



Top Tips for Online Delivery

Dr Lauren Mottle, The Brilliant Club, 19 May 2020

This document brings together best practises from a growing body of scholarship on online learning. In designing any online learning experience, it is important to consider the specific context in which the learning will take place and apply the principles below as appropriate to that context.

Best Practises from Scholarship: Design or adapt your session specifically for online delivery rather than just moving what you might have done in person into an online learning space. The points below can help you consider how to adapt a session for online delivery.

- Everything takes longer in an online learning environment – plan any session accordingly.
- All technology adds complexity and possible access issues – consciously consider the best technology available for your purposes and keep the technology as simple as possible. Challenge should come from engaging with the session's content rather than interacting with the required technology.
- Learning and listening fatigue occurs much faster in online environments and distractions are more readily available; break sessions up into smaller chunks with activities throughout to combat this fatigue.
- Shorter sessions that occur more often are most effective. Shorter periods of intensive learning are often better than longer sessions with people tuning in and out.
- Plan your instructions so that they are as clear and specific as possible.
- Explicitly share the purpose, aims and/or outcomes of each session or task. Explicitly linking individual sessions or tasks to the broader aims of the session/course allows learners to place their learning in the context of their wider aims and allows session leaders to be explicit about the benefits of learner participation.
- Do not assume preparedness or any familiarity with the learning platform and share expectations for engagement explicitly. Session leaders should be clear about their expectations of learners, but also be clear about what learners can expect of them (i.e. I will be online X times a week and will answer questions then).
- Be aware of the digital resources available to learners and design your session accordingly (i.e. will everyone be using a computer? Or do you need to consider how learners can engage with the session/platform from a tablet or mobile phone?).
- Designing extended online learning involves building both the content and explicitly considering the interface (i.e. how can you facilitate learners' efficient navigation of the platform).

Synchronous or Asynchronous Learning?

Synchronous = session is delivered “live” with everyone attending simultaneously	
Positives	Possible Pitfalls
<p>Session leader can check for understanding and resolve any misconceptions in real time</p> <p>Can create a strong sense of community by facilitating interactions and creating a culture of accountability for participation</p> <p>Enthusiasm and energy can be clearly communicated and can convey a clear sense of purpose or mission for the session</p> <p>Can foster engagement with large numbers of participants but...</p>	<p>Technical issues can derail an entire session for the whole group or individual learners</p> <p>Fatigue and disengagement of learners if a session is not well planned for digital learning</p> <p>Learners must be in a certain place at a certain time with access to specific technologies; can increase the digital divide</p> <p>The larger the session, the more difficult it will be to organise breakout rooms or moderate discussion boards</p>
Asynchronous = session is pre-recorded, and learners engage on their own time	
Positives	Possible Pitfalls
<p>Can help close the digital divide. Individuals can engage with the session when they have access to the relevant technologies and a suitable environment to learn in. Learners will also be able to access learning in familiar and static file formats and platforms, rather than needing access to a conference calling software that may be difficult to use or access on the technology available to them</p> <p>Opportunity to increase the rigour and depth of work and learning as learners can take the time they need to consolidate and utilise learning</p> <p>Session quality can be improved as the presenter has time to revise and recreate content and delivery</p>	<p>Learner engagement and participation can drop off; it is easier for learners to “hide”</p> <p>Confusions or misconceptions can endure for extended periods or go unnoticed completely</p> <p>Less opportunities for interactive group work or pairs work and can be more difficult to create a sense of community</p> <p>Input from session leader is needed over a longer period of time to check in on learner progress through tasks, to moderate chat functions, support learners at a variety of times and stages etc.</p>

While the table above captures some considerations, each type of online delivery presents opportunities and challenges that need to be balanced. Best practise suggests a **hybrid** of synchronous and asynchronous is most effective, but the appropriate balance should be determined by your delivery context and the needs of your learners.

Delivering the Session

- Include a checklist for preparedness to make sure learners have everything they need to engage with the session.
- How important is it for you to measure how much people have engaged with and understood your session? Consider how you will check for understanding and at what level of challenge.
- Use pause points – ask viewers to pause the video or pause the delivery of the session to complete a task. Doing this at a variety of times during a session and setting different tasks helps learners consolidate information, allows for formative thinking, and combats digital fatigue.
- Include clear “time-on-task” instructions to support learning.
- Avoid having one person speak for too long – community and discussion should be purposefully designed as a core component of the teaching session.
- Structure learning so that engagement is compulsory through cold calling, pause points or a task the needs submitting (this can be as formal or informal as you wish)
- Vary the tasks or activities learners are asked to complete so that different types of learners can engage in a variety of ways.
- Use online polls, chat functions or discussion boards to facilitate participation. In a large synchronous session, session leaders can use these to get a snapshot of the learning and understanding and to ensure learners have a chance to interact with peers. In asynchronous learning, these tools are particularly important to create a sense of community. They also provide an opportunity for learners to engage with their peers and with the session leader, both in terms of academic learning and to get support. In asynchronous environments, its particularly important to explicitly consider the interface so resources are easy to locate and access. You should also explicitly share expectations for engagement to both learners and session leaders.

Further Resources

- [Recorded Webinar on Remote Teaching](#), run by Teach Like a Champion, explores and demonstrates a variety of techniques supported by videos of teachers applying these techniques to digital learning with various age groups.
- [Designing Learning for A Digital Age](#), a blog post from Open University staff member that suggests a “simple framework adapted from The Open University’s approach”.
- [Powerful Action Steps](#) has created easy to action suggestions for online learning environments.
- Sean Morris and Jesse Stommel’s [An urgency of teachers: The work of critical digital pedagogy](#) explores “the authors’ work in, inquiry into, and critique of online learning, educational technology, and the trends, techniques, hopes, fears, and possibilities of digital pedagogy.”
- [Instructional Models for Distance Learning](#) is a resource created by Instruction Partners that highlights some of the considerations and variables in choosing a

model of distance learning. [The Instructional Models for Schools and Systems](#) summarises the models and considerations for students, teachers and families.

- [No Buildings from September: What on earth do we do about the learning experience?](#), a digital conference hosted by Aula and Wonkhe consisted of a range of panels exploring the prospect of delivering university learning online in September and beyond.
- [Take Your Teaching Online](#) is a free course from the Open University and draws on the experience of educators to explore the ideas and tools that shape online learning and methods to make the most out of online delivery.