materials in the course. In this way, we can ensure that we cover off the critical elements that students need.

And what are these elements and who has decided that they are essential? The elements encompass the teaching areas of **assigning tasks**, **delivering content & sharing expertise**, **giving and gathering feedback**, and **providing student support**.

Much of what we do in our classrooms is a holistic combination of these tasks that we are rarely conscious of. However, when we think

about how to move some or all of these elements online, we face the communication gap. In order to overcome this communication gap, and to reduce the transactional distance, we must be deliberate in providing these elements in alternative ways. And we also first have to be aware of what they are. The history of distance-based education, moving from paper-based to online delivery, has taught us what they are, why they are important and how to achieve them, when considering the extreme end of the continuum, a fully asynchronous course.

A number of different institutions and organizations have developed quality checklists of what these elements are, with the idea of working backwards. A checklist tells us what is important and what will be assessed. Therefore, we ensure that we have included those elements so that we may be successful in an assessment.

Quality standards for online learning come from a robust body of research and for a global compendium of various schemes that articulate quality, you can check Tony Bates' collection, E-learning quality assurance standards, organizations and research [1]

A popular one is from Quality Matters,[2] and the main sections of their checklist are:

- Course Overview and Introduction
- Learning Objectives (Competencies)
- Assessment and Measurement
- Instructional Materials
- Learning Activities and Learner Interaction
- Course Technology
- Learner Support
- Accessibility and Usability

1. https://www.tonybates.ca/2010/08/15/e-learning-quality-assurance-standards-organizati
2. https://qualitymatters.org/

These all need to be in place within a course and aligned (e.g. assessment must be aligned with learning objectives).

BCIT has developed our own BCIT Online Course Quality Checklist [3]and it covers the elements that we would like to see online. Click on the link to open and save your own version.

You will see that it parallels the Quality Matters main sections; however, it has been designed with the needs of a polytechnic teaching environment in mind. Also note that it does not include the teaching elements of being an online facilitator, nor any list of duties. It is focused on 'the what' of what is online. It is the stuff that you might see already there when you log into an online course.

Going back to the concepts of presence, and Teaching Presence specifically, the first place where students get a sense of your Teaching Presence is in the design of your online course. Online teaching shares the same needs as classroom teaching, but because we take them for granted in the classroom, they might feel unnecessarily artificial online.

For example, in the list of what makes good online design above, number one is having a section in your online course that is the Course Overview and Introduction. Essentially, we call this the how-to of the course, where you are telling students how the course works, and how to be successful. This section parallels the first day of a campus-based class when we explain the very same thing. Designing and developing your online course means being deliberate about these elements to ensure that they are present because we know that students need them to be successful. Including these elements projects to students the presence of an instructor deliberately and thoughtfully guiding their learning experience.

When you approach the planning of your online teaching with a

3. https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/teachingonlineatbcit/wp-content/uploads/sites/2109/2024/01/BCIT-Online-Course-Quality-Checklist.docx

learning design framework in mind, it avoids practices that result in online courses that replicate unhelpful teaching practices from the classroom in the online environment. Designs that enable positive online learning experiences contain opportunities for collaboration and communication, reflection, and knowledge development. Having a clear learning design approach entails thinking about your students' journey through your course (which is what a course syllabus does) and will help you decide, if you are planning a blended course for example, which elements will be best served by everyone being together on campus, and which by being online.

Quality in the Development Process

A second angle to the quality element is designing and developing your course using a tested process. Just like designing for classroom-based courses, we have three key decisions for designing our online courses:

1. What do I want students to learn? (answer: learning outcomes)
2. How will students (and the instructor) know if these goals are being accomplished? (answer: feedback and assessment)
3. What will the instructor and students need to do in order for students to achieve the learning outcomes? (answer: teaching / learning activities)

When we shift our teaching to online, the emphasis shifts from preparing class sessions to preparing learning modules with specific goals, reading assignments, brief instructional materials, learning activities, assessment procedures and more. If you are teaching using synchronous tools, you will still need to prepare your live sessions as you would for your campus-based class, but you will also be attempting to cross the barriers the technologies create with specific activities you might not employ when you are in the same

place and the same time with your students. While you design your online course materials, you should regularly ask:

1. What do I want students to learn in this module?
2. How will students demonstrate their learning of the materials in this module?
3. What assignments or learning activities will support the learning for this module?
4. How do I want to teach this module?

And use the quality checklists as a planning tool. Work backwards in your planning and development from the quality checklist to help you:

- strive for clarity in writing, in layout, and online course design.
- help the learner to easily find what they need to know.
- make sure the "pieces" of your plan connect or align. Is there, for example, a recognizable path from stated outcomes to planned learning activities and potential assessments?
- choose technologies that support the learning, are easy to access and use.
- make sure your plan and activity include a sense of time – when they need to be started and completed and estimates of time for the instructor and the learner.

A note about specific educational technologies:

There are thousands of tools available online. There are also many tools already integrated directly into the BCIT Learning Hub, which you may not be familiar with or have not previously used. Many online (not Learning Hub-based) tools are free or at minimal cost, while others are quite expensive and complex to master. These are factors to keep in mind when selecting tools you want to explore. Further, at BCIT, for each digital and internet-based tool we would

like to introduce to our class that is not supported by the Institute, we are required to complete a Privacy Impact Statement and submit it for review and approval as per Policy Proc[4]edure 5900-PR3 Educational Technology Privacy Compliance.

We will not be going into any detail about specific tools, as integrating technologies into your teaching is the topic of our course, POLY 1020 Teaching with Technology. We do, however, speak to the use of the discussion forum and web conferencing tools, as these are the common digital spaces used for many direct teaching and learning through discussion activities.

4. https://www.bcit.ca/files/pdf/policies/5900-pr3.pdf

3. Planning & Preparing an Online Course

The next segment has been prepared as a stand-alone guide for you to use when you sit down to plan and develop your use of the Learning Hub to either support a fully online course or a blended course.

Open and download BCIT Guide to Planning your Course (Re)development for Online Delivery[1]

The guide is meant to reflect a proven-process for online course development and will take you through a high-level tour of the different decisions and creation of deliverables you will need to create a good quality online course.

1. https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/teachingonlineatbcit/wp-content/uploads/sites/2109/2024/01/BCIT-Guide-to-Planning-your-Course.pdf

UNIT III

UNIT 3 BEING AN ONLINE INSTRUCTOR

Being an Online Educator

We have already talked a lot about the foundational aspects in Unit 1. In this unit, we will focus on the praxis of teaching online, where we take the theory and apply it to practice. And we have divided this unit into two sections based on the categories we introduced in Unit 2 What's Online: Defining and Designing Digital Learning Spaces from this book, as well as what is described in further detail in Section 3 in the guide, BCIT Guide to Planning your Course (Re)development for Online Delivery [1]:

The first sections of Unit 3, sections A., address the elements of:

- Delivering Content & Sharing Expertise
- Giving Feedback

The second sections of Unit 3, sections B., address the elements of:

- Providing Support
- Assigning Tasks

1. https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/teachingonlineatbcit/wp-content/uploads/sites/2109/2024/01/BCIT-Guide-to-Planning-your-Course.pdf

A. Delivering Content & Sharing Expertise, and Giving Feedback

Why do we need to talk about specific aspects of teaching online?

Isn't teaching teaching?

Yes, of course it is. In this unit we will be applying what we know about what is good teaching to the online environment. There are circumstances that we have to consider, as we discussed in Unit 1, that online learning presents and we use the notion of presences and engagement to meet those challenges.

But ultimately, teaching is teaching. Let's recap:

We connect our instruction to our learner's needs

Good instructors think about the needs of their learners, where their learners are coming from and where they want to go. We think about our learners in terms of their developmental, cognitive, and social needs. We connect our teaching to what our learners need.

We know from research and experience that once we become adults, as adult learners we generally enjoy learning environments that are respectful, where there is collaboration, where we have a sense of control and where we are participating voluntarily. Adult learners come from a wide variety of backgrounds and prior learning experiences, so that as adults, we are always seeking to integrate the new concepts and ideas that we are introduced to

with our prior knowledge. Adult learners also desire practical applications of the learning to make it meaningful for themselves.

From cognitive science, we can summarize into these six principles of knowledge acquisition the needs of brains that optimize our learning, and these are generally accepted to be the case for most learners.

Six Principle of Knowledge Acquisition

1. Learning requires time, effort and motivation
2. Concentration spans are short
3. Distributed practice is more effective than massed practice or cramming
4. Prior knowledge effects are powerful
5. Our minds respond well to multimedia input
6. To learn, our minds have to be active

(Hattie, J. and Yates, G. (2014). Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn, Routledge: New York)

Connecting our instruction

We want to make sure that we plan our instruction to fit with how people learn, as described in the previous section. The following is a summary of seven principles of good practice for teaching adults and they are especially relevant for teaching at BCIT. They describe effective practices of instructors who have connected what they do in their teaching to what their learners need for an effective learning experience.

Seven Principles of Good Practice for Teaching Adults

1. Good practice encourages contact between students and instructors.
2. Good practice develops rapport and cooperation among students
3. Good practice uses active learning techniques
4. Good practice gives prompt feedback
5. Good practice emphasizes time on task
6. Good practice communicates high expectations
7. Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning

(Compiled in a study by Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson)

Taking the idea of seven principles for effective teaching one step further, some of the developers of the Community of Inquiry have created seven principles for building a community of inquiry specifically for online and blended learning environments.

Seven principles for Building a Community of Inquiry

1. Plan for the creation of open communication and trust.
2. Plan for critical reflection and discourse.
3. Establish community and cohesion.
4. Establish inquiry dynamics (purposeful inquiry).
5. Sustain respect and responsibility.
6. Sustain inquiry that moves to resolution.
7. Ensure assessment is congruent with intended processes and outcomes.

(Vaughn, N., Cleveland-Innes, M., Garrison, R. (2013) Teaching in Blended Learning Environments[1])

For this section, we narrow in specifically on instructional strategies that depend upon communication, and the use of communication tools in the online environment.

The affordances of online digital technologies enable us to reduce the transactional distance in traditional correspondence courses when used—specifically, the various communication-oriented technologies such as discussion forums, web-conferencing technologies, News items, and push emails from within the LMS. The planned and sustainable use of these features promote Teaching Presence, Social Presence and facilitate learning (enabling Cognitive Presence). Promoting online interaction across space and time facilitates learning engagement in the course by tapping into and provoking key motivational elements.

The planned and sustainable use of these communication tools are best matched with instructional strategies that promote discussion and collaboration, where these specific technologies gird the activities and assessment strategies to achieve that outcomes that are best attained via discussion and collaboration.

We merely summarize these instructional strategies and relate them to teaching online (and instructional strategies are the focus of POLY 1010 Instructional Strategies). The main instructional strategies we will briefly review are:

- direct instruction,
- cooperative & collaborative learning,
- learning through discussion, and
- experiential learning.

1. https://read.aupress.ca/read/teaching-in-blended-learning-environments/section/ac46044a-ecde-4fc4-846d-8c17fe8bf712

Our approach is that the above are strategies that are not mutually exclusive of each other – each are strategies that you can combine into one learning event, for example. But for the purposes of concentrating on teaching strategies that adapt well to the affordances of online, we would like to highlight their features.

But before getting started on those, we want to introduce the notion of having a facilitative mind-set and employing tangible facilitation skills to your teaching, no matter how, what or where you teach.

A. Facilitative Approach

- Good communication skills,
- asking "good" questions,
- being sensitive to the needs of participants, and
- ensuring a safe environment for risk-taking and participation

… these are all qualities that lean on our facilitation skills. Facilitation of online discourse is one of the areas where you project your Teaching Presence.

In other Units we use the term facilitation in a general/global sense, where you are guiding your students through your course elements during the time they are in your course—where you welcome them, introduce yourself and encourage them to introduce themselves, use icebreakers, communicate regularly with them about expectations and requirements, for example. But we also want to examine the key element to the meaning of facilitation in a teaching context, which is the facilitation of online discourse.

Facilitating Online Discourse

Opportunities for students to interact—with you, with other student, with the learning—increases their engagement with the course, which in turn motivates them to persist. The Community of Inquiry accounts for Social Presence in addition to Teaching and Cognitive Presences as a key element of successful online learning. And a primary means for social interaction is learning through social discourse. It is for this reason that practicing your facilitation skills in synchronous and asynchronous formats is the basis of many instructional skills workshops: to develop or further enhance your skills by facilitating discourse in synchronous and asynchronous online environments.

Asking good questions is the place to start with a facilitative

mindset. Asking questions and making the space for students to answer is a key shift in the moving from a lecturing instructor to a learning facilitator. When you as an expert ask questions, you are signalling to students what's important. Asking questions in either discussions or in giving feedback can help learners clarify what they know and what they think, as well as assess what they do not know. It promotes learners going to a deeper level of analysis and reflection. And asking good questions helps shifts the responsibility for learning onto students and affirms the instructor's role in facilitating discourse as that of guiding student learning. We are going to talk more about creating and using questions to facilitate learning in Unit 4 and especially in Unit 5.

Responding to the Changing Course Dynamic

Another more subtle skill we employ when we take a facilitative approach to online teaching is being able to adapt to the changing dynamic of a course's delivery. A course has a beginning, middle and end, and there are different duties that we perform in our roles as facilitators that are linked to students' success at the different stages in an online course.

