Engaging Students during Synchronous Online Class Sessions
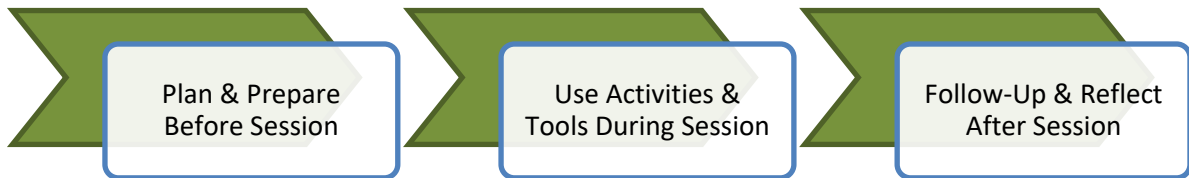
Teaching a synchronous online course using Zoom, Collaborate Ultra or another platform can be challenging. You're meeting with students in "real-time", but you & your students lack the immediacy and connection from in-person interactions. In remote online courses, it also may be difficult to read the nonverbal cues of your students. Web cams may offer a solution for you to **"read the virtual room"**, but there are other ways to balance engagement, privacy and community in "real-time" online sessions. With a little planning, you'll find that you can engage your students in synchronous online class sessions--through activities and using tools that are available in the learning platform or externally on mobile devices.

In this issue of the Online Teaching Coaching newsletter, we will share guidance and tips for how to plan and implement strategies for student engagement in synchronous online class sessions.

Please also see Stearns Center's handout, **"Planning Effective Synchronous Sessions"** for additional ideas for effective live online class sessions.

Planning for Student Engagement in Synchronous Sessions

Plan & Prepare Before Session → Use Activities & Tools During Session → Follow-Up & Reflect After Session

BEFORE CLASS	DURING CLASS	AFTER CLASS
Lesson Planning is Important • Plan & prepare a structured agenda. Have back-up plan in case there are technology glitches. **Communicate Expectations** • Let students know what's planned for the session & how to prepare, including any technical requirements. **Prepare Students for Learning** • Create short overview video to check-in with students before class session. • Use a pre-assessment to find out students' knowledge and baseline learning.	**Get Off to Good Start** • Arrive early to the synchronous class session and prepare your virtual space. Make sure everything is working! **Timing and Pacing** • Pace sessions, chunk content, vary activities. **"Zoom fatigue"** is real! • Consider **flipped approach** to allow more time for student engagement and interaction during the session. **Use Activities and Tools** • Include **active learning** strategies in the session.	**Follow-Up with Your Students** • Follow-up with students after the session, asking them to rate their participation in session activities, and to share feedback about the class. **Reflect on Your Teaching & Plan Next Class Session** • Reflect on what worked during session and what didn't work. • Use student feedback and your own self-assessment to plan (and improve) your next class session.

Some Examples of Activities & Tools for Engaging Students

(Click on links to learn more)

Activity Type	Description	Example
Games	Students participate in dynamic and playful activities often involving competition, to create community.	**Virtual Scavenger Hunt:** Have students search website(s) to find list of items; this can relate to the course or just be for fun. You may assign teams to **Breakout Rooms** so that they can work together. **Variations** of virtual scavenger hunt may include retrieving physical items and then showing on-screen.
Online Icebreakers	Students participate in quick, simple, fun and positive introductory activities at the start of a class session, to create community.	**"One Word":** Have each student think of one word that best describes themselves or their mood and post in **Chat**. Review and comment on postings.
Peer Partnership and Team Activities **	Students work in pairs or small groups on specific tasks.	**Think-Pair-Share:** Pose a question & have each student think about their response. Use **Breakout Rooms** then to divide class into pairs, with each pair will discussing their answers with each other, and then sharing with class.
Reflective Activities ** ** See Stearns Center **Active Learning web page** for information about these activities.	Students pause and reflect on content, including what they understand and don't understand.	**Minute paper:** Give students a prompt to write about for one or more minutes. Variations of this include Muddiest Point/Clearest Point, where students write about a point they don't understand or understand very well. Use **Whiteboard** (in Zoom) or Word Cloud (in tools such as **Mentimeter** or **PollEverywhere**) for students to share their "Muddiest" concept with class.

Learn More about Teaching Synchronous Online Classes

Craven, M. (2020). **Syncing with students: Valuable qualities of synchronous online teaching.** *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications. Retrieved 4 March 2021.

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