



Should I Provide Synchronous or Asynchronous Lectures?

When classes are unable to meet on campus, due to illness, campus closures, or weather-related events, many instructors find themselves in unfamiliar territory. One challenge of moving to a virtual teaching approach is determining whether to lecture online in real time or provide prerecorded lectures.

Therefore, it is important to first reflect on the following questions:

- What is the right balance between synchronous and asynchronous lecture for my class?
- How much synchronous lecture time is necessary to equip students to complete asynchronous tasks independently?
- How might students' environments—including time zones and internet access—impact my lecture delivery?

Once you have a clear sense of what differentiates these experiences, you'll be better prepared to select the right combination of lecture approaches.

Synchronous Lectures

Synchronous learning means that classes are delivered live. In the synchronous virtual classroom, students and instructors communicate using voice, chat, and other web conferencing tools in real time. As noted in *Inside Higher Ed*, "... synchronous instruction can provide socially isolated students a schedule and sense of community" (Flaherty, 2020).

Benefits of synchronous lectures:

- Allow instructors to provide lectures online in a way that is similar to how their on-site lectures would run.
- Can be an engaging, student-centric learning opportunity.
- Can deepen social connections through live interaction.
- May allow for immediate feedback or clarification on course materials and concepts.

Limitations of synchronous lectures:

- May disadvantage some students, including those with technical, personal, or environmental barriers.
- Require faculty to manage selected tools and have reliable technologies and an environment conducive to facilitating class.
- May cause "[Zoom fatigue](#)." With so many classes moving to virtual teaching, demands of live, Zoom participation can be a challenge.



Asynchronous Lectures

In **asynchronous learning**, instructors record lectures in advance. When transitioning from on-site teaching to a virtual teaching approach, instructors can use tools such as Panopto (recommended by JHSPH), Zoom, or VoiceThread and share the recordings through CoursePlus.

Benefits of asynchronous lectures:

- Allow faculty to fine-tune their lecture content, length, and quality.
- Allow students to access available recordings and accompanying materials from the course site whenever and wherever they want.
- Allow students to learn off-line by downloading the materials (important to those with unstable internet connections).
- Allow students to review lectures for further comprehension that can be applied to other activities, including assessments and synchronous sessions.
- Allow for multiple modalities (e.g., video transcripts, audio-only files, etc.) for personalized learning.

Limitations of asynchronous lectures:

- May feel impersonal for learners because of lack of interaction.
- May be a disadvantage to learners who require more structure and motivation, or otherwise may lack familiarity with the self-paced format.
- Require faculty to plan, record, and upload lectures in advance of their release to students. This includes understanding [evidence-based best practices](#) and allowing for technical issues along the way.

Seek a Balance

A combined approach incorporates synchronous and asynchronous methods. In the majority of cases, effective remote teaching requires a combination of both. Using a blend of prerecorded and live lectures can help stimulate engagement, particularly if the synchronous time is used to actively build connections and elevate critical thinking through [active learning](#). In this strategy, the asynchronous material can free up time for valuable “active” lecture for class.

Consider the following best practices:

- Let your learning objectives, your students, and the merits of each method guide your approach.
- Be mindful of “seat hours” when planning your lecture activities.
- [Use Zoom for synchronous lectures](#), making sure to share a recording of the sessions in CoursePlus along with [transcripts](#).
- [Use Panopto when developing asynchronous lectures](#) and follow [self-recording best practices](#).
- Use live lecture meaningfully, for learning that benefits from Zoom interaction.
- Design instruction with [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) strategies.



If you have questions about which approach to use, contact the [CTL Instructional Design team](#). They will be happy to consult with you.

References

Flaherty, C. (2020, April 29). Zoom boom. *Inside Higher Ed*. Accessed on July 30, 2020, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/29/synchronous-instruction-hot-right-now-it-sustainable>