Here's one description of how our roles and that of our students can evolve (we have already seen this table in Unit 1):

Stage	Students' Roles	Instructor's Roles
Stage 1: Access and motivation	Getting into the course: successfully logging on	Encouraging, welcoming Clarifying role of conference
Stage 2: Online socialization	Moving beyond browsing the learning environment to feel at home	Creating an atmosphere where people feel respected. May include contacting individuals by email or responding to their postings as they "arrive" (or fail to) in the conferencing spaces
Stage 3: Information exchange	Deal with potential information overload. Work at finding information online. Discuss content and issues in the conference area	Present linkages in interesting ways. Ensure that contributions are not lost or ignored.
Stage 4: Knowledge construction	Begin to analyze/interpret what they are learning. Experience different perspectives. Become authors, based on their own reading and personal experience, not just transmitters of facts	Begin to move out of the way.Encourage critical thinking.
Stage 5: Development	Experienced participants may share the moderator's role. May challenge position of moderator. Take responsibility for own learning. Clearly demonstrate critical thinking. Often reflect critically on role of the technology in learning, as well as on topic area	Be prepared for challenges from participants. Don't interfere too much with discussion, but don't become obviously absent either

(Based on Salmon, G. (2000) E-moderating: The key to teaching and learning)

Creating a Sense of Learning Community Instructor's Role:

Creating a welcoming atmosphere

Hospitality — a sense that we are welcome to participate — is a foundation of creating dialogue. When new students arrive in an online conferencing space, there are none of the physical signs that can suggest a safe and hospitable environment; no tables to arrange in a circle, for example. Posting your own autobiography, and including in it some mention of your life outside the class, is one way to create that sense of hospitality.

An important step in creating a safe space is to make it clear to students that it is a space for their participation, and that they will spend time there with others. Many instructors ask students to post a biography as their first assignment: doing this helps to establish a sense of shared space.

Creating opportunities for social interaction and dialogue

Course moderating takes place in both a social and professional context. As the facilitator and instructor, you also have a role as "good host" in the discussion forms. A warm social atmosphere, within limits, encourages enthusiasm for the course.

Modeling participation

Your postings in discussion forums provide participants with examples of professional, courteous dialogue. When in your postings you refer to and build on others' contributions, you model to students the idea of paying attention to each other's thoughts.

Your presence encourages others to participate, often boosting the perceived value of the discussion forum. This is especially true in the early stages of a class.

Your participation establishes your virtual presence as the class instructor.

Encouraging participation

If dialogue and discussion are a significant part of the course, you will want to be sure that everyone is participating. Methods to boost participation in online learning is a key theme in this unit, as well as Unit 4 and Unit 5.

Setting limits

As moderator and instructor, it is your responsibility to ensure that discussion remains respectful and professional. Modeling appropriate dialogue is one aspect of this.

You may wish to include a definition of the type of dialogue you expect within the course in the course outline, or a "how this course works" section.

Consider holding an early discussion with students on their expectations for online dialogue. If postings do not conform to the class expectations, speak to the student who made them directly. Some instructors prefer to talk to the student synchronously, in person, by phone, or by web-conferencing. E-mail allows you and the student to discuss the issue privately.

Posing questions

Especially important in Stages 3 and 4, posing questions can be used

to begin discussions, re-focus discussions and ask for clarification of points that have confused other participants, and to encourage participation.

Deepening the dialogue

Your role is to push the dialogue/discussion towards a deeper, more meaningful exploration of the materials by re-focusing discussion, reinforcing and identifying significant themes for inquiry, and building on students' contribution.

Encouraging Participation – Student Roles

Increasing participation

Depending on the reason students may have for not participating, you may be able to assess the situation and come up with mitigating strategies:

Lost or lurking?

Participants might not be posting because they're reading what others are posting but not contributing themselves — "lurking" in the online world. On the other hand, they might not be posting because they have not been able to access the discussion forum. If someone has not participated, send an e-mail or call them to ensure they have access.

Marks

Most instructors award at least some marks for participation in discussion spaces. Decide early on how you will deal with "I agree" posts. Will they "count" for participation marks? We address assessment and participation later in this unit, as well as in Unit 4 and Unit 5.

Clarify expectations

Requiring substantive contributions from participants reduces lurking. What are you asking your student for? Opinions? Reference to readings? A tie-in to personal experience? This should be clear in your question or discussion-starter.

Instructions for participation can vary depending on the stage of the class. In the beginning, provide detailed, specific instructions, and then later, loosen the requirements as participation takes off. For example, in Week 2, you may write: "In the discussion forum, post a response to the question. Your response should be no more than 100 words in length, and should make reference to at least one of the readings. Once you have posted your own response, comment on one or two of your classmates' responses." By week 13, your instructions may be, "Post your responses in the discussion forum."

Creating a social space

Many online courses at BCIT always include a "water cooler" – a special forum where students are encouraged to converse about things not related, or only tangentially related, to course materials. This is where people can talk about the arrival of new babies, discuss their job searches or mutter about workload – the same kinds of conversation we expect to have with colleagues at coffee break,

or with classmates in a face-to-face class. A designated forum encourages students to have this kind of conversation, building the sense of community in the class. A dedicated forum can also help keep a professional focus in the class forums.

Much of how we have structured our discussion in this book is based on this idea that our roles and the corresponding tasks we perform as instructors shift and change and are responsive to the needs of our students at the various stages of the life of a course. Think of a course as a journey, and like a journey, students complete it different from when they entered (hopefully), based on their interactions with the learning, with you, with other students, and with themselves, regardless of how successful they may be on their assignments.

Facilitation is a huge skillset and the goal here has only been to make the point that it is an approach that works well in the online teaching environment, regardless of the design or specific pedagogies of your teaching domain.

A. Learning through Direct Instruction

Students become aware of your Teaching Presence through direct instruction techniques. Direct instruction can be described as:

> "… educational leadership that provides disciplinary focus and structure or scaffolding but also offers choice and opportunity for students to assume responsibility for their learning. This instruction is more than a 'guide on the side' but less than 'a sage on the stage'. It is an approach whereby learning is socially shared. This is the path to a meaningful, systematic, and worthwhile educational experience" (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008).

Learning through direct instruction means creating structure and deliberately designing opportunities for engagement at the right moments. If you have taken the Instructional Skills Workshop or a similar workshop, you would have learned a model called the "BOPPPS": this is an example of a structure that supports direct instruction.

Typically, Direct Instruction involves the following four phases:

1. Presentation Phase

- Review: of previous material and/or pre-requisite skills
- What: what is to be learned
- Why: why it is important

- Explanation: of the topics and/or skills
- Probe & Respond: where instructor informally checks students' initial understandings.

2. Practice Phase

- Guided practice: where students practice new concept/skill under instructor's supervision.
- Independent practice: where students practice new concept/skill independently.
- Periodic Review: where, during instructor probes, guided practice or independent practice, students review topics/skills they've already learned.

3. Assessment & Evaluation Phase

- Formative Assessment: using the information from teacher probes, guided practice or independent practice, or using additional assessments (eg. quizzes and assignments) the instructor determines if students have learned the topic/skill or require further instruction
- Summative Assessment: the instructor gathers summative assessment data to see if students have acquired the topic/skill.

4. Monitoring & Feedback continuously through three phases on an as-needed basis

- Cues & Prompts: instructors use cues to hint at what's important, while using prompts during student demonstration of learning and during

guided practice; both provide scaffolding to students during their learning phase.

- Corrective Feedback: done whenever the instructor has made an assessment of student learning at any point during the lesson.

(summarized from Huitt, W.G., Monetti, D.M., & Hummel, J.H. (2009) 'Direct Approach to Instruction' in Riegeluth & Carr-Chellman, Instructional Design Theories & Models III. Pg.73-97)

These should sound familiar, as these phases are parallel to the instructional models we discussed in the section on Cognitive Presence in Unit 1.

A. Learning through Discussion

Using Learning through Discussion as a teaching technique requires planning, and it requires skillful implementation. But the effort you put into planning and facilitating a discussion activity is worth it in terms of the pay-off for student learning: discussion engages students in active learning.

Effective discussions do not result because of chance. They result because you, as the instructor, prepare and structure your course in such a way to facilitate effective discussion. Discussion can be in pairs, with two students talking to each other. Discussion can be small groups of students interacting. And discussion can be an entire class discussion with the instructor facilitating the conversation among all the students in the class at the same time.

> Appropriate outcomes that support achievement via discussion and collaboration, are "learning situations where in-depth exploration of topics, interactions of ideas and people from multiple perspectives are valued, or in settings where developing strengths in analysis or critical thinking within a community are important. Circumstances not well suited for discussion teaching include those where building a specific knowledge base or broadening a base of knowledge through presenting material or sharing information is the primary focus." (p.103)
>
> A good way to test whether or not your outcome is

suitable as a discussion activity is to create a discussion question and decide if it has a right and wrong answer, or if it has multiple potential answers, the latter being a good candidate, and the former not.

Learning through discussion methods work best in learning environments that:

- values active student learning and participation
- values respecting different perspectives
- values collaboration and democratic processes
- values questioning, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills
- values creating a community of learners
- life experiences are inseparable from learning
- values empowering learners
- values inclusivity and participatory

In addition to the basic lesson structure you might use for direct instruction (eg. the BOPPPS model) the following are pedagogical features of discussion approaches to instruction:

1. "Shared responsibility: Discussion teaching should shift the instructor-centred approach to one of shared responsibility for learning between instructors and students"
2. "Collaboration and multiple perspectives: Discussion teaching should create a climate of collaboration and respect for multiple perspectives and worldviews to be heard"
3. "Instructor competencies: The discussion teaching instructor should have competency in

the discipline and skills in facilitating groups."

4. "Life experiences: In discussion teaching, life experiences of the students should be acknowledged and utilized in the learning process."
5. "Activities for higher learning: Discussion teaching should include listening, reflecting, responding and linking as essential activities in promoting higher learning."
6. "Democratic learning community: Discussion teaching should promote a more democratic learning community."
7. "Physical environment: Discussion teaching should be used in a physical environment that accommodates the interactions necessary in this type of learning" (p105-108)

(Summarized and quoted from Gibbon, J.T. (2009) Discussion Approaches to Instruction, in Riegeluth & Carr-Chellman, Instructional Design Theories & Models III. Pg.99-116)

Some classroom management issues identified with using Learning through Discussion that apply no matter if it's in the classroom, online in a web-conferencing session or online in asynchronous discussion forums are:

1. A very small number of students have a tendency to do the vast majority of the speaking. Planning discussions in ways that enable all students to participate in a safe and non-threatening way overcomes this challenge.
2. Students might appear to be paying attention but they also

might be multitasking at the same time. A challenge is to engage their full attention.

These are basic discussion techniques that apply face-to-face, in web conferences and in discussion forums:

1. **Think-Pair-Share**: A Think-Pair-Share works very simply. For starters, you give students a minute to maybe two minutes to write and reflect in response to a question you ask them. This is the think portion of Think-Pair- Share. It's important that you ask a question that can be examined from multiple perspectives. Then you pair students up. Every student is talking to another student, sharing their thoughts in response to the question. And finally you ask for a person from each pair to report out to the group; conversely, you could ask for volunteers to share.
2. **Small group discussion:** particularly for large classes, breaking up session to have small group discussions provides opportunities for more shy students to engage without having to speak in front of the entire class. Further, you could organize students into ongoing teams for the duration of the course, which has the added benefit of creating a sense of community and belonging even when the course has large numbers of students enrolled. This sense of community also creates positive peer-pressure to be prepared for the discussion by completing reading assignments and to engage in the conversation.
3. **Limit the dominant speakers by asking others to share.** You could ask, 'I want to hear from someone who hasn't spoken up yet'. Doing so signals to the dominant speakers they might be taking too much responsibility for the discussion. And often the dominant talkers are aware that they tend to speak first and appreciate the cue that it is time to allow others to speak. In the same way, introverted students appreciate the invitation and opportunity to speak without having to jump in

immediately before a dominant talker speaks.

When you are planning a discussion, remember to define the goals of the discussion. What kind of discussion prompt would best support the stated learning outcomes? And consider the kind of discussion you would like to have. For example, is it a brainstorming session, a debriefing or a reflection after a learning experience, or will you be asking students to apply new skills or knowledge by posing problems?

A. Learning through Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

Collaborative learning (also called cooperative learning and team-based learning) specifically refers to instructional strategies that require students to work together in small groups towards a shared goal or deliverable. Working together towards the completion of the shared goal or deliverable is at the core of cooperative and collaborative learning activities.

Group and team-based activities grow Social Presence in the online course and foster the sharing of skills and the co-construction of knowledge. By having a shared goal, students have a tangible purpose for collaborating with peers. They are motivated to engage with others in a constructive activity, making cooperative and collaborative activities high contributors to student engagement with an online course.

Common examples of cooperative and collaborative learning activities are project-based learning and case-based learning, among others. The key is that students work in groups and groups are working towards a common goal, based on learning tasks and, often, a deliverable.

Your instructional role changes over the course of the activity. Your main roles are:

1. **Planning & Preparation** before the course
2. **Explaining tasks and giving directions** at the beginning of the activity
3. **Monitoring and Intervening** during the activity
4. **Evaluating** both during and after the activity

As students progress through a team-based activity, they learn and develop confidence in the course environment, understand the nature of participation expected and required, and, hopefully, take leadership roles in team activities. With appropriate facilitator support, they will also develop their skills at working together to accomplish targeted goals. When you design team-based and collaborative activities for the online environment, you should also ensure that you include:

- **The timeframe for completion:** as for face-to-face classes, collaborative learning takes place over time. Determine how much time your activity requires, and then add more time to account for the synchronicity of the online environment.
- **Where will teams meet:** will you require teams to meet in digital spaces that are part of the course, such as in discussion forums and/or breakout rooms in the web conferencing tool? Or will you suggest that student teams determine that themselves?
- **What you will be assessing:** online discussion forums make group work visible in the online environment and you will be able to see how groups are functioning. If the process of completing the deliverable/goal is as important as the deliverable/goal itself, consider having groups work in discussion forums.

