



Synchronous Strategies for Interactive Live Virtual Class Sessions that Engage Students and Build Community

November 18, 2016

Online Learning Consortium Accelerate Conference
Orlando, FL



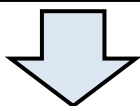
Matthea Marquart

Director of Administration, Online Campus
Columbia University School of Social Work

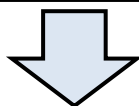
Twitter: @MattheaMarquart, Email: msm2002@columbia.edu

What's in this for you

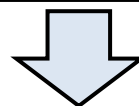
- Presentation of philosophy and strategies from chapter & experience with hundreds of virtual class sessions
- Handout of concrete ideas & activities you can use to engage students and build community



Share strategies



Share activities



Ask questions

Quick Reference Tables for Synchronous Components of Online Classes

The tables below serve as quick start guides for leading interactive live virtual class sessions that engage students and build community. They cover the potential challenges of running an online class (Table 1), tools for promoting instructor immediacy (Table 2), and behaviors for promoting instructor immediacy in an online class (Table 3).

Table 1: Challenges and Recommendations (p. 197)

	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The instructor may have technical issues that interrupt class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior to the start of the semester, make sure the instructor’s computer and headset are set up properly Conduct a practice class session with the instructor to identify any needed fixes Each day of class, restart the instructor’s computer and clear browser cache Stay current on Internet browser updates and updates for needed software Staff each class session with a support person; if not possible, keep the technical support contact information readily available
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual students may have technical issues and request help during class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require students to set up their technology prior to the start of the course, as part of their course grade for participation Provide a technology set-up checklist and troubleshooting FAQ Provide an online test room where students can independently check their technology Provide a mandatory orientation session to verify that the students’ technology is set up and to offer troubleshooting help Staff each class session with a support person, or provide a chat or phone helpline; if not possible, direct students to the checklist and FAQ rather than stopping instruction, and follow up after class If students’ technology issues prevent them from participating in class, offer a consequence for repeat unresolved issues and possibly a make-up option for reduced participation points
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worst case scenario - the online conferencing platform crashes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep technical support contact information readily available If class needs to be cancelled and can’t be rescheduled, the instructor can record a lecture to send to the students

Instructor Load	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive activities such as polls, videos with debrief discussions, and breakout groups require preparation, which can be time-consuming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff the class with a support person or teaching assistant who can do this preparatory setup for the instructor; if not possible, the instructor can use one type of activity until setup has been mastered and takes little time, and then introduce another type of activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chat conversations happening during class require constant monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign a teaching assistant to monitor the students' chat throughout the class, answer questions, and escalate questions or comments to the instructor as needed; if not possible, assign students to monitor chat on a rotating basis as part of the coursework or on a competitive basis for extra credit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student attendance and participation require tracking when they impact grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff the class with a support person or teaching assistant who can do this; if not possible, many web conferencing platforms offer time stamped chat tools, which instructors can use to ask students to sign in
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online instructors need to develop online instructional skills over time, and can feel overwhelmed by the many tools and differences from face-to-face classroom instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide orientation training to new online faculty, in an online environment so that instructors can get a taste of the student experience Provide advanced refresher training to returning online faculty Provide ongoing coaching, peer mentoring, relevant practical literature, classroom observations with feedback
Student Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unprofessional behavior, microaggressions, or bullying can happen publicly or behind the scenes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish community agreements or class rules at the start of the semester, reference them periodically, and enforce consequences if broken Encourage students to speak up if they feel uncomfortable
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students can be tempted by distractions built into their computers or in their environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish expectations for students to close other computer applications and work in a location with minimal distractions Plan interactive, whole-class activities periodically throughout class that require students to focus

Table 2: Tools for Promoting Instructor Immediacy (p. 201)

