

# Synchronous Learning

Synchronous learning is used to describe education, instruction and learning that takes place at the same time and place as the others in the learning community (i.e., students and instructor). It is most commonly used to describe forms of digital and online learning activities that take place in real-time. Synchronous activities can be used to facilitate hybrid, blended and fully-distance education. In-person classroom instruction is also a form of synchronous learning, though it may not include digital learning activities.

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## Tips

- Break-up the course into smaller sections of content (e.g., moving from 4 big units to 7 smaller units).
- Move lecture content online and use class time for discussion and problem solving.
- Use multiple forms of media to spur discussion (e.g., written text, videos, visual images).
- Offer a 1-day tech training at the beginning of the semester to orient your students to the technology they will be using in your course.
- Utilize the Tech TAs that are available to faculty.
- Give students in longer, fully virtual class sessions a break during the session (e.g., a 5-minute screen break).
- Group distance learning students together and in-person students together.
- Provide students with structured opportunities to get to know one another and build trust in order to make the breakout rooms more effective later in the semester.
- Encourage students to have their cameras on when their peers are talking as a way of honoring their peer's contributions.
- Model the behavior you want students to engage in on video calls (e.g., say hello as people join the call, start the call with your video on and mic unmuted)
- Spend time visiting small groups when they are in breakout rooms. Stay to listen to most, if not everyone speak.

## Class Sessions Via Video Conference or Phone

Synchronous class sessions can be held by video call using [Zoom](#) or [Google Meet](#). Phone, or audio-only, calls can be facilitated through [Google Meet](#).

## Small Group Work Via Video Conference or Phone

Ask students to meet with their small group in Zoom, Google Meet or phone. If meeting by video conference, ask the group to record their session and to share the link to the recording with you. Then review the recordings to get a sense of where the group is at. If group meetings are graded, use the recording as the group's work product. Alternatively, ask groups to take notes in a Google Doc and to share the document with you so that you can monitor their engagement and progress.

- Provide students with structured opportunities to get to know one another and build trust in order to make the breakout rooms more effective later in the semester.
- Take time to set up small group norms/ground rules at the beginning of the semester. Alternatively, ask small groups to create meeting norms /ground rules for their breakout sessions and share them with you.
- Take time for small group evaluation and reflection.
- Consider assigning roles to small group members (e.g., time-keeper/tracker of broadcast messages, recorder, reporter, synthesizer, question asker).
- Spend time visiting small groups when they are in breakout rooms. Stay to listen to most, if not everyone speak.

## Collaboration in Google Docs or Slides

Google Docs and Slides offer students and instructors the opportunity to collaborate textually in real time. They can be used in a myriad of ways. Here are some examples:

- Ask small groups to take notes of their small group meeting in a Google Doc and share it with their instructor.
- Create an activity template for students to follow/complete in small groups
- Paste a text into a google doc and ask students to make comments or suggestions in it.
- Ask students to create a slide in a class Google Slide presentation to highlight their learning on a specific topic, sort of like a poster presentation. Then in the class video call have each student present their slide.

## Real-Time Text Chat

Meet in a chatroom for all or part of a class. Because text chatting is something students are used to as a very informal kind of venue, they tend to interact with one another more than they will on Zoom. Consider these activity options:

- post questions for students to respond to and discuss with one another.

- Ask students to read a text as they are in the chat room and to post responses to what they are reading as they go. They can post reflections, questions, pondering, etc., or you can provide structured questions for them to respond to.

Note that in Google Chat Rooms you can save a transcript of the entire session for later reference. The Moodle Chat activity is nice because students automatically have access to it once you create the activity. To save a transcript of the Moodle Chat select that option in the settings (Bruce, 2020).

## Real-time Forums

Use the Moodle Forum activity, but ask students to work and write in it simultaneously. This seems to work well for a more formal, organized discussion. Students can also divide different topics into their own threads. An activity like “think/pair/share” works well in this format (Bruce, 2020).

## Synchronous Writing

This activity is borrowed from a writing group, where participants help each other get work done by meeting in a real-time text chat room, and then using the “pomodoro” technique (focused 20-minute bursts of concentrated work), all do your individual work together. Something about being present with others doing this really works. You can encourage each other, share drafting back and forth, etc. between writing sessions. This works really well when you want students to work on drafting essays, for example (Bruce, 2020).

## Watch Parties

These are higher bandwidth, and so student access may vary depending on their internet access. However, it can be useful to use Zoom to stream a video to the class. Then everyone can discuss it in real-time in text chat (Zoom’s chat function works well for this), or with audio/video after the video ends (Bruce, 2020).

## Pair video conferencing with other synchronous activities

Consider mixing-and-matching one or more of the activities above with video call based class-time. This can be especially effective in longer classes where students and instructors lack the stamina to be on a video call for the entire length of the class, but where students also seem to start feeling disconnected from the instructor and from each other when there aren’t face-to-face components. As an example, you could meet in the video call for an hour discussing course concepts, then ask students to practice or write for an hour, possibly in pairs or triads, then return to the video call to debrief (Bruce, 2020).

## Play Games

Foster community by playing games in your synchronous classroom. For instance, the Zoom whiteboard works well for a game like Pictionary.

## References

Bruce, M. (2020, October). *Quiet synchronicity for remote teaching*. The unvarnished geek: making tech sane again. <https://unvarnishedgeek.github.io/2020/11/07/quiet-synchronicity.html>