Determining the degree of your instructional presence is an ongoing challenge as the needs of online teams change as they move through both an activity as well as a course. Facilitator interventions may include monitoring and responding to the direction of online groupwork and discussion and modelling positive ways of posing challenging, thought-provoking questions.

Team learning or online group projects present challenges just as they do in the face-to-face environment. In an online course, group dynamics, communication, and conflict can be difficult to discern. Generally, people are quite polite in online teamwork; however,

there can be sub-currents that can inhibit the group's effectiveness to work cohesively. Letting students know that you are ready to listen and to intervene as needed maintains your presence in student-centred activities.

"The key to successful group work is to ensure:

- The project and deliverables are clearly defined.
- Team rules are agreed to and maintained

1. **Planning:** Careful planning and alignment with learning outcomes can ensure successful group work.
2. **Criteria for success:** Provide explicit criteria for success – check that students understand the goals of the project and how you intend them to be achieved.
3. **Teamwork skills:** Allocate time for the development and management of teamwork skills – ask students to create a team contract right from the start, make this one of the project outcomes.
4. **Interdependence:** Create interdependence – make sure the group project goals necessitate the sharing of knowledge, skills, resources and goals.
5. **Recognize individual contributions:** Ensure individual contributions are recognised. Have an individual as well as a group grade or create a related assignment that captures an individual's learning from the project."

(Quoted from Farrell, O., Brunton, J., Ní Shé, C.,

Costello, E., (2021). #Openteach: Professional Development for Open Online Educators. Dublin: #Openteach Project. 10.5281/zenodo.4599620)

A. Learning through Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is essentially learning experiences where instructors purposefully engage with learners in direct, authentic experience and facilitate focused reflection in order to increase student knowledge and develop skills. While we often first think of experiential learning as being the same as "hands-on", this is not quite true. The key aspect is that we enable students to have the same or near-same kind of experience that reflects the real-world environment, and then work with them through a cycle of reflection to enable their learning from the experience. What that experience is could range from thinking through a real-world case study to a truly hands-on activity. Thinking through a case-study can be achieved entirely online, while a truly hands-on activity using specialized equipment cannot.

Many educators had to adapt their classroom-based experiential learning activities to fit within the online environment during the switch to remote teaching during the pandemic. In doing so, many had to modify the authentic experiential aspect so that it became more of a simulation. However, they also found asynchronous and synchronous online formats worked well for the reflection phase of the activity. With the return to in-person learning, some instructors have developed a blended approach, where hands-on experiential aspect remains on campus, but the framing and reflective aspects take place online.

The typical instructional cycle for an experiential learning activity is summarized here:

1. Framing the Experience

    - Defining instructional objectives
    - Communicating criteria for assessment
    - Formally defining the social structure (relationship to peers, the instructor, and the environment
    - Setting expectations regarding behaviour of the participants

2. Activating the Experience

    - Authentic experience: be authentic to the practice environment
    - Making decisions for authentic outcomes: where the learner has the opportunity to make decisions reflective of the practice environment
    - Problem orientation: the experience is centred on a core issue, problem or situation
    - Optimal difficulty: be difficult enough to challenge the student

3. Reflecting on the Experience

    - Instructor facilitation: prompts reflection
    - Community-building: via communicating the equality of the participants, and their active role in providing feedback to each other, including the instructor
    - Process: asking:

1. What happened?
2. Why it happened?
3. What was learned?
4. How to apply it to future experiences?

(Summarized and quoted from Lindsey, L. & Berger, N. (2009) Experiential Approaches to Instruction, in Riegeluth & Carr-Chellman, Instructional Design Theories & Models III. Pg.117-142)

A. Assessing Collaborative, Experiential and Discussion-based Learning

What makes a good online discussion that facilitates learning? How do you know it when you see it?

In an online course, there are endless options for assessment; for the purposes of this workshop, we will be focusing on assessing learning within synchronous and asynchronous activities. As you can probably imagine, online discussion activities seem at first to be difficult to assess as they rely upon subjective assessment. However, we can use performance assessments to make transparent to students the elements that we are looking for in their efforts. This section will explain how you can do that.

Much can be said about assessing learners; however, it is our intention to provide laser-like focus to this section. We concentrate on assessing learners in the context of collaborative, experiential and discussion-based learning activities. The synchronous and asynchronous affordances that online discussion forums and web-conferencing tools provide make student-to-student interactions easy. Online learning makes it possible to design learning activities that encourage students to engage with each other using these tools. Our role as instructors, then, is to how best to provide students with meaningful feedback as we engage these tools to facilitate their learning.

And of primary of importance to note: it's important that participants know how they will be evaluated up front. This means you must determine how you will rate or measure contributions and communicate this information to participants at the start of the course or activity.

Feedback as an Example of Teaching Presence

Giving feedback on assignments is a critical part of the direct instruction component of teaching presence. It provides a natural opportunity for one-to-one teaching presence while supporting student learning. And remember, feedback does not equal grades: what kinds of channels can you open up with your learners where you can provide them informal feedback that is timely and actionable for your learners?

Effective feedback can be described as

- a mutual process involving both student and instructor
- providing constructive guidance that builds confidence
- guiding through explicit expectations and ongoing coaching
- meeting mutually established timelines
- being applicable to future situations

In an online course it is important for students to get frequent feedback on how they are doing. Are they learning what they are supposed to be learning? Are they achieving the learning outcomes? The most effective way to ensure that students get the feedback they need to stay on track is through a comprehensive, balanced assessment strategy that includes both formative and summative assessments. You can even

have students provide peer feedback if you supervise it well.

There are several ways to provide feedback in an online learning management system, such as the Learning Hub: **individual** written, audio, or video feedback or via an Inbox message; **group** feedback in the group space via a group announcement or discussion forum; and **aggregated** class feedback via whole class announcements or discussion forums.

However you choose to provide feedback, it is important that the feedback be provided in a timely manner and that it include specific suggestions for improvement.

(This section has been modified from Types of Presence: Teaching Presence[1] an is offered under a CC Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike)

The Goal of Assessment

Let's start at the beginning by considering what is the goal of assessment in our learning environments. Very simply: the goal of assessment is to evaluate participants' learning, and give them feedback on their progress toward learning outcomes. All

1. https://canvas.ucdavis.edu/courses/34528/pages/types-of-presence-teaching-presence?module_item_id=5003

assessments must be fair and consistent. This means that all students are assessed in an open and straightforward manner: no tricks or hidden agendas, or different applications of the rules to different students.

What we are asking you to do is to think about the choices and rationale that you make when you design and create your course's learning assessments. In an online course, we must be more deliberate in planning for assessment and planning in advance. Determining how the various evaluation activities work together in your course go a long way in ensuring that:

- the timing of the assessment is fair. Students are ready for the assessment based on the work that has preceded it.
- the scope of the assessment is fair. The assessment is aligned with the learning outcomes of your course, in terms of both breadth as well as level of achievement.
- the conditions of the assessment is fair. You have scheduled assessments over your course so that students have time to complete them, and to ensure they have access to the resources to complete them.
- students benefit from formative feedback during the delivery of the course so that they may have the chance to apply what they have learned from the feedback to subsequent assessments. Planning and scheduling assessments in advance ensure that your online students have a chance to identify errors in their understanding and learn from their earlier mistakes so that they may then be able to turn around and apply their revised understanding.

Sometimes facilitators equate "being fair" with "being objective." In many cases, though, it is impossible to eliminate the subjective element. The learning you are evaluating does not always lend itself to clear-cut yes or no answers–a requirement for completely "objective" grading. However, subjectivity is not, in itself, a bad thing. It is what allows you latitude to use your own knowledge and

experience—the knowledge and experience that you draw on every day as a facilitator and in your other work—to help people become more proficient. The important thing is using fair, consistent criteria to help you evaluate and assess.

Key take-aways:

- Focus on what's important (what will make a difference to student knowledge, understanding and performance in the future).
- Feedback is a conversation. Foster a supportive environment where this conversation can flourish.
- Focus on the actionability of the feedback you give.

Assessing for Evidence of Student Learning

When you are planning and designing online learning activities, you have the choice of including individual or group assignments. There are times when an individual assignment is the best choice. Individual assignments give you an opportunity to evaluate each participant's mastery of the competency being learned. At other times, group work can be more useful; it can enhance learning to have participants work together to learn from each other. Group assignments do save you from having to review individual assignments; however, it is rarely a time-saver, since they tend to be large and more complex.

Whether the assignment is an individual or group effort, the process of evaluation is the same. Your goal is to ensure that participants have demonstrated their mastery of learning outcomes measured by the assignment. In doing this, you want to be fair and consistent with everyone. A systematic, analytic approach can help you do this.

Develop Learning Outcomes

To assess a participant, the first step is to clearly define and state what it is the participant must be able to "do." These statements have various names: learning objectives, performance objectives, and learning outcomes. (We shall use the term "learning outcome.") Learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills and/or attitudes the learner is expected to have when they have completed the course, lesson, or program. It is a good exercise to construct a learning outcome, and then set the criteria to measure it. Doing this will help you focus on the critically important components of participant assignments when you begin marking them: that which is stated in the outcome should be what you are evaluating.

Clearly stated learning outcomes allow you, as the facilitator, to have clear criteria against which to measure participants and provide feedback. Clear outcomes also inform participants of how they will be measured. Your role is to help participants acquire skills and knowledge that will help them on the job. By providing feedback on how they are doing, you help them focus on areas where they need to improve to meet the learning outcomes.

Create Marking Criteria

Set Criteria

In order to assign a mark, even with a pass/fail type of assessment, you need to set criteria for measuring participants' success at achieving the learning outcomes. Marking criteria are sometimes referred to as rubrics, marking guides, marking scales, marking schemes, or scoring schemes. The important issue is not the name, but how well the criteria are developed so as to be fair and consistent. Established criteria will help participants self assess and give them guidance as to what is expected for a given grade.

When you develop scales for your own courses, you can set the marking scale to whatever makes sense. For example, you can use a one to five scale (excellent, above average, acceptable, unacceptable) or a pass/fail scheme.

What's important is using it consistently.

Establish Measurement Scales

Before you can evaluate discussion contributions you need to develop criteria against which you can measure them. Developing criteria is easier if you have specific learning outcomes to work from. One form of measurement is a Likert scale. These scales are usually designed on a 1-4 or 1-5 value scale: 1 is the top level and 4 or 5 is an unacceptable level of work.

The analytic approach means that before you begin marking each assignment you determine what should be in each response, and then apply that determination to each of the assignments you mark.

For example, if you are going to assess your students' efforts in a discussion forum, you might follow these steps:

Step 1: Create (or identify) an ideal response.

- An ideal response might be one that you and experts in your field would consider excellent or really, really good. Crafting an ideal response means asking yourself what 'excellent' looks like.
- An "ideal" response is one to which you would assign a grade of 9–Response Meets Expectations. (You may choose to challenge learners to add more detail and ultimately exceed expectations. That's your choice. Learners, though, must have the option of doing what is required and nothing extra.)

Step 2: Analyze the components of the ideal response.

- You may find it easiest to list what is required in the form of

questions to be answered.

Step 3: Determine what absolutely must be present for the response to be satisfactory, and what can be missing or partially present.

- If a critical component is missing, then the response will be incomplete.

Step 4: Read responses and assign points.

A special note about Assessing Participation:

Participation is not attendance, we don't give marks just for showing up. Maybe it's better to call it "Contributions" rather than "Participation" in order to escape the trap that we sometimes fall into which is trying to justify marks when a student has done nothing other than be present.

And if you decide to assess student contributions, use the four steps above to determine your marking rubric. Doing so not just makes the assessment more transparent, it also highlights to everyone that just showing up is not enough.

A. Designing Assessment Schemes for Online Discussions

There are several ways to evaluate online discussion contributions:

- **Include an outcome that requires participation in discussions to achieve.** Having an outcome will help you identify criteria for participation. Skills related to teamwork, for example, lend themselves well to participation-based outcomes and can be combined with co-operative learning techniques.
- **Require a set quantity of posts per week or per lesson.** Award participation marks if the target is met. The advantage of this approach is the ease with which it can be done; the difficulty is that it encourages shallow discussion.
- **Reward a combination of quality and quantity.** For example, work on a four-point scale: assign one mark for posting, one for achieving the deadline, one for the post's relationship to the topic, and one for drawing on other responses. Or, alternately, award two possible marks for each post as follows:

  0 = no posts
  0.5 = no interaction with others' ideas in posting
  1 = post builds on the ideas of 1-2 others
  2 = post builds on multiple views, forming a basis for reflection by others

- **Require a set number of posts to meet a set quality**. For example, require at least three posts per week, one of which must make reference to another participant's posts, one of which must make reference to course reading, and one of

which must relate to personal experience. This can be administratively difficult to keep track of. You may require participants to keep track of their own success in meeting this objective and send you a log at the end of term.

- **Require participants to critique their own posts**. As an assignment, ask them to identify the post they found the most satisfying and explain why. Ask, "How did your post deepen the discussion? Did it bring in new or challenging materials that were then considered by others?" Ask participants to consider the value of their own contribution. You may wish to have them assign themselves a mark for participation based on this contribution and make their self-assigned mark part of the marks for participation.