<i>Interactive tools to promote instructor immediacy</i>	<i>Implementation and considerations</i>	<i>Modifications for a variety of circumstances</i>
Instructor webcam throughout class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables use of visuals and nonverbal communication • Helps students get to know instructor • Requires strong Internet connections • Inexpensive webcams are ok 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use webcam only at the start and end of the live class session • Display a headshot when not on webcam • Pause the webcam as needed
Student webcam, individually or in groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps instructor get to know students, builds community • Individual students can ask or respond to questions • Groups of students can role play, present, debate • Requires advance notice to students, and clear expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For large classes, invite students onto webcam only when they speak • For small classes, possible to invite all students onto webcam throughout class
Student microphone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conveys student personality • Enables activities such as role plays and debates • To prevent background noise, require that students mute microphones when not speaking • To prevent audio distortion, use headset with microphone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For large classes, withhold whole-class student mic access and enable mics individually
Typed instant chat for two-way interaction and whole-class participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables whole-class participation, throughout class • Questions for students to answer in chat can lead to inviting particular students onto webcam/mic to elaborate • Potential questions include icebreakers, check-ins, opinions, related experiences, activating prior knowledge • Set expectations for etiquette and encourage use of chat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign a teaching assistant to curate the chat, including escalating questions to the instructor or tracking questions to be answered later • If no teaching assistant, assign students • If class size makes it difficult to keep track of a fast-moving chat, create a second chat area designated for serious questions
Instant polling for whole-class participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about students about build community through ice breakers • Assess comprehension, assess learning, gauge opinions to spark discussion, reinforce key points • Differs from instant chat because anonymous and offers whole-class statistics • Gather student feedback on the course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If no built-in polling tool, can poll by asking questions and using the chat or status icons to gather student responses • Numerous free external polling tools can provide live results, which can be shared verbally or via screenshare

Status icons for whole-class participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can raise hands with questions • Instructors can ask students to use icons for quick polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If no status icon functionality, ask students to use chat for these uses
Live on-screen note-taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile student ideas from brainstorm, discussion, debate • Reinforce key points while lecturing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If no note-taking functionality, share a link to a web-based shared document
Live annotations or drawings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight key points, focus attention, illustrate answers to questions • Allow students to use drawing tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If no drawing tool functionality, draw on paper and hold it up to the webcam
Screen share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate specific software • Walk through websites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If no screen share functionality, share the website link with students and clearly narrate a walkthrough
Breakout groups for small group activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable small group discussions, role plays, collaborative work, interviews, teach-backs • Assign groups different questions for report-backs • Requires strong Internet connection and headset microphones for quality audio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If no breakout functionality, end class early for groups to meet independently via free web conferencing platform, and report back at the start of the next class session
Slides with student work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate exemplars from public student work into lesson slides, giving students credit by name, e.g. excerpts from discussion forums or blogs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the instructor doesn't have time or a teaching assistant, assign different students each week to compile exemplar student work to share

Table 3: Instructional behaviors for promoting immediacy (p. 207)

	Instructional behaviors promoting instructor immediacy
Instructor visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the instructor visible on webcam throughout the class session? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If not on webcam, was there an instructor photo? • Was the instructor clearly audible? • If there was a breakout group activity, did the instructor visit each room?
Instructor-student interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the instructor arrive early to interact informally with students? • Did the instructor create opportunities for instructor-student interaction, using available technology? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student webcam • Student microphone • Typed instant chat • Instant polling • Status icons • Live on-screen note-taking • Live annotations or drawings • Screen share • Breakout groups and debriefs • Slides with student work • Did the instructor acknowledge and respond to students' questions and comments? • Did the instructor stay after class to answer student questions, or offer an alternative way to meet?
Interpersonal connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the instructor use students' names? • Did the instructor share relevant professional experiences to illustrate course concepts? • Did the instructor demonstrate personal passion for the material?

From:

Marquart, M. and Rosenthal, S. (2016, April 20). Synchronous Strategies for Interactive Live Virtual Class Sessions that Engage Students and Build Community. Session presented at the Education Beyond Tomorrow: Innovation in Pedagogy and Practice Virtual Conference, Online.

Adapted from:

Marquart, M., Fleming, M., Rosenthal, S., & Hibbert, M. (2016, April). Instructional Strategies for Synchronous Components of Online Courses. In S. D'Agustino (Ed.), *Creating Teacher Immediacy in Online Learning Environments*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Advice from Instructors, on Synchronous Online Strategies

Webcam with mic

"Using webcams really builds my connection with the students....the connection builds week by week....By the end of the semester, I am as connected to my students as I am in a face-to-face classroom setting."

-- John Robertson (p. 200)

"Incorporating webcams adds depth to the quality of student interaction....I ask students to use their webcams as a strategy for engaging each other in ways that would not be possible in a campus-based classroom"

-- Amelia Ortega (p. 200)

Tips:

- Use visuals, including gestures, facial expressions, objects
- Set the stage - consider the lighting and background
- Avoid WiFi
- Encourage students' use of webcam, individually and in groups

Typed chat

"Chat is one of the richest parts of being in a virtual class session together, in real time....The chat turns the class sessions into a dialogue."

