

Best Practices for Synchronous Sessions

Online synchronous sessions help students feel connected and engaged with the instructor, each other, and the content. Other means of keeping students engaged is through discussion posts, small group projects, and assignment feedback. For a successful synchronous session, plan ahead and encourage active learning.

General tips for synchronous sessions

- In your synchronous session, avoid duplicating what is covered elsewhere in the course, e.g. pre-recorded lectures, readings, videos, and discussion boards.
- You may choose to deliver your lecture asynchronously and reserve the synchronous session to discuss content, answer questions, or review homework problems.
- While you are lecturing, students should turn off their camera and remain muted. Students should use the chat box to ask questions during the lecture or save questions for a designated discussion time.
- For a successful synchronous session, plan ahead and encourage active learning.

Encourage Active Learning

Avoid only lecturing during synchronous session; instead, encourage active learning.

- Field question from students prior to the session to discuss during class.
- Share your screen to demonstrate tasks or navigate documents and websites.
- Ask guest speakers to join your synchronous sessions as they would an in-person session.
- Plan an activity, such as breakout sessions, ask students to take sides and defend a topic, use informal polls for opinion.
- Ask students to prepare in advance for the session. That may include pre-reading or an activity like a QQTP, where students prepare a discussion question, choose a favorite quote from the reading, or prepare talking point an issue or idea developed from the reading for the session.
- Have students take the lead. Ask students to guide the conversation as a group or individually as part of your assessment plan for the course.

Plan ahead

- Get to know the software you will be using, i.e. Zoom or Webex. For example, practice sharing (and muting) audio and video for yourself and others. Practice monitoring the chat while also sharing your screen and handing off the presenter role to another person.
- Provide guidance to students on how to access the session, and any action they should take upon entry into or during the session. For example, ask students to mute their mics and turn off their cameras upon entry, or to use the chat box for questions during lectures.
- Give students the opportunity to “stay after class” and practice as attendants and moderators before a class session where they are going to take the lead during a session.
- Reserve a portion of the first class (or hold an optional and informal test meeting at the beginning of the semester) to troubleshoot and ensure student audio and video are functioning prior to the meeting. Provide a quick tutorial to student attendees on how to mute audio and video, type in the chat box, and join by phone.

- Join the session early to field access questions and stay afterwards to answer any follow-up questions.
- Think about your environment and how it will appear on screen. Ensure that your background is not distracting and the lighting is clear, not too dark or too light.
- Limit distractions - silence your phone and go to a room where you can close the door. Be sure to consider unexpected white noise distractions such as the air conditioner, fan, washing machine, or dishwasher.
- Have a contingency plan. If the connection fails, in what way should students expect you to communicate things like, "I'll be back in a moment"? Will you communicate this via email to their GSU email addresses, or will you communicate it via an announcement in iCollege? Inform the students of the plan in advance.
- Plan to record all your sessions. The School recommends you post recordings of all sessions to your class after each session is over, so students that are unable to attend are afforded the opportunity to review the session.
- Contact [The GSU Access and Accommodations Center](#) if informed of a required accommodation for disability-related services.

Contact the SPH education technology specialist [mayele1@gsu.edu](mailto:maye1@gsu.edu) or CETL CETL@gsu.edu if you have any questions.