

Synchronous sessions in online learning

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- Where is this coming from?
- Research with online learners
- Longitudinal qualitative work of our own, plus attention to the varied works of others
- Online teaching
- 2 institutions, 3 course management systems, 4 synchronous technologies

What we know: the basics

- Getting together in time and place is important to a sense of community
- Synchronous online sessions are one way to do that
- Synchronous sessions make school feel more like school for students accustomed to classes that “meet”
- Regular synchronous sessions anchor the class, making it feel more structured and less amorphous
- Some students’ learning styles work better with the fast pace of synchronous sessions -- an analog to FTF discussion

Multiple models for synchronous sessions

- Face -to- face
- Text only (chat)
- Text plus audio (1-way or 2-way)
- Audio / video
- 3-D space (graphical)
- Enhanced text (whiteboards, shared browsing)

Many modes for success

- Attendance: required or optional?
- Number of students?
- Typing ability (especially with text only) -- or mousing ability and 3-D kinetic sense
- Multitasking ability (especially with multiple media)
- Understanding and leveraging the hybrid space

And still more ...

- More vs. less structure for the session
- Agenda
- Discussion Questions
- Control vs. chaos
- “Stages” and other lecturing platforms
- Hand raising and other notification mechanisms
- Emoting and other classroom no-nos
- J.S. Downie and the bang rule
- Multiple rooms and the roaming eye -- groups!

And more!

- Guest lectures
- Student presentations
- Demonstrations
- Hand-on activities
- Field trips
- Naming conventions and text linguistics

And students lately have said...

- Make it fun -- but not too fun
- Answer questions about assignments -- but don't turn it into an office hour, unless it's called an office hour
- Don't take my "whisper" button away -- or, learning by backchanneling

TAs and synchronous sessions

- Easier with multiple channels, but do-able in any setting
- Works well with defined roles
- Maintaining brand identity

Thank you!

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