Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Learning Online

Having an online course means we should make decisions about how we will use learning. We can breakdown online learning into two main types, synchronous and asynchronous.

Synchronous learning is an activity where the learner(s) and instructor are in the same place at the same time. So, a face-to-face class is synchronous. When it comes to online, meeting with your class in a tool like Collaborate allows for synchronous learning to take place.

Of course, asynchronous, is simply defined as not being synchronous, where there is no timing requirement for transmission of information. Almost everything we do in an online course is asynchronous; discussion board activities, email, reading articles and submitting assignments as well as many other modes of delivering information are asynchronous.

What are the benefits of asynchronous learning?

There are many benefits of asynchronous learning. First and foremost, people tend to take online classes because they are primarily asynchronous. Learners have the benefit of being able to attend to their class when they have available time. It doesn't matter what their work schedule is, because they have autonomy to complete the tasks put before them.

The benefits of online synchronous learning allow you to interact with your class in real time, which is helpful for group activities, live discussions, student presentations and case studies. Make sure to record all synchronous sessions so students who couldn't attend can watch the recording later.

How do I schedule a Synchronous Session?

As an instructor, you can't control your students' varying schedules, which makes planning a synchronous session that meets everyone's needs difficult. It also can be difficult to plan meetings around holidays, family responsibilities, etc. Synchronous lecturing is not recommended. Synchronous should remain a primary tool to build community between learners and yourself, like a kickoff session or an exam review or debrief.

We recommend that you create a poll and ask learners to mark off the time they are not available (most often they know times they are not available, rather than times they are).

Having a Collaborate session to welcome learners to the course and orientating them to the space is a great idea. You can also use Collaborate for office hours and providing feedback on coursework to a student.

What about accessibility?

A person using a screen reader can access Collaborate, however the materials you are posting in Collaborate like a PowerPoint, cannot be read by that screen reader, causing a learner with blindness to miss out on valuable instruction. Make sure to provide all handouts and materials to learners before the Collaborate session. If a learner has a hearing disability, make sure a captioner or note taker is invited to the session. DSS will be able to help you meet any accommodations for students.