-- Katrina Pugh (p. 202)

"It gives all students an equal chance to participate. It especially important for the involvement of usually shy and non-participating students. This group often involves international students."

-- Mashura Akilova (p. 202)

Tips:

- Select a moderator/curator for the chat
- Use multiple chat pods for different purposes
- Establish expectations for social use
- Prepare for teaching moments

Formal and informal polling

"An effective poll engages the students, makes students active participants (and keeps them alert), and makes students feel like their opinions count....Polls can also gather helpful anonymous feedback and allow students to gauge their opinions versus those of their peers."

-- Basil Rabinowitz (p. 203)

"I'm a huge fan of official polls as well as the 'informal' polls with hand raising, emoticons, etc. They're easy check-ins to ensure I'm audible or to inquire if students have personally experienced what I am discussing in the moment."

-- Lauri Harrison (p. 204)

Tips:

- Build community by asking students about themselves
- Reinforce important points, assess comprehension right away
- Allow students to reflect by asking for key takeaways
- Spark discussions by asking opinions

Other platform features

Note pods

"The switch from lecturing off of a prepared slide to creating an example via a live note pod creates a sense of immediacy in the student."

-- Rebecca Shaffer (p. 205)

Drawing tools

"The use of drawing tools....allows online faculty to add an unexpected level of spontaneity and a human touch to their lectures or presentations."

-- Mario A. González-Corzo (p. 205)

Breakout groups

"They increase student engagement and team building, contribute to a sense of intimacy within the course, and allow me to monitor student discussion and help guide students toward the goal."

-- Karl Rutter (p. 205)

Tips:

- Break up any lecturing off slides
- Enable students to share their voices or see their ideas/questions validated

From:

Marquart, M. and Ortega, A. (2016, April 14). Sharing Synchronous Strategies for Interactive Live Virtual Class Sessions that Engage the Whole Class. Roundtable presentation at the Social Work Distance Education Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Adapted from:

Marquart, M., Fleming, M., Rosenthal, S., & Hibbert, M. (2016, April). Instructional Strategies for Synchronous Components of Online Courses. In S. D'Agustino (Ed.), *Creating Teacher Immediacy in Online Learning Environments*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Quick References for Setting Up Webcam for Online Classes

Table 1. Checklist for instructor-produced videos created with computer webcam

	Physical Set-Up
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up at least two light sources pointing at your face • If you are recording in a setting with an external light source such as large windows, close the blinds / shades to avoid being back-lit and creating dark shadows across your face • If you wear glasses: turn down your screen's brightness to cut down on the glare on your lenses
Camera angle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position the webcam at eye level • Position the webcam at a distance that will show your head and shoulders
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a professional background, such as a wall or bookshelf behind you • Consider branding with school paraphernalia in the background • Consider adding personal touches such as art, specific books, or other
Attire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid busy patterns, such as stripes or polka dots • Dress professionally
Memory aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are narrating slides, have your slide notes readily accessible • Tape any talking points near the webcam • Tape any technical reminders near the webcam
	Tech Set-Up
Test recording	Record a short test video to check audio and video quality; make adjustments as needed; determine if you will need an external microphone and/or headset with mouthpiece
	Tips
Professional quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak naturally; avoid reading word-for-word • Look directly at the camera • Adopt a confident posture • Use the pause button as needed
Personalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be yourself, include your personality via humor, stories, gestures, imperfection • When appropriate, show and discuss course-related physical objects
	Editing (Optional)
Opening	Consider adding a slide with the school name and logo to the start and end of the video for borrowed credibility
Accessibility	Adding closed captioning will make the video more accessible; be cognizant of ADA compliance standards
Interactivity	Use software tools to add in interactive elements

Figure 5. An example of the impact that good quality lighting can make
Screenshot taken by Adrienne Garber, 2016.



Figure 6. The impact of camera framing and angle
Screenshot taken by Kristine Kerr, 2016.



Figure 7. Examples of different backgrounds
Screenshot taken by Matthea Marquart, 2016.



Figure 8. Examples of how presentation and attire influence nonverbal communication
Screenshot taken by Melanie Hibbert, 2016.



From:

Hibbert, M., Garber, A., Kerr, K., & Marquart, M. (2016, April). That Human Element: Fostering Instructor Presence Through Online Instructional Videos. In S. D'Agustino (Ed.), *Creating Teacher Immediacy in Online Learning Environments*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.