Here is a simple example of a rubric that assesses student work in a discussion forum:

Rating	Own Opinion	Response to Others
Exceeds Expectations	Comments show reflection on one's own experiences and that lessons that can be applied to future activities have been learned.	Comments show that the responder has understood the writer and reflected on the comment in an appropriate and supportive way.
Meets Expectations	Comments show reflection on one's own experiences.	Comments show that the responder has understood the writer and reflected on the comment.
Incomplete	Responder makes only a superficial statement(s).	Responder makes only a brief, unsubstantial comment such as "Good point" or "I agree" without any elaboration.

A. Assessment of Group Assignments

With group assignments, assessment is done on two levels: the group product/deliverable (be it a case study or report), and the individual contribution of each member of the group. As a facilitator, your role is to guide participants in their roles and set guidelines for individual and group participation. Once the guidelines are in place, individual contributions to the group project can be self assessed, or each group member can assess all group members.

Getting Buy-in on Group Work

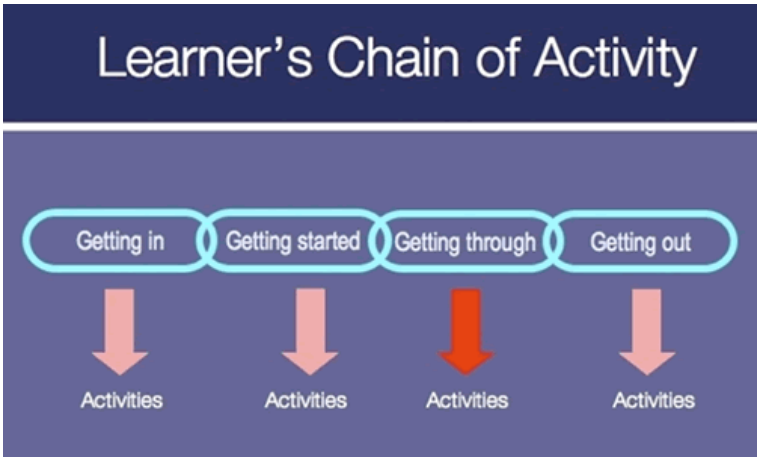
Many learners are wary of group projects because they fear not all group members will contribute equally. One of the most effective ways to get buy-in from the participants is to have them create the guidelines of how participants should contribute to a group project. This can be done in a discussion, with some suggested criteria to get them started. Ask the group what they think is a reasonable level of contribution to an online discussion or collaborative project. Once you have their ideas, you can use this as part of your evaluation of contributions. These could also be included in a scheme that members evaluate each other in a group.

B. Assigning Tasks and Providing Support

If you consider teaching, all teaching, in a holistic sense, these categories of delivering content & sharing expertise, giving feedback, providing support and assigning tasks are artificial. However, they prove to be useful when we attempt to map the various roles we have and the activities we do as instructors to the online spaces and digital tools we have available to us.

Irrespective of these seemingly artificial categories, and of whether the course is in-person or online, a course has a beginning, a middle and an end. We can map what we do in terms of providing support and assigning tasks to what our students' needs are at a particular stage in our course.

This section is organized based on the learner chain of activity as a way to integrate activities providing support and assigning tasks.



We can support learners in their journey through our courses

at each link in this chain and our efforts in doing so as online facilitators align with principles of good teaching practice. These methods help to create and maintain a supportive learning environment.

B. Before the Course Starts: Designing the Course

Examples of instructor activities:

Add a Course Overview/Course Introduction/How to Do this Course section.

When we are delivering part or the entire course online, the dispersal of learners and instructors across space and time can lead to a sense of isolation and sometimes students find themselves trying to figure out and guess what they are expected to do on their own, because the friendly, helpful, guiding voice of their instructor is somehow absent.

To avoid students feeling lost in your course, ensure that the following elements are included in that section:

1. Explain relevance of course
2. How course fits into overall program
3. Topics that will be studied
4. What is unique and relevant
5. How delivered
6. What to expect
7. Support available
8. Teaching details
9. Learning outcomes
10. Timelines /schedules/ Course Syllabus
11. Assessments and deadlines
12. What is online and what is face-to-face, and the rationale if feasible
13. Technologies used in this course and where to get help

In particular, the benefits of taking the time to create number 10: Timelines/schedules/course syllabus, are:

- It maps the student's learning journey through your course; with enough detail to ensure that students can understand how one week's worth of learning experiences and activities feed into the next.
- Students can use it to manage their time, as well as clarify the course sequence, assessment timing and deadlines, and participation expectations.
- It sets upfront information and schedules around synchronous, asynchronous and collaboration

B. Before the Course Starts: Getting In

Examples of instructor activities:

- Confirm student registration.
- Identify important deadlines.
- Confirm that all of the course components are present and up-to-date.
- Ensure that course materials such as textbooks, manuals, and equipment are sent.
- Upload/edit the schedule.
- Clearly articulate assignment expectations and due dates. Consider providing a rubric that shows what you are looking for and how marks will be assigned.
- State how assignments should be submitted (e.g., via Dropbox or email).
- Clearly state evaluation and exam expectations, as well as due dates.
- Ensure that there is introductory content such as a 'Course overview', 'How to succeed in the course', 'Instructor contact information', 'How to get technical help' …
- Ensure that all links and other online resources work as expected.
- Consider creating an introductory video: a video of you helps them "see" who will be teaching and guiding them through the course and sets the tone as well as the expectations of the course, makes expectations transparent and easy to find, brings things to the surface.

B. At the Beginning of the Course: Getting Started

Examples of instructor activities:

- Send a 'Welcome to the course' communication to the students by email, news, or discussion board. This message should be welcoming and set a tone.
- Provide an activity, such as a discussion forum, for students to introduce themselves and to get to know each other.
- Follow through with student management (who's in, who's out, follow up).
- As needed, establish student groups for projects.
- Send messages or set calendar or news items for things like times for group discussion forums, assignment due dates, exam dates and times.
- Create a Getting Started/How to do this course module
- Use News for information
- Have your students post a greeting, introduction, goals, in a forum
- Learn about your students using a survey in the Survey tool
- Post a welcome message of yourself, text, picture, audio, video, to help them get a sense of you
- Use the Calendar for upcoming scheduled sessions and assignment due dates
- Get to know your learners by asking them specific questions in a survey or to send to you by email. Ask them about their background and context to help you tailor the course as feasible.

B. During the Middle of the Course: Getting Through

Examples of instructor activities:

- Solicit learners' expectations and state how you will meet those expectations or let them know what is not possible or reasonable to expect.
- Have a clearly mapped out plan of when key communications are required throughout the course and what information these communications should contain
- Respond in a timely manner to queries, in a time frame that is consistent with what is stated (e.g., within 24 hours on a weekday).
- Be present on the discussion forums.
- Provide thoughtful, detailed, and clear feedback on assignments. This can be written or an audio recording. (Audio recordings can be faster to create than writing text and also provide the advantage of students being able to hear your tone of voice.)
- State how assignments should be submitted, such as via email or the Learning Hub's Assignment tool, for example.
- Return assignments in a reasonable amount of time.
- Provide encouragement, ideas to help address workload issues, etc…
- Consider phoning each student to provide "human" contact. Doing this early in the course helps
- Use a schedule, share it with your students at the beginning, and stick to it, and if not, ensure that you are always communicating with them the changes
- Using a mid-point evaluation for you as instructor using Survey tool in the Learning Hub

- Provide frequent and timely feedback by offering frequent assessments and getting your marking done
- Add opportunities for feedback with self-quizzes, peer feedback, rubric self-evaluations
- Use the Discussion Forums or the Virtual Classroom for unstructured contact time: open-ended questions, Office Hours
- Harvest data from the Learning Hub: Classlist, Quizzes and shows that you care about them.
- Focus the discussion on specific issues
- Summarize the discussions
- Confirm understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback
- Diagnose misconceptions
- Inject knowledge from diverse sources
- Look for every possible opportunity to demonstrate to your students that you are human! In both the synchronous web conferencing tool, and in your assessment feedback, personalize your communications and show your care for their progress and well-being
- Monitor the discussion forums and watch for participation: who is absent; who is not following the rules regarding respectful communication; who is off-task
- Do what you say you are going to do

B. At the End of the Course: Getting Them Out

Examples of instructor activities:

- Final assignments are graded.
- Final exams are graded.
- Grades are submitted to Banner.
- Consider sending a closing email or news item.
- Grade exams and final assignments and provide feedback
- Have a concluding remark and best wishes statement
- Encourage students to share class experiences; for example, have a goodbye forum or live session.
- Review student feedback to make revisions aimed at boosting participation next time
- Review the statistics on your online Quizzes for questions that might need strengthening for the next time you teach the course

B. Managing your Workload: Consider Using a Teaching Calendar

Consider creating a teaching calendar for yourself in order to both keep track of tasks you need to do at key times in your course as well as to help manage your time.

In creating a teaching calendar, determine:

- what you do (Instructional Activities)
- when you do it (Schedule)
- how long do you spend on it (Time allotment)
- how much time do you have available to teach your online course each week?

Prioritize instructional time based on the potential impact on student learning experiences (and this includes giving prompt, timely feedback/marking on assessments). And think about batching instructional tasks: focus instructional attention on one activity at a time rather than jumping between tasks.

Here's an example of a 10 hour week:

		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Email, text	Check email & messages	5 min	5 min	5 min	5 min	5 min
	Course administration	10 min				
	Whole-class email outreach			10 min		
Chat, phone, videoconference	Individual outreach to students	30 min				30 min
Content development	Integration of learning resources		10 min		10 min	
	Personalize learning experience			10 min		10 min
	Course announcements	10 min				
Discussion facilitation	Discussion facilitation	15 min	15 min	30 min	30 min	60 min
Grading and feedback	Feedback on student submissions	60 min	60 min	60 min	30 min	
	Feedforward development					30 min

(Based on the work of Mandernach, B. (2020) How Can a Teaching Calendar Help Me Be More Effective and Efficient in the Online Classroom?. Magna Publications Inc.)

B. Promoting engagement in HyFlex Learning Environments

As we saw in Unit 2, HyFlex courses give students the option of attending the course in person, synchronously online, or asynchronously online. Students have the ability to choose their mode of attendance with flexibility each week and are not locked into the same format over the course of the semester. From an instructor's perspective, this means that you face multiple challenges:

- You are delivering your course at the same time to student both physically present as well as participating live online
- You need to ensure that students participating asynchronously who will access the learning resources outside of the synchronous time are served by what you have in the Learning Hub.

TechBuddies

One strategy to ensure student engagement is to create a TechBuddy program between your in-person students and the live and online students. TechBuddies connect with each other via the web conferencing software. The in-person TechBuddy ensures that the online TechBuddy can see and hear the session as well as support the online TechBuddy's participation, ensuring that their questions and input will be heard. And if feasible, the in-person TechBuddy can port the online TechBuddy to small group locations if you are planning group activities and which to have online and in-person work together.

Other suggestions for ensuring an engaging and supportive hyflex learning experience:

- provide presenter slides in advance
- do a "tech check" well in advance
- decide which channels you will use for communication with the online participants – the chat feature in the web conferencing software? A discussion forum in the online learning management system?
- provide reserved, front-and-centre seating for on-site tech buddies
- provide easy access to power outlets for on-site tech buddies

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UNIT IV

UNIT 4 PLANNING AND FACILITATING EFFECTIVE SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING

Why choose Synchronous Learning?

Synchronous online learning describes when people gather together in the same digital space at the same time. Such gatherings often have a facilitator who is responsible for guiding the group's process during their meeting.

Why would you choose to use synchronous session in your course?

Supports accessibility for participants

Synchronous online activities allow participants to learn from home, and connect from rural settings, and enable a diverse virtual classroom, potentially with participants from around the world.

Increase teaching and social presence

Synchronous online activities support the development of learning communities through the real time interaction opportunity between facilitator and participants, decreasing participants' feelings of isolation and allows for timely address of participants' concerns or questions at the beginning of the course or points throughout.

Versatility

Synchronous online activities can support longer, asynchronous online courses as well as accessibility for hyflex courses.

Opportunities for Immediate Feedback

Synchronous online sessions enable the opportunity for real-time feedback, whether it is formal feedback based on student performance (in a presentation, for example) or informal feedback (in responding to students' contributions to a discussion, for example).

But for the benefits of synchronous online activities, there are some technical limitations of using synchronous sessions in your course:

- the difficulty of choosing a time for the session(s) that all participants can attend (i.e. time zones, work and family schedules, etc.)
- maintaining an accessible environment for all participants

Planning Synchronous Configurations

Synchronous configurations can be divided into three areas:

1. Personal videoconferencing
2. Web conferencing, and
3. Room-based videoconferencing

Personal videoconferencing usually connects two (or more) individuals with something that can be thought of as a telephone call with video.

Web conferencing, while it is similar to personal videoconferencing in that it allows both video and audio, adds a number of features such as interactive whiteboards, voting, text chat (to all members of the web conference or between selected members), and a number of other features. Web conferencing is one of those products that was originally designed for businesses, but which is now used extensively in distance education.

Room-based videoconferencing differs from the previous two kinds of videoconferencing principally because it is oriented to connect a large number of people at each location to each other (e.g., two or more classrooms sharing a lecture or a guest speaker at the Canadian Space Agency presenting to a class of elementary students in rural Alberta).

