
Online Teaching: Pedagogical Practices for Engaging Students Synchronously and Asynchronously

Abstract

Faculty throughout the world abruptly adapted their instructional delivery approaches via technology during the spring, summer, and fall terms in 2020 due to the COVID-19 virus. While faculty used a variety of modalities to disseminate content, such as recorded lectures and online tests, many students who did not prefer online classes experienced frustration and lessened opportunities for learning. Forced to teach online courses, faculty needed to utilize pedagogical practices to engage students actively. Instead of lecturing as they would have in classrooms, faculty need to learn to record short lectures providing only essential content and information unavailable in textbooks or readings. Faculty needed guidance in designing effective online courses beginning with the establishment of learning outcomes with aligned assessments. Faculty needed to add details and clarity to syllabi and organize disciplinary content into sequential learning modules, each filled with internet resources including videos, discussion groups, and a variety of learning activities and assessments. In designing and teaching online courses that fostered regular and substantive interactions, faculty needed to provide interactive lectures interspersed with engaging learning activities to expand and strengthen student learning.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed instructional delivery throughout higher education starting in the spring semester of 2020. The new normal became stay at home, help children with their K-12 schooling, nurse and comfort friends and family attacked by the virus, and maintain social distancing everywhere. With limited time to prepare adequately, faculty and students persevered to complete the spring semester, often with less learning than expected. Most
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summer classes used online course delivery, rather than risk the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff as health officials tried to control the spread of the deadly virus. In the fall semester of 2020, thousands of students returned to campuses attempting to practice social distancing, while thousands of others enrolled in online courses to lessen contacts in classrooms and campus-based interactions.

To help address this evolving instructional world, the purpose of this paper is to provide successful pedagogical practices to help faculty teaching online courses to actively engage students synchronously and asynchronously. This work offers concrete and detailed alternative best practices for recording lecture videos, designing and organizing online courses, teaching quality online courses, using active learning strategies to help build and maintain a sense of community, and incorporating numerous learning activities into online courses. The scholarship of teaching and learning and national standards for high quality online teaching support these best practices, described in understandable language for ease of use.

General Suggestions for Video-Recorded Lectures

Given the short attention spans of students, teachers should never exceed 15 minutes for an auditory and/or video-recorded lecture, with shorter lengths preferred. Teachers should not fixate on making their videos perfect—just like class presentations are not perfect. Video-recorded lectures should be clear and effective in communicating information otherwise unavailable to students, synthesizing information from multiple sources, and clarifying confusing concepts, systems, theories, and ideas. When deciding what to include in video-recorded lectures, teachers should limit lectures to emphasizing the essential or most important content students need to learn. Teachers should use pictures, diagrams, and charts to reinforce
messages—less text results in more learning! To facilitate video-recorded lecture, teachers need a variety of recording tools to choose the one(s) they prefer.

**Recording Tools**

Recommended are five recording