



Instruction Ideas for Online Synchronous Courses

Takeaways from the Fall 2020 Student Learning Experiences Survey

In November 2020, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education asked undergraduate, graduate, and professional students to provide feedback about the teaching strategies instructors used in their Fall 2020 online, synchronous courses. Derived from the most consistent and salient survey responses and supported by evidence-based teaching practices, we offer these instruction ideas and resources for faculty consideration, recognizing that you may have employed some of these practices as well as other strategies not included below. Join the [Faculty Online Community for Teaching](#) facilitated by the Center for Teaching Innovation to share additional ideas and/or questions (if you have already signed up, [click here to go to the community](#)).

Explore the results from the [Fall 2020 Student Learning Experiences Survey](#).

Provide opportunities for students to interact with you and each other both in and outside of class

When students are comfortable with you, they are more comfortable learning, participating, and sharing in the learning environment.

- During class, employ methods that enable you to interact with students such as [polls](#), live questions with the use of "raise hands," [breakout rooms](#), class discussions, and case studies
- Offer many opportunities for students to ask questions of faculty and other instructional staff outside of class (e.g., hold ample office hours and offer times that work for students in all time zones). View [Instructor Presence and Interaction](#), as well as [Setting Expectations & Connecting with Students](#)
- Be available immediately after class; respond to email
- Foster student-to-student interactions via [discussion tools](#), [group projects](#), and structured breakout rooms, and by posting the class roster within Canvas so students can contact each other
- Encourage students to sign up for the [Learning Strategies Center's Study Group matching service](#)

Be flexible as students may have new or different needs related to remote learning in a pandemic

Remote teaching and learning require patience in co-creating a learning community.

- Acknowledge the current challenges caused by the pandemic and show compassion (see [Setting Expectations & Connecting with Students](#))
- Allow students to miss or drop one assignment/test of their choice (see [Promoting Academic Integrity in Remote Teaching](#))
- Demonstrate your empathy (e.g., check-in with class to see how everyone is doing)
- Use assessments that offer some flexibility regarding due dates and participation expectations and that remove means for students to violate academic integrity (e.g., open book exams, group projects)

- Provide a short break during longer classes
- Do not increase the workload beyond what you would require if the course were in person; refrain from posting extra videos and assignments and exceeding the scheduled class time

Use Zoom features and other instructional technologies

Effectively using [learning technologies](#) can improve the online teaching and learning experience for your students.

- Show writing/typing in real time to provide in-person class feel
- Encourage students to turn on their cameras to increase engagement, create a sense of community, and help students stay focused (but be understanding of students who cannot). See [Inclusion in Online & Hybrid Settings](#)
- Use [Canvas Discussions](#) or [Ed Discussion](#) to answer student questions
- Rely on TAs to moderate chats, provide technical assistance, and lead discussion sections

Provide clarity to enhance understanding of course structure and course concepts

Clear, consistent communication is an important part of successful online teaching. Your students will need information about how your class will work and what they are expected to do.

- Provide as much clarity and transparency as possible about the [weekly schedule](#), course expectations, learning goals, assessments, and grading rubrics (see [Communication Tips](#))
- Maintain an easily navigable [course organization in Canvas](#) (e.g., minimize tabs and pages to find announcements, due dates, and assignments)
- Check in with students regularly to assess whether they understand course concepts and create materials or exercises to help students understand the concepts (e.g., ungraded quizzes). See [Practice with Feedback](#)
- At the start of a new lecture, give a brief summary of important points from the previous lecture
- Slow down when teaching complex concepts

Post course materials, such as lectures (videos or PowerPoint presentations), online

Learners are more likely to make cognitive connections when information is presented in multiple modes (See [Online Teaching](#)).

- Record lectures and post them in a timely manner to allow for review when needed
- Post course materials online, ideally before class meets