The BCIT Learning Hub's Class for Teams tool is an example of a Web Conferencing application.

Web conferencing can be used as an online counterpart to classroom-based tutorials, seminars or any synchronous (real-time) learning activity, such as collaborative, project-based work. Its most typical applications are for one-to-many slideshow-based presentations (webcasts) and many-to-many group meetings (webinars), but it can also include one-to-one private tutorial or innovative assessment sessions. Web conferencing tools are usually highly multimodal, with simultaneous video, voice, text chat, whiteboard annotations and screen sharing, making them rich and dynamic — but also complex — learning environments

Many systems often include more advanced features that can mimic certain classroom activities, such as polling or breakout groups, and can therefore be effective for varied and interesting workshop-style learning sessions, in addition to allowing for the now standard abilities that allow for live, personal and spontaneous learning discussions and brainstorming sessions between students and teachers.

Web conferencing requires learners to log in at scheduled times, which may undercut some of the flexibility we hope to achieve through online learning. It can also require stable, high-bandwidth Internet connections, which may make it less accessible for some learners or locations. While its multimodal capabilities can ultimately lead to stimulating class sessions appealing to a wide variety of learners, they can also initially be complex and overwhelming; training sessions and ongoing technical support may be necessary.

Finally, there can be capacity limitations for many of these tools or services, such as limits on the number of simultaneous users or minutes per month, which have to be considered when planning a blended learning programme.

Nevertheless, the dynamic qualities of web conferencing environments and the sense of direct, personal connection through video and voice make these tools particularly effective for developing social and teaching presence, while the potential for collaboration can lead to more creative and flexible forms of learning.

This section above adapted from Cleveland-MacInnes & Wilton, http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3095

Determining what is the purpose of bringing participants together at the same time

Think about the overall **purpose** of the session that you would like to hold. Why would you like to do it? Some common purposes might be to:

- host a discussion or question and answer session
- teach concepts in a format that permits live interaction
- plan or make decisions about something as a group
- build or maintain online class community
- gather feedback from people
- interactively teach a topic
- host a guest speaker
- model or demonstrate a skill

- hold office hours and meet one on one with individual students

Thinking about your session's purpose is a necessary step to confirming whether it *does* make sense to hold your session synchronously online. For example, if you determine your purpose is to "hold a lecture" in which you talk *at* your participants for the entire hour, you may wish to ask yourself if you think that is the best use of your participants' time (or even if you think it is the best way for your participants to learn). Although there may be a place for "webcasts" (uni-directional synchronous online learning events) in some situations, they perhaps aren't best used in the higher education context where we aim to promote participatory and interactive learning and/or some of the other purposes mentioned above.

Incorporating Web-conferencing into Teaching your Online Course

You can use the web-conferencing tool to provide the digital space for many different kinds of engaging learning activities in your online course. Some examples are:

1. Direct teaching, presenting, webinar-style.
2. Demonstrations of tools, think-alouds, processes, etc. using screen share, and or the camera.
3. Office Hours: tell your students you will be present in the room at a certain time each week and encourage them to drop-by with their questions.
4. As a site for discussions with students as driven by the needs of your course; it is also possible for break-out smaller group discussions.
5. Create rooms for students to use a project working rooms to work in together.
6. Student presentations to the whole group.
7. Invite guest speakers to present to your class via web-conferencing.
8. Organize “Field trips” to web-based resources.
9. For shared collaborative work on shared documents and other files
10. If you are also teaching a face-to-face class, the web-conferencing tool can be a means of bringing distance students into live classroom.

Teaching in Synchronous Sessions

The switch to remote teaching during the pandemic taught us that instructors are resourceful, inventive and creative, and can make whatever teaching environment they are in work for their students. Using direct teaching and learning through discussion instructional techniques were not as difficult to translate to the to the synchronous online environment. What didn't change in the transition to online synchronous teaching was the deliberate structuring of teaching that is required equally in both environments. Increased cognitive presence depends designing learning that meets learner needs. We've already discussed the structuring of learning in Unit 3. Therefore, in this unit we focus specifically on those skills and suggested techniques you can apply to ensure you optimize the synchronous learning environment for enhancing cognitive, teaching, and social presences.

Enhancing Cognitive Presence in Synchronous Online Environments

Cognitive Presence is tied to how you plan the structure of your teaching. As we discussed in further detail in Unit 1, a common underlying structure for mostly all well-planned lessons has four key features: discovery, exploration, integration, and resolution.

Using direct teaching and learning through discussion methods, here are some simple suggestions of what enhancing cognitive presence might look like in a synchronous online learning environment:

Activation/Discovery: Triggering events to stimulate inquiry

You can, for example, ask your students to think about at least one question (or ask them to prepare this question beforehand) that they would like to discuss the topic. This encourages them to think

deeply about the topic and engage in meaningful interaction during discussion.

You can invite special guests to participate in a discussion, to address and share their stories. Alternatively, this could be a video recording of your guest. This can be a welcome change, provide different perspectives and re-energize the class for discussions.

Demonstration/Exploration: Exploring to create coherent understanding of concepts

Frame the discussion in the form of the question that requires students to pick a side. When students are asked for their opinion, they become more interested in the topic and more invested in discussing the same. By asking students to defend their opinion and explain their views, we can generate different perspectives and creative ideas that deepen thinking.

To reduce the feeling of unpreparedness for discussion among students, give them 5-10 minutes to collect their thoughts and make notes about the topic. This allows you to call on them during the discussion without putting them on the spot and making them anxious.

Application: Integrate information and insights

Use a simultaneous online chat so that students can add their points to the debate while they listen. Most video-conferencing tools like Webex or Zoom have this functionality.

Integration/Resolution: Refine and start a new cycle of inquiry

Seek an initial response from students on a discussion topic through polling features or Reactions in Zoom. Students can type their

response, raise hands, checkmark, use emojis or icons to express their views. Then call on students to explain their choices.

Your Role Facilitating Synchronous Sessions

The basics of managing live synchronous discussions in an online setting are much the same as those in the classroom except there is the added complication (or opportunity) of technology. While technology can offer many interactive features, it's easy to be misdirected to functions rather than thinking about the learning we want to take place. As facilitators of synchronous online discussions, our role as educators encompasses encouraging student participation, assisting students in meaning-making activities, and engaging them.

All that you know about facilitating face-to-face applies to in the synchronous environment. Paraphrasing and summarizing the group responses, asking good questions, and active listening are all skills that you can bring to your synchronous learning environment. Other key facilitation skills that enhance the online synchronous learning environment are:

1. Welcoming learners
2. Fostering a safe and supportive learning environment
3. Using humour
4. Modelling effective discussion strategies

Some additional challenges of the digital synchronous environment, however, may require you to develop some additional skills.

These include:

- **Take leadership and be an active facilitator.** Synchronous environments have a tendency to amplify the awkward and frustrating situations when no one is actively stewarding the discussions. Abandoning this role with the expectation that the group will just get on with the discussion is not empowering

for the participants. It causes anxiety and frustration when people cannot see each other and are trying to figure out who is going to be in charge. It takes longer and people feel it wastes their time.

    - As the instructor, you do not have to facilitate every discussion. If it is appropriate to the outcomes of your course, enlist students to be moderators and have them take turns.
    - If you are having students meet in their own groups for learning activities, they will need to negotiate these roles amongst themselves. Be deliberate and remind them of the need for someone to actively moderate their group's discussions.

- **Use people's names.** Ask people to say their names and identify themselves when they speak up in an unstructured discussion, and do this yourself as facilitator as well. For example, say, "*This is Bonnie* here, the point that both of you have made is relevant….". And address people by their names as often as you can, not just when addressing a question to them, such as when they enter the room (welcome them), when they've come back from a break-out room activity, and when you've just responded to one of their questions.
- **Draw out participation** from all participants by calling on people in a specific order to make sure everyone is included. Keep a list of participants and tick off their names as you go.
- **Be okay with silence.** Things can move a little slower and the rhythm of an online synchronous conversation requires deliberate attention to get it established amongst the participants. While that happens, be prepared for silent times, when you and your students are waiting for someone to speak when you thought that they were going to speak but then paused. Silences can feel longer than what they are because we don't have visual clues to let us know that someone is thinking or making a note. We can worry that our audio has stopped working or that there is a technical issue.

Techniques and Tips for Planning and Facilitating Synchronous Learning Sessions

For designing your session, this is the typical process:

1. Know your purpose and align with learning outcomes
2. Use a lesson plan
3. Build community
4. Emphasize participatory, active learning
5. Plan for assessment in advance

As you design and plan your synchronous learning sessions, the following are tips and techniques to think about.

For building social and teaching presence:

Establish Tech and Time Communication Agreements

- What are the times that sessions will be scheduled? Are you firm or will you be attempting to accommodating students in other time zones?
- Are the live sessions mandatory for students to attend or are they optional? What you plan to do during the sessions is linked to this. If you are planning activities to occur during the session where student participating is vital to their learning, then making the sessions mandatory signals to students to

their importance. Linking marks to their participation further signals the importance of their attendance.

- Will you be recording the sessions or not? If you are using the live session to make a presentation and making some time available for optional questions and discussion, there is less pressing reasons for students to attend the live session and they can get a similar experience from the recording you make. This might be suitable for students in other time zones who cannot attend. You could tie an activity to both options, attending the live session or viewing the recording, in order to drive participation and access of either option.
- How will features of the technology be used during the session? Set clear expectations about how you expect to use the various features, such as the chat and the use of 'raise a hand' during the session.

Create a Welcome Poster at Session Start

As soon as participants join an online meeting, they are reassured they are in the right place and seeing the right thing, with a slide or poster that lets them know they are in the right place. You could add the times of the meeting, the agenda, and your contact number should there be any connection issues, for example.

Be Visible

Use the advantages of the web-conferencing tool for visibility. Use your webcam so that students see your nonverbal cues in addition to your voice. Doing so helps increase your presence.

Make the Purpose of the Session Explicit to Students

Ensure that you have communicated clearly to students the relevancy of the session. If students appreciate its relevancy, they won't attend, and might rely on the recording of the session instead.

And to make things easier for yourself and your students, create an agenda based on your lesson plan for each session and make sure students get it in advance. An agenda does not just provide the basis for your lesson in the synchronous environment, it also provides your students a map to their participation during the synchronous session, so that they will be forewarned in advance when they will be expected to speak up and therefore ensure that they are ready both to intellectually as well as technically.

Ensure that they have the agenda in advance of the session as well as provide it at the beginning, perhaps on the Welcome poster. On the agenda, outline the topics for discussion and the type of activity each will be.

Use Ice-Breakers

Just like in the face-to-face classroom, a short and simple ice-breaker activity can go a long way to settle the webinar jitters among your students.

Icebreakers in a synchronous learning session also help students get to know who else is present in the session. Some students might have their video enabled and some might not. A quick activity at the beginning helps students calibrate how and what they communicate as they participate, as well as help build trust amongst the group.

Some easy and quick icebreakers:

- Have each person introduce themselves via audio/video
- In the text/chat function, have everyone answer a question prompt
- Use the polling function to give their response to a question

prompt
- Using a whiteboard function/screen-writing tools, create an image like a table, and have students write their names for where they are sitting at the table

Pacing

Expect to slow down, and plan for a slower pace in your agenda. Plan for up to 10 minutes for everyone to get connected and to test their audio/video and to settle in.

Further tips to ease anxiety and increase participation:

- Giving people a chance to say something at the beginning makes it easier for them to participate later
- If you are making a presentation, break it up into small chunks, and then break for check-ins with the group. You can ask them a question based on what you have just previously discussed and have them make their responses in the chat tool, clicking on an icon, or speaking directly with the mic. Choose one and communicate that one communication channel when you ask the question.
- Make space for quiet people to be heard as you would do in a classroom. Give quiet people a hint that you'll be calling upon them soon, pulling them into the conversation.
- Be very deliberate and explicit when you give directions. For example if you are making a presentation, when you intend to pause in order to ask your students a question and have them respond via the chat tool, say, "I am pausing my presentation now." Tell them explicitly what you want them to do: "Share your responses in the chat tool". And when you have given them enough time to complete the task, tell them, "Let's see what you responded" before you discuss their responses to

signal that you are shifting the activity again. If you want your students to think about a question, be explicit about the ensuing silence that will come: "Let's take a few moments to think about this. I'll wait until you are ready." Check in with the group after the allotted time has passed: "What do you think? Any ideas or comments, or would you like more time?"

Tips and techniques to increase personal connection

- Have everyone show themselves with their camera on, including yourself, at the beginning of the session. Doing so gives everyone a chance to project their selves into the virtual space and helps make connections between participants. You eventually might decide to turn all of the cameras off, including yours, if bandwidth issues are affecting the connection speed. Further, privacy and safety issues can also be concerns for our students so it is not recommended to have a mandatory on-camera policy for your course.
- If some people are on camera, then everyone should be on camera. If some participants don't or won't have video, then at least show a photo of other image of every speaker, if possible. Video images of participants seem to help us feel more present to others and animate than those who are not. Make sure those who can't also have a chance to get themselves "out" there in the session.
- Do everything so that you appear to be making eye contact. Look at the camera while you are talking and not at the other participants' faces on your screen. This may feel strange at first because our instincts are to attempt to make eye contact with the people we are talking with. But if you look directly into your web cam, from your participants' point of view, you will be looking directly at them while you are speaking. If you are looking at your screen, from their point of view, you are not looking at them but down at your hands or with your head

turned away if you have multiple screens.

