

Synchronous (using real time interaction) and **asynchronous** (interaction doesn't happen in real time) instruction each have advantages which can serve different and complimentary purposes when teaching online. Some of the advantages of synchronous and asynchronous instruction, as explored by [Oztok, Zingaro, Brett and Hewitt \(2013\)](#) are:

SYNCHRONOUS



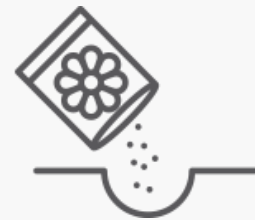
Social presence tends to be higher in synchronous discussions.

Can improve students' motivation because they receive immediate responses/feedback.

Can increase communication.

Can increase the amount of time that students spend on the course.

ASYNCHRONOUS



Students have the flexibility of accessing content at any time.

Students have extra time to reflect before posting their interactions with others in the course.

Gives more chances for everyone to contribute.

Discussions can be more in-depth and more focused on course content.

References:

Oztok, M., Zingaro, D., Brett, C., & Hewitt, J. (2013). Exploring asynchronous and synchronous tool use in online courses. *Computers & Education*, 60(1), 87-94.

Asynchronous Instruction: Online Discussion

Online discussion boards can be beneficial activities that meaningfully stimulate learning, motivate learners intrinsically, and help learners to connect their participation and engagement to course learning outcomes ([Vereninka, Jones, & Delahunty, 2017](#)).

HOW CAN WE DESIGN AND CONDUCT SUCCESSFUL ONLINE DISCUSSIONS?



Outcome-oriented task design.

Problems where learners work together to achieve a common goal are intrinsically motivating. When building discussion tasks, begin with this common goal and work backward, identifying what learners need to understand and what resources they will need access to in order to succeed. See p. 6 of [Vereninka, Jones, & Delahunty \(2017\)](#) for real-life examples.



Explicit communicative strategies.

Communication guidelines support discussion participation. Create a positive social space and encourage interpersonal relations, building an understanding from diverse perspectives, and co-constructing knowledge through critical discussion. See p. 11 of [Vereninka, Jones, & Delahunty \(2017\)](#) on how to communicate this to learners.



Interactional scaffolding.

As an instructor, you must maintain presence within the forum space and provide on-going support at the moment of need.



Clear expectations for interaction.

Learners must be given instructions that are clear, explicit and unambiguous. As an instructor, you should use an informal, conversation-like manner, free from quotes or references. Academic-style writing is not appropriate for online discussion. Word limits must also be specified to encourage learners to be concise and to allow multiple perspectives to construct knowledge.

References:

Verenikina, I., Jones, P. T., & Delahunty, J. (2017). The guide to fostering asynchronous online discussion in higher education.

Asynchronous Instruction: Online Discussion

Aloni and Harrington (2018) suggest the following best practices for improving the effectiveness of asynchronous online discussion board. For more teaching strategies, see p. 276.

Communicate purpose and expectations.

Communicate the purpose and importance of the discussion board to increase motivation.	AND	Use grading structure where online discussions count for a moderate amount of the final grade.
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Set a structure for the discussion.

Set multiple deadlines for initial and follow-up responses.	AND	Divide the class into small discussion groups.
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Create effective questions and prompts.

Use divergent question prompts such as “brainstorm” and “focal” instead of convergent prompts.	AND	Incorporate videos and other media into your questions.
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Facilitate discussion effectively.

Increase engagement by assigning roles: starter, skeptic, moderator, devil’s advocate.	AND	Participate in discussion to increase your presence, but avoid over-contributing.
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REFERENCES:

Aloni, M., & Harrington, C. (2018). Research based practices for improving the effectiveness of asynchronous online discussion boards. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 4(4), 271.

Asynchronous Instruction: Online Videos

Integrating videos is a good way of increasing the interactivity of a course. [Guo, Kim, and Rubin \(2014\)](#) have the following suggestions to improve student engagement with pre-recorded asynchronous online lectures and videos:

- 1 Create videos that are shorter. Learner engagement is improved by segmenting videos into chunks shorter than six (6) minutes.
- 2 Intersperse face-time speaking with engaging, visual slides. Try to displace a visual of the instructor at opportune times.
- 3 Students find videos produced with a little more personal feel are more engaging than high-fidelity studio recordings.
- 4 Videos where instructors speak clearly and with enthusiasm are more engaging to learners.

SOME ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER ([INMAN & MYERS, 2018](#)):



Use visuals strategically. Limit on-screen text and use only keywords or images to reinforce lecture material.



Incorporate active learning techniques, such as **skeleton notes** - partial notes where students are asked to fill in gaps.



Assess student learning by embedding quizzes in lecture material.

REFERENCES:

Guo, P. J., Kim, J., & Rubin, R. (2014, March). How video production affects student engagement: An empirical study of MOOC videos. In *Proceedings of the first ACM conference on Learning@scale conference* (pp. 41-50).

Inman, J., & Myers, S. (2018). Now Streaming: Strategies That Improve Video Lectures. IDEA Paper# 68. IDEA Center, Inc.

Synchronous Instruction

Synchronous instruction is good for clarifying and emphasizing topics, and to facilitating dialogues about difficult concepts. Online face-to-face meetings can build connections between the instructor and students and community among class members, which improves motivation. Schedule sessions early in the semester when most students will be available, allowing them to adjust their calendars. Always try to start and end the sessions on time. [Acosta-Tello \(2015\)](#) suggests the following for successful synchronous online sessions:



Record all sessions. Plan an alternative to these sessions for learners unable to attend such as an assignment if there were participation grades.

Begin sessions by greeting students and reminding them to mute their microphones.

Integrate interaction by encouraging student participation when teaching content online in a synchronous manner.

End synchronous sessions with time for learners to ask questions to be answered in real time.

Ask relevant questions for students to discuss throughout the session.

Include PowerPoint presentations, video clips, web links, polls and pop quizzes; these are useful for visual interactivity, and supplement instructor commentary.

REFERENCES:

Acosta-Tello, E. (2015). Enhancing the Online Class: Effective Use of Synchronous Interactive Online Instruction. *Journal of Instructional Pedagogies*, 17.