

Conducting Synchronous Sessions

Faculty periodically incorporate real-time synchronous activities into their online courses. Synchronous sessions are most effective for timely information, immediate feedback, and collaborative decision-making. The following guidelines are offered by faculty who have experience facilitating synchronous sessions:

1. Since *Pitt Online* is a primarily asynchronous program, we recommend making synchronous sessions optional or incorporating flexibility some other way. To accommodate students who cannot attend, you may record the session so you have an archived copy for students to view at their convenience.
2. Know your web conferencing software. Become comfortable with the functions, shortcuts, and typical errors so that you will be able to manage minor technical problems. Conduct several test runs of the program with users who are unfamiliar with the software.
3. Provide students with advance notice of the date and time of the synchronous session. Email session materials such as PowerPoint slides, case studies, or discussion handouts to students prior to the start of the session. Send students information to set up and test the software including technical requirements such as computer specifications, speaker/microphone guidelines, and browser recommendations. The day before the session, send log-in instructions including the URL and the telephone number for a possible dial-in connection.
4. Encourage students to log in 10 minutes prior to the start of the session. Explain that technical issues may occur and students will not be penalized for experiencing these problems. Provide your email, text, or telephone contact information for anyone who encounters last-minute problems.
5. Create an agenda that includes topics, strategies, and a schedule. Limit the session to one hour or incorporate periodic breaks.
6. Develop ground rules and share your expectations at the start of the session. Explain how information will be shown, how students will interact, and how speakers will be recognized. For example, some faculty ask students to mute their microphones and enter questions in the chat area.
7. Use the synchronous learning environment to enhance social presence. Allow for a few minutes of introductions and general dialogue at the beginning of the session. This interaction also gives students practice using some of the software features.
8. Involve students early in the session with questions, comments, and other activities (e.g., polls). This will communicate that you expect the session to be an interactive class.
9. Conclude with a summary of key points and reminders for the next steps in the course. Invite students to make additional comments on the discussion board.
10. Have a back-up plan if something goes wrong. For example, students may switch to telephone discussions or a Blackboard discussion forum if there is a problem with the synchronous software.