Ensure that any preparatory materials students might need have been available to them well in advance of the meeting

- In order to avoid delays during the synchronous session and to maximize students' learning experience, ensure that they have access to any preparatory materials in advance.
- Pay attention to the various versions of particular documents in the preparatory materials. If you are sharing a version of a document during the live session of the course, ensure that it is the same version that you asked students to access for the preparation. Having multiple versions causes a lot of frustration for students, as they are looking for the definitive version that you will be using and that is considered most correct.

Have a lower-tech back-up

What will you do if the web conferencing tool is not working? It happens. Is the activity critical? How can you shift participation in the activity over into the asynchronous discussion forum if technical failure should occur?

Dedicate time to tour the synchronous environment

There are many different web-conferencing tools. It is worth spending the first 15 minutes of you're your first synchronous session with your students, providing them a quick tour of the various features within the tool that you're using. In particular, familiarize them with the tools that you will be asking them to use such as putting up their hand, polling, and screen-writing tools as

these are most often found in web-conferencing tools meant for education environments and less used in tools used for general communication.

Multi-tasking participants

It is a considerable challenge for all of us to be on the computer and ignore the notifications from our email and social media and our students are no different. Further, students may be focused on other tasks while logged into your session. Ensure that your online synchronous session has engaging and interactive activities to compel participation. Check in with participants frequently: if you are presenting, pause every five to seven minutes and ask students a question related to your topic and getting their response via the text/chat, or use the polling feature.

Planning the Time

For every hour of synchronous time scheduled, ensure that you leave about a quarter of that time unplanned. This unplanned time can then accommodate any technical or other issues that may have arisen during your session, as well as provide ample time and space for students to raise questions and issues that they might have.

If you are directly presenting a topic, try to speak for no longer than five minutes before pausing. In your pause time, direct students to an active activity such as responding to a poll or responding to a question in the chat/text tool. Chunking up your presentation into small units helps students stay on track as well as help you assess whether or not they are on track. Doing so also provides you with reminders of their presence. It is an odd feeling to realize that if someone saw you and didn't know what you were doing, it would look like you are talking to your computer. Checking

in with your students frequently is a way for them and for you to mitigate this odd feeling.

Getting students to interact with each other

Use collaborative brainstorming/crowd-sourcing activities:

- Within the web conferencing tool and using the whiteboard and drawing tools, have students contribute ideas to a common digital space
- Use tools outside of the web conferencing system, such as Google Docs,
- Get students to prepare their contributions on their own computers and then get them to share their screens during a discussion.
- And instead of having small groups present to the entire group, one by one, send two groups together to breakout rooms to present to each other, and then have groups report a summary of the presentations and ensuing conversations.

Tips and Techniques for the Technical Aspects of Synchronous Facilitation

The following are aspects to consider when using the web conferencing tool.

Setting Up your Audio

Audio is the most important element to get right in a synchronous session.

Sound problems can include:

- A participant can't hear or be heard when speaking
- Voices are garbled
- There are echoes when someone is talking

Some tips to mitigate sound issues from happening:

- Do not use a speakerphone to connect, and ensure that you set the audio requirements with your students in advance of the class, much like we have done in this workshop.
- Ask people to use a headset instead of the microphone built into their computer. When a headset is not plugged in, sometimes the microphone built into the computer picks up on sound coming out of the built-in speakers and broadcasts it back to the group, causing echo and distortion that everyone else can hear except the offender.
- If participants don't have or can't use a head-set, ask them to mute their microphone except when they are speaking, in order to reduce the echoing issue.

- Many web conferencing tools have a call in option using the telephone if someone is have serious audio issues with their computer or headset. Note that sometime long distance charges might apply to those who call in.
- For those who use the telephone to call in, ask them not to use the speakerphone because the microphone will pick up the audio from the computer speakers if they have them turned on, creating echoing and distortion.

Prepare your environment

Ensure that you look your best by:

- Setting up your camera so that you fill the frame and to ensure that half of your head had not been cut off unintentionally
- Ensuring that the light source in the room you are working in is not coming from behind you because it can darken your face. The best is to have light directed towards you from behind your webcam, if possible. That way your face is fully lit.
- Trying to raise your webcam/laptop so that the camera is at the same level as your eyes. That way you will not be talking down to the camera and students won't be looking up your nose.

Get familiar with the environment yourself

- Run through all the tools and options you think you might use
- Load any files you plan to show
- Practice screen-sharing so that you know how it works and how to make it stop

Consider have a second facilitator

Consider asking a colleague or a student to help you and be on-hand to handle the technical aspects of your session:

If you have a large group, and/or you are new to the synchronous tools, it can be challenging at times to be both presenting and speaking to your topic, while monitoring student activity in the text/chat function, particular if technical issues arise. A second person can monitor the student issues while you can focus on the teaching side of the session.

There will be technical difficulties

You can count on it. It is not the end of the world! Students are, after all, people and they can be forgiving. Allow yourself the option to re-schedule the session and/or re-group to the asynchronous discuss forum should the activity not work out.

Recording the Session or Not?

Think about whether or not you record the sessions in your early planning. If you record them, you will need to perform the post-recording tasks in order to share the recordings with your students. Will have a recording help or hinder your students? Recordings help for future reference and reinforcement. But also knowing that a recording will be available means that students might not attend the live synchronous session. And students might procrastinate watching the recording until it is too late to mean anything to the topic under study. If their participation is critical, then recording is perhaps not as valued.

For Hyflex teaching configurations, some Hyflex scenarios make the recordings of the live in-person/online sessions further available to a segment of students who can attend neither in-person

or online in the simultaneous synchronous web conferencing tool. This third group of students being served are asynchronous participants, and in this kind of configuration, what gets done during the synchronous sessions should be equally accessible to all (meaning no assessed group discussions, for example).

Cameras on/off

Rather than compel students to turn their cameras on, have them insert a photo of themselves in their profile. When their camera is off, everyone will still have a sense of each other because you will have their photos. Compelling students to turn on their cameras can create issues for numerous reasons, including the limited load of their internet connection and privacy issues. Also, having their camera on does not mean that they are engaged. Giving students a choice is key, while also making sure your attention is not unevenly distributed among students with their cameras on and off. Having their photo in place of their live camera helps everyone get a sense of each other.

Using Video to Assess Student Attention in Virtual Class Meetings

Don't Do This

- Connect students' video use and eye contact time to participation points, grading, or school attendance.
- Remove students from the meeting if their videos are not on.
- Trick students into turning on their videos (e.g., for a class dance party).
- Give extra credit to students who have their video on.

Do This!

- **CHOICE**. Let students decide whether to turn on, or keep on, their video. Allow them to use virtual or blurred backgrounds and fun filters (e.g., be a banana or potato!). https://bit.ly/virtualmtgfilters
- **REAL-TIME CHECK-IN**. Ask questions often to assess student understanding. Allow students to respond via audio or virtual meeting tools (e.g., chat box, polls, nonverbal reactions - "thumbs up").
- **USE DIGITAL ASSESSMENT TOOLS**. Collect different types of data to evaluate ongoing learning - Answer Garden, Gimkit, Kahoot, Google Forms, Poll Everywhere, Socrative, Crowdsignal, Formative, Classkick, Ted-Ed, Playposit, Ed Puzzle, Nearpod, etc.. https://bit.ly/formassesstech

Why Does It Matter?

PRIVACY. Students might be uncomfortable displaying their living space to their peers.

SAFETY. Students (and their family members) may not want their image captured, recorded, or shared. Students could be cyberbullied if a classmate takes a screenshot of their video.

EQUITY. Students might have unreliable Internet access, low bandwidth, devices without video capabilities, or limited access to a device.

PERSONAL. Students might feel shy or anxious to be on camera.

"But I Don't Like Teaching to Blank Screens"

Teach students to setup their Google Meet or Zoom profile picture as a bitmoji, school photo, or a favorite selfie. When the camera is off, the students' profile picture will show up, giving you a virtual audience to talk to.

Ask Before Assume

This is a challenging time for everyone. If students are struggling to show attentiveness, ask questions rather than make assumptions about their actions or punish them for lack of engagement.

Example of Synchronous Session

Here's an example of a synchronous session, from conception to completion.

From session open to close

Let's look now at what facilitation looks like in a synchronous online environment, from the beginning of a "typical" session (if there is one) to the end.

Session Lead Up

You will want to make decisions about what the "lead up" to your online session looks like just before you start at the planned time. As the facilitator you should arrive early to the platform to set up the environment and make sure you're ready, especially technically (e.g. upload slides, do audio check to test your headset and sound). Decide whether you will talk informally with arriving participants as they come into the virtual room (tends to work for more casual settings), or remain silent and have on-screen instructions for arriving participants (perhaps useful for more formal settings).

Only you can decide what feels right as a lead up for your particular session.

Session Opening

How will you begin your session? A confident start with a warm welcome is a great idea, that is, after you've turned on the record button! (If you are choosing to record your session.) Incorporate participant check-ins or introductions depending on the purpose and goals of your session and the time that you have.

As you begin your session it is a good idea to turn on your video feed so that people can see you and connect with you as a live human being. (You may indicate to others to do the same, keeping in mind that later you may have to ask people to turn off their videos if the connection seems slow, or the number of people present are too many for the number of video feeds that can be on at one time.)

In your opening, you may wish to cover any norms or "ground rules" that you'd like the group to adhere to during the session. A common norm in web conferencing, for example, is for people to keep their mics turned off unless they are actively speaking.

Purpose and Objectives

It's a good idea to briefly address the purpose of the

session and the session objectives or outcomes so that your participants know what to expect. Indicating an agenda may also be very relevant here.

Active, Participatory Learning

You will now be facilitating your session plan encouraging active, participatory learning. Hopefully you've designed a good balance of interactive activities to keep people awake and engaged! Watch your session plan and the clock closely during your session because – just like when facilitating face to face – you may need to make decisions around either encouraging or reigning in the conversation according to the time you have.

If you've chosen to get a little creative in your session using some of the interactive tools that your platform has available, we hope that you've thought about a good reason for *why* you are using those tools, and not just because they are fun and cool! Keep in mind that sometimes using too many tools that are new to participants can be somewhat stressful for them, so try to find the right balance for your group that stretches them and helps them participate in your session but doesn't overwhelm.

Technical Skill and Comfort

During your session you will simultaneously have to

facilitate AND competently manage the technical environment. (Or share this between co- facilitators!) The goal is that you feel adept with the technology and you help support your participants in feeling adept with it too. You may need to give your participants brief instructions about how to use the platform if they are new to it. (Perhaps you could poll them to gauge their comfort level before or at the beginning of the session so you know where they are at.) Remember, if things go wrong, keep as calm as you can. You can always ask for assistance from your participants if you really get stuck. To mitigate any mishaps, it's a good idea to:

- spend time well ahead of the session practicing in the platform by yourself or with a co-facilitator or helper, and
- thinking through what you'd do if the technology doesn't work in certain ways. What's your backup plan?

Visual and Technical Resources

Slide decks

If you're planning on using a PowerPoint slide deck for your session, make sure you adhere to best practices around putting together slides.

Ensure your slides are clear, uncluttered and appealing. And break out of that mold that you may be

used to when using slides in a face-to-face environment! In the synchronous online classroom your participants have the ability to interact with your slides, so think about how you can incorporate some that participants can do something with. For example, can they draw on them? Type a word or short phrase? Highlight something? Circle images on your slide that may describe how they're feeling or think about something? Indicate where they might be on some continuum that you've provided by drawing a line on the screen?

Note that when you upload a PowerPoint deck to many web conferencing systems, it removes all the animations, transitions, etc. The file is transformed into images and links are no longer clickable. You will also want to check the type of document that you are able to upload in your technical platform. For example, in Blackboard Collaborate you can upload PowerPoint slides but not Word documents.

Modes

Keep in mind that sometimes platforms have different "modes" that you can use to your advantage. For example, Blackboard Collaborate has not only a whiteboard mode which allows you to interact with the whiteboard using the toolbar and show PowerPoint decks, but a web tour and an application sharing mode as well. This means that you can visit a website together (web tour) or share your desktop (application sharing) if

you wish. Check the platform that you're using to see what the possibilities are. The website for that particular platform should have help files or videos which can help you become familiar with its features.

Headsets

A technical "must have" when facilitating in synchronous online environments is a headset. Often, computer speakers and a built-in computer microphone don't lead to the best sound quality for you or others. Invest in a headset that helps eliminate the dreaded "voice bouncing back" scenario!

Communication

As always, communication skills are important to be aware of when facilitating. Try to maintain an awareness about how you are communicating with your participants as you are facilitating. What do you look like on camera when your video feed is on? Do you look confident and comfortable and dressed typically for your work environment or do you look and sound like you just got out of bed? ☺ What about your tone of voice – is it clear and measured? Is your pace effective? You want to feel "authentically you" as you facilitate online but you also may have to purposely focus on maintaining a certain level of energy, just like you would if you were facilitating in person. Don't forget to use

humour if it comes naturally to you (and it's appropriate in the situation).

Co-facilitation

By this point, if you are working with a co-facilitator or producer for the session, you would have already discussed roles and responsibilities. But recognize that sometimes we co-facilitators can forget our roles and "take" someone else's slides to lead, for instance! (It happens to the best of us.) If your co-facilitator jumps in to do a part of the session that you were supposed to do (or you do), just go with the flow. If you are both very familiar with the session plan and are prepared ahead of time to lead any piece of the plan, then this won't be a stumbling block for either of you.

Session Closing

Just like you would in person, provide a summary or wrap-up activity such as a "check out" to close the session. Thank the participants for coming. You may need to indicate follow up or next steps items, or let participants know that an evaluation will be sent to them.

Lastly, don't forget to stop the recorder at an appropriate point. Make sure all participants have exited the room and then close the session properly.

Practical considerations for following up

The follow up that you may choose to do after facilitating your synchronous online session likely will vary depending on the purpose of your session and the content and activities of your session. It also may vary depending on whether the session was "standalone" – an event in and of itself – or part of a longer, asynchronous course, and whether there were people absent that need to be caught up on anything that happened in the session.

Here are some more things to think about:

Sending out a link to the session recording

If you recorded your synchronous session, sending out the link to the recording is a time-sensitive follow up task. Especially if the session contains information that is either "nice to know" or "need to know" for your participants in order to be able to proceed with the rest of an asynchronous course that the session is a part of, sending out the recording link soon after the session is important. It may also be a good idea to:

- highlight key messages of the session in your follow up email or discussion forum post to give

your participants the "quick and dirty" of what was discussed/happened

- include actual timings of when key events happened in the session so that participants can find them easily if they should review them

You may even want to go as far as converting the session into an. mp4 file and chopping it into smaller pieces for your participants to review – it's up to you! Note that in some platforms, such as Blackboard Collaborate, the conversion to the .mp4 file splits the various parts of the session into pieces and only what was visible on the whiteboard is shown in the .mp4.

Sending out additional resources

During your session did you (or someone else) promise to send out additional resources after the session? Were any documents or URLs posted in the chat area for all participants that should be shared with others who weren't at the session? These additional resources may also be important to capture and send to participants in an email or discussion forum post after the session.

Additionally, if you used a PowerPoint deck for your session, you may wish to send this out to your participants.

(This section has been adapted from BCCampus

"Facilitating Synchronous Sessions[1]"and is shared under a CC-BY-NC licence.)

1. https://scope.bccampus.ca/mod/book/tool/print/index.php?id=153403

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UNIT V

UNIT 5 PLANNING AND FACILITATING EFFECTIVE ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING

Why use Asynchronous Learning Activities

Asynchronous facilitation poses unique challenges in teaching: we choose to facilitate learning through engaging in social interaction, yet we are separated in time and in (physical) space. The advent of online learning and digital discussion forums provided the solution to having a common learning space to bring learners together.

Discussion forums provide the spaces for student-to-student and instructor-to-students interaction that was not available in distance learning in pre-digital times. When deliberately planned with intention, using online discussion forums can enable increased participation (when not time-bound like face-to-face discussions), make collaboration possible, contribute to learning, and can bring courses taught online to life.

Why use Asynchronous Discussions?

Here are a variety of reasons that make planning and facilitating online asynchronous discussions worth the effort:

To support higher order thinking and course outcomes

Discussions provide opportunities for the synthesis of what is new with what is known. Insights emerge from shared experience.

In discussing course materials, participants are encouraged to analyze what they are learning and test their own understanding against that of their classmates and instructor. Meaningful discussion requires analysis and application of ideas: both indicate higher-order thinking.

To bring real-world experience to the classroom

Discussions give students a chance to practice thinking about issues as professionals in the discipline they are studying and participate in a discussion with a professional in the discipline.

Many BCIT students in online courses have considerable professional experience. Discussion gives these students an opportunity to examine course materials through the lens of experience in the workplace, and to consider their workplace in the light of the new concepts they are learning. Encouraging these students to share their explorations is a benefit for all.

To build space for critical reflection

Asynchronous discussion may encourage critical reflection more than in-class, face-to-face, discussion. Participants do not need to respond to a question or comment immediately. They can wait and reply once they've had some time to think about it.

It's easy for students – for anyone! – to read quickly through material, think they have understood it and then later, when it's time to apply it, find they didn't get it at all. Discussions that require students to apply their understanding require critical reflection.

To create a forum for cooperative learning

A very effective way to learn something is to teach it to others. Cooperative learning techniques involve peer teaching in addition to talking through concepts towards a defined goal. Many cooperative learning techniques lend themselves to use in discussion forums.

To allow course participants a structured forum to communicate with one another as they master new material.

Student-to-student communication helps develop the sense of the class in a learning community – a grasp of individuals setting out together to master new skills and knowledge.

To add a social component to courses taught at a distance

When students have a sense of each other as individuals, they tend to be more motivated, more willing to listen to each other and more interested in each other's contributions to the course.

To create a space for brainstorming and playing with ideas

Participating in brainstorming and idea generating activity in a discussion forum has the advantages of making the thinking 'visible' as well as becoming a documentation and archive of the ideas generated. When your activity moves students beyond the brainstorming phase, they have the brainstorming to refer back to.

To add a continuous contact and reflective element to face-to-face courses

Discussion forums can allow students a chance to direct questions to each other, and to the instructor, between classes. Answering student questions in public forums extends the benefit of the question to all participants.

To allow instructors to answer questions in a public way, or send messages to everyone at once.

Discussion forums provide a convenient method to respond to questions about assignments, due dates, library access and other logistic aspects of courses. Many instructors prefer to establish a forum called "Questions about the course" for this type of question.

The primary disadvantage of asynchronous discussions is that they can lack pace or momentum. If these are your learning objectives, consider the role of synchronous discussions instead.

Planning Asynchronous Configurations

The typical configurations of activities using the online discussion forum technologies can be divided into three general categories: instructor-led, student-led (full-class, and student-led(small-group). Once you have decided that learning is best achieved through social interaction using the online discussion forum, you will need to decide which configuration will work best for your outcome.

Instructor-Led

The instructor posts a prompt and students are required to post an initial response by midweek and one or more follow-up responses to other students' posts by the end of the week.

Student-Led (full class)

A few students opt to each facilitate one discussion with the entire class, taking on the role of the instructor by crafting the prompt and providing moderation as needed. These student-moderators might select this option as part of a set of collaborative inquiry projects.

Student-Led (small groups)

The class divides into groups of 4-5 people, and each student takes a turn as discussion moderator within small groups. This allows the potential for every student to lead a discussion. It is particularly useful when full-class discussion threads have a tendency to

become lengthy and overwhelming to follow. This configuration is also the same for group projects where the work occurs in the discussion forum rather than in a space outside of the digital learning environment.

Some examples of asynchronous learning activities that use the discussion forum tool to enable learning through social interaction are:

Whole group and small group discussion spaces: Not only can you bring all students into one large group, you can also organize students into smaller break-out discussion groups.

Workspace for group work: Use smaller break-out discussion forums as a collaborative space for group work, including, for example, working on projects or analyzing case studies and topic-related problems.

Presentation and feedback space: Forums provide common digital spaces for presenting work and commenting on peers and providing peer feedback. Here's an example: students can submit their reading notes as an assignment to the discussion forum, including their own learning takeaways, ways they can apply the learning, and one question they had for someone else. Assign each student as a peer reviewer for each submitted reading assignment and they are to review the submission, provide feedback and answer the question. This activity enables students to meet and interact with another student in a structured way.

Supporting alternative modes of representation: Students can incorporate media into their discussion contributions, such as using images, and provide audio or video responses. Using video as a means to contribute instead of text can then become the threading of the video conversation. Students can add non-text elements to their postings as a means to communicate their ideas in addition to text. For example, to illustrate their response to a topic or reading, have them create concepts maps and upload the resulting map to the forum.

Alternative digital spaces to the online discussion forum

We often think of the online discussion forum within the learning management system as the primary place that asynchronous discussions take place. However, asynchronous discussions can also take place in other ways and through other applications. Group chats and collaborative documents are other common places. Messaging apps such as What's App, Slack and Mattersmost also provide both asynchronous and synchronous experiences. Also, be aware that students may find their own platforms to work together on, particularly when working on group projects.

Your Role as a Facilitator

1. Moderating discussions that promote learning

Discussions promote learning when:

- Contributions are substantive, based on evidence from course materials and personal experience, rather than based only on opinion.
- They are purposeful, deliberate, and thoroughly exploring aspects of the course and outcomes.
- They reflect critical thinking by the participants: this is apparent, because participants are willing and able to critique their own ideas and the ideas of others.
- They are conducted in a respectful manner, so all participants feel they can participate and be listened to.
- They avoid tangents.
- Participants participate in setting their direction.
- They are clear and focused.

2. Creating a social space

As a moderator, you make a major contribution to moving the discussion forward, encouraging participants to think critically about what they are learning. One caution: avoid stepping from the "guide on the side" role to that of the "sage on the stage." Impromptu mini-lectures posted in discussion forums will tend to shut down dialogue. Your posts may be relatively infrequent: perhaps you will contribute one posting to every ten put in by the course

participants (collectively). When you do make a posting, you will have a purpose in mind. You may want to:

- Showcase the diversity of ideas that have been contributed, to encourage participants to consider if there are other angles they may have missed.
- Pose a question based on divergent contributions that will re-focus discussion and move it to a deeper level.
- Spotlight significant ideas that may have been buried in participant contributions.
- Ask brief questions for clarification.
- Summarize and bring dialogue to a close, indicating the beginning of a new course section.

3. Instructor Participation

There are several reasons for you to participate in class discussions.

- Participation gives you the opportunity to model appropriate discussion for students.
- Your participation underscores the importance of the activity.
- Students may feel that they are performing in a discussion just for evaluation. This sense of being watched and judged by a non-participant can be unnerving, and is lessened if you are a participant.
- Participating gives you a chance to help students deepen the discussion.
- As discussion progresses and students become more active, and more critically reflective, you may need to post less frequently.

4. Providing Asynchronous Informal Feedback

In addition to any formal assessment associated with the discussion forum activity you may or may not have planned, providing informal (e.g. not for marks) feedback in an asynchronous online course becomes a crucial communication channel between you and the distance student. For informal assessment in particular online instructors have limited opportunities to meet and discuss with students where they are at that moment. For that reason, planning how you will be giving feedback and when you will be giving feedback in an asynchronous environment is very important to discuss, and to make transparent to your students in an online course.

- Consider giving feedback between activities, in addition to giving feedback at the completion of tasks, as doing so improves both student motivation and performance.
- Consider using audio or video as modes to provide informal, interim feedback. Many learning management systems have the ability built into them making using this feature convenient. And seeing you and/or hearing you personalizes the feedback to the student and helps you further increase your teaching presence.
- Consider designating a discussion forum for student-generated questions about the current learning underway (that week's assignment, the projects underway, the weekly readings, etc.). You can make this an open forum so other students respond if they know the answer. But you can also set the discussion forum to post-only and give students a mid-week deadline. You can then follow up on each of the questions via a single video or audio posting.

Techniques for Facilitating Online Asynchronous Learning Activities

In this next section we will look at the four key techniques that good discussion forum facilitators use to drive learning forward:

1. Asking good questions that promote engagement and learning
2. Responding
3. Summarizing as a moderating technique
4. Facilitation strategies for group learning activities

Technique 1: Asking Good Questions that Promote Engagement and Learning

Framing Questions

Typically, in an online course, discussion begins with a question framed by you, the instructor. A well-designed question encourages participation and requires students to apply what they are learning to their responses, both to the initial question and to their classmates' replies. A poorly designed question can stifle the discussion before it begins.

Ineffective discussion questions

- Questions that lend themselves only to yes/no answers
- Questions that have a single correct response. Many textbook review questions fall under this category. The first student to reply will likely provide a more-or-less correct response. The rest are left with nothing to say, or can only repeat what has already been said.
- Questions requiring only unsubstantiated opinion as a response, when used exclusively.
- Opinion-seeking questions can get the conversation going, but encourage students to provide evidence that supports their opinion, or that refutes the contentions of others.

Effective discussion questions

Good discussion questions are divergent questions. They open up multiple possibilities for response, all valid, and all based on interpretation of course materials and professional or life experience.

- Good questions encourage critical thinking – a deep exploration of the "why" of things.
- Good questions challenge course participants to examine materials and application of new knowledge in real world settings.
- Good questions may ask students to examine an issue or theory in light of their own experience, providing examples from a workplace or community activity.

Developing effective questions within dialogue

Questioning techniques need to go beyond the who, what, where, and when of daily journalism. Critical thinking in discussion allows participants to probe underlying assumptions, explore hypothetical outcomes and explore personal and societal beliefs. Your questions can help students move towards this ideal.

Researchers and instructors at the Concord Consortium, an American non-profit research and training institute for online STEM education, have developed a technique for generating questions they call full spectrum questioning [1]. They identify six types of questions, included in the table below:

- Questions that ask for more evidence

1. http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/lsn/OnlineFacilitator/discussion/04Handout_FullSpectrumQuestioning.pdf

- Questions for clarification
- Questions that link or extend responses
- Hypothetical questions
- Cause and effect questions
- Summary and Synthesis questions

The table included here is not intended to provide all the possible questions that you may wish to use, but it does raise some intriguing possibilities. Is dialogue proceeding based on an obvious but unexamined assumption? Consider a question that probes the "so what" response. Do postings rely on a particular understanding of cause and effect? Focus on "questions that seek to identify causes and effects of outcomes."

Questions that can move dialogue along

Questions that ask for more evidence	"What evidence can you give to support that view?" "Can you give us an example of that, from your own experience?"
Questions for clarification	"Can you give us an example of that?"
Questions that link or extend a group of responses	"Alan said _____, and earlier Gill said _____. Is there a common ground between these two positions?" "This week, several people have commented on the challenges of following these protocols when time is short. Linda mentioned how time-consuming the process feels when there are many people waiting for her to finish. Larry finds them too cumbersome to use when the unit is short-staffed. Are there ways in which we can streamline the application of the protocol without abandoning it?"
Hypothetical questions	"How could things happen (in your workplace for instance) if this procedure was not correctly followed?"
Cause and effect questions	"Chris suggested that the IT department should change its procedures to better conform with nursing practice. What impact would those changes have on staffing in IT?"
Summary and synthesis	Typically, as moderator, you provide the summary and synthesis at the end of the discussion. Creating this summary is an excellent learning opportunity, especially for the person doing it! An option is to assign students responsibility for summarizing the discussion for each module.

Questions that hijack discussion

Instructor questions can hijack discussion and be a barrier to learning if:

- They are interjected into conversation without reference to what the students have been talking about.
- They don't pick up on themes laid out in student responses
- They are contained in responses that consist of 2-3 or even

more questions – people become uncertain about what to respond to
- They respond to student questions prematurely, thus giving other students the sense that the question has now been answered, so there is nothing left to be said.

Questions to begin discussion

May be set, based on course content, and used each term.

- Advantages: time saving for the instructor. Can ensure focus on significant points.
- Disadvantages: May come to seem dull to you, the instructor, and to participants.

May be linked to current events

- Advantages: take advantage of the currency of the Web environment. Can include links to news reports and other information relevant to new material.
- Disadvantages: More time consuming for instructors. May not always be possible to find, depending on the course.

May be student generated

- Advantages: Require deep student learning for students to pose questions, for example, based on readings.
- Disadvantages: May be unsuccessful as discussion questions. Require provisions of guidelines for discussion questions to ensure success.

Other ways to start discussion:

- Post a quote from an authority in the subject – one that is provocative, challenging and likely to provoke strong reactions.

Ask participants to post their initial reaction to the quote.

- Ask students to identify quotes in the text or other course readings that best illustrate the thesis of a required reading. Ask others to respond to the selection.
- Ask students working in the field, or in a related field, to begin discussion in a particular area by posting a story from their own experience. Ask other students to analyze the story in light of the course readings and discussion.

Questions to avoid to start a discussion:

- assignment or essay type single contributions
- personal review/reflection type sharing that might be better suited for a journal activity
- leading questions where the answer is obvious
- slanted questions which favour one side of an argument or another, and closes down alternative points of view
- overly formal language

Technique 2: Responding

Too many posts, and participation of the wrong type, can backfire, reducing student participation. Some things to avoid:

- **Praise!** It can inhibit participation. "You're absolutely right," you enthuse in response to a particularly good post. Other students may think, "Right, no need for me to post anything, the Absolutely Right answer's already out there."
- **"Ping pong" discussions:** (student A – Instructor – Student B – Instructor, etc!) inhibit participation. When you respond to every post, participants do not feel a responsibility to reply to each other.
- **Your too-quick response** may also have a chilling effect. Once you've expressed your opinion on a question, participants will likely be reluctant to take an opposite view.

The type of intervention you choose to make will be driven by the stage of the dialogue, and by the kind of discussion that is happening when you intervene.

If this is what's happening...	Try this
Participants are all responding to an initial query/question, but not responding to each other's responses.	Craft a post that responds to multiple postings, citing the contributors, and suggesting a direction for follow-up. Consider revising your instructions for participation, encouraging participants to either post a new response or craft a response to one of their colleagues' responses.
A provocative, particularly interesting, but off-topic post has led to multiple responses. The discussion is now no longer focused on course material.	Identify portions of the thread that are related to the topic of the course if possible, and create a thread that weaves those portions together. Or Examine the off-topic issue and identify reasons why it is so appealing. Is there an aspect of that energy that can be found in the course material? If so, craft a post that acknowledges the energy and interest in the area, and direct it towards course materials where it applies. Or In a posting, or an e-mail to the originator of the post, encourage the participants to take the discussion to the "student lounge."
A post makes a good point, buried in social chat.	Highlight the points in a follow-up posting, preferably one that cites multiple contributions from different participants. Ignore the irrelevant content.
Conversation seems superficial.	Ask questions that probe for underlying assumptions, explore cause and effect, or ask for more evidence.
Dialogue seems to be missing the main point.	Examine your own assumptions: participants may have identified what is, for them, the main point! Or "Sweep the decks" and re-focus discussion on particular content, using the contributors' contributions to do so. Avoid saying, "This is irrelevant." Instead, focus on the contributions that are moving towards the main point, and pose a question to direct conversation in that direction.

Discussion seems unfocused and incoherent.	Craft a post that focuses on some key points that have been raised, and close by asking participants, "What intrigues you here — what idea would you like to follow up in discussion?"
Conversation is proceeding with two or three different, conflicting assumptions obvious from different participants	Craft a post that draws out the assumptions and pushes participants to examine them explicitly.

Technique 3: Summarizing as a moderating technique

Online discussions seldom follow a simple path. There are disagreements, differences of perspective, and often there are multiple branches. As a number of messages increases, it may become difficult for participants and the online facilitator to keep a big picture view of where the discussion is going. Sometimes, at the meeting point of messages with shared or opposing themes there is a glimmer of gold. These new or surprising insights can help re-ignite a dying discussion.

Summarizing is a facilitation technique that mines for these glimmers of gold. Summarizing can include harvesting, weaving and incorporating holding questions. Effective online facilitators also manage to integrate new teaching into summarizing existing discussions, relating what has been discussed to new threads and ideas.

Creating effective summaries

(*Adapted with permission from Nancy White* http://www.fullcirc.com[1])

Online discussion boards/forums, email lists and blogging often suffer from too much volume. This has been labelled the 'tyranny of recency over relevancy'. The most recent post or message is the one that gets

1. http://www.fullcirc.com/

attention. In discussion boards, even threads highly focused and on topic, gems quickly get buried and action items forgotten. Important side topics either dominate or die. Critical blog posts get lost in archives. This creates the need for systems to harvest or organise information, gems, action items and decisions.

Two possible options are creating summaries and creating indexes.

Who does this work?

This 'harvester' role often falls to the facilitator. In larger communities or diverse, multi-threaded situations, this is rarely an achievable option because of volume, and the work needs to be spread between more people.

Purpose

Before you start to harvest, think about the following questions:

- Who will use the summaries or indexes?
- How will they use the summaries?
- What is the desired action outcome from summaries?
- Where will they reside (resources, summary page, etc.)?
- Is there a tag or category associated with the material you will be working with?

It is important to recognise that summarisation can be both useful and harmful. A summary can often stop a conversation. It can create the sense of closure prematurely. It can misrepresent the conversation and

cause alienation. So think carefully about not just why you are summarising, but when!

Timeliness

If you have ever tried to summarise a hot and heavy thread after a week or a month, you know what a daunting challenge that can be. The longer you delay summarising, the harder it can be. It is often good to keep up daily in heavy discussions, regardless if they are in a forum, email list or blog. Keep notes in a separate word file; use a wiki or other tool where you can copy and save useful snippets from the conversations.

Content

Based on your determined purpose, there are a number of content approaches you might take, including:

- summary of discussion;
- analysis of tagged items;
- action plan updates;
- list of outstanding discussion or action items;
- lists of insights, techniques or issues;
- leading questions for next phase/discussion;
- direct hot-links to key postings (index);
- text analysis; and
- analysis of who contributed, frequency, etc. to capture
- the interaction process.

Some online interaction spaces have protocols for participants, which aids in the creation of summaries and searching for content. Participants can be asked to

annotate each of their postings with key words or tags, or to provide a 'title' for their post. Then harvesters can more easily skim or search through material for relevant citations. If your software tool has tags, check to see if there is an RSS feed of the tags that you can follow. This allows you to see the material in a topical, rather than strictly chronological, view.

Process and presentation

Summarisation forms include the following:

- **Harvesting** – Extracting information from conversations. This might be harvesting tasks, specific information or even responses to questions. It is straight collection of information (vs. synthesis).
- **Weaving** – Looking for and linking relevant information, thoughts or comments between different conversations. This technique is based on a single reply to several postings and creates opportunities for the instructor to guide the direction of the discussions. This helps build coherence when there are multiple conversations and helps connect subgroups at opportune moments. Links between relevant threads supporting connection, which also benefits learners' by recognizing their contributions to the discussion.
- **Summarising** – Regular recaps done during online interactions, which provide overviews and synthesis of conversations. These help reinforce work, ideas and processes and help to build

stronger groups. They allow people to 'catch up' if they have fallen behind without reading 'everything'! You can do the summaries yourself, however, consider assigning the task to learners as a way to further engage them in the discussion.

- **Holding questions** – Tracking comments or questions that need follow-up or answering but which have no current available answer. Resurface them at the right time or place. Unanswered questions can make people feel unheard, even if there is no current available answer. By 'holding' them, you not only have an action follow-up mechanism, but a way of letting people know they were 'heard'.

Summaries and indexes are often text-based, but you have other options. Visual forms such as mind-maps, electronic files of graphic recording summaries or even conceptual sketches can be very useful. The expression of 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is often true online. Visual summaries can also be easier to grasp for those working in a second language. The images provide contextual and cultural 'hints' that can be useful.

(The above was adapted and modified from Facilitating Online: A course leader's guide, Centre for Education Technology, University of Cape Town, which has been shared as CC-BY-NC-SA)

Technique 4: Facilitation Strategies for Group Learning Activities

Assigning your learners group activities doesn't mean that you can sit back, relax and drink some coffee. It's necessary to factor in the time it will take for your distance learners to organize themselves, do their work, and then prepare to share and present it, so be rigorous in your time scheduling to ensure student success.

Other key responsibilities you have as a facilitator during the execution of the group activity are:

- explaining the purposes and process of group learning tasks
- coaching learners by helping them develop skills or find resources they need for their group learning activity
- monitoring progress of group learning
- providing ongoing feedback to each group
- enabling groups to solve problems that might arise

Group projects facilitate learning as a social process, as team members observe and model behaviours and attitudes to learn in collaborative environments, which is a skill that is highly transferable to the working environment.

The design of successful group projects should include a detailed group project outline which should include:

- **clear goal statements**: what are the goals and expected outcomes (deliverables) for the project. Projects are compromised when the team fails to see the objective and purpose for the work.
- **clear assessment guidelines**: learners know exactly how they will be assessed and what is expected of them. They can judge

for themselves the validity and fairness of the assessment guidelines. If they believe the assessment if flawed, they will not engage in the work.

- **phased approach**: Group project is structured across several phases with deliverables due at different times
- **suggested group management processes**: how the group may work together, how the work can be divided by the team and how the team will report to the instructor.
- **suggested implementation timelines**: how frequently the group checks-in with each other and the instructor. This keeps the team on task and prevents procrastination, especially if there are reminders throughout the course when each phase of the group project is supposed to start.
- **clearly defined due dates**: milestones and final delivery due dates are clearly stated in a course schedule, course calendar and at certain points during the course, for example, in the introduction to one of the modules, there could be a reminder about the need to start working on phase 2 of the group project.
- **clear assessment guidelines:** Having a good grading rubric in place for each group project will go a long way to ensure effective group work.

Groupwork Challenges

Things don't always go as expected, and you may need to intervene should there be a break-down in a group. This is not a rare occurrence.

Consider these situations:

- Learners do not see the point in the activity so they are reluctant, either to fully participate, or to even get started on the activity. They might not like it, they might not be prepared

for it, or they might misinterpret the instructions
- A discussion gets off track so that it is no longer directed towards the original goal
- A group activity has a promising discussion but is not completed in the allocated time

Some ways to mitigate these scenarios may include alternative activities or ideas for intervening if a discussion goes in a different direction, for example. When you plan your activities, therefore, also think about some contingency plans should your online community not go in the direction you intended.

Other solutions to group issues might come about from the task design itself. Make sure that the task you have assigned them is centred around a clearly communicated and tangible outcome. When designing the task, begin with the end in mind and think about the steps students will need to complete together to achieve the objective. The task should be something students can't complete independently and requires their collaboration with peers.

Another aspect of group work that you are able to affect is setting clear expectations. Set your expectations of students and include participation requirements (assessed or not). To prevent issues of students not participating, it helps to agree expectations of participation at the outset of a course collaboratively with students, e.g., by asking students to develop a participation charter that they write and against which they hold each other accountable.

Other ways to keep students engaged using asynchronous discussions

Here are a few more strategies that you can use to keep your students engaged in the discussion activities:

Use students to lead the discussion:

- Have students synthesize the weekly postings.
- Have students suggest a relevant topic discussion and let them moderate. Students may submit one question to you via e-mail for consideration. You select the question that is most relevant and have the student who submitted the question be the moderator for that discussion.
- Assign a group to be the experts on a topic or section. Have them post a question for discussion and lead the discussion. Toward the end of the class discussion, have the discussion leaders summarize and combine points for their classmates.

Promote interaction:

- Create debates by having students take sides on an issue and defend their positions. In blended environments you may poll students in class on a particular topic. Then you can have students

support their positions in the online discussion area.

- Post a number of questions relating to a course topic. Assign students to work in small groups on these questions. Each group will then post their final results to the discussion.
- In blended environments, post a discussion question related to course readings prior to the in-class discussion. You can use comments from the online discussion to generate in-class discussion. This will help students prepare for the face-to-face discussion.

Regardless of how engaged students are, make sure that you always post a summary or conclusion to the discussion thread, and remember that this can take the form of homework for students.

(The above is adapted from Developing and Teaching Online Courses, Commonwealth of Learning 2014 and shared as Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International)

Unit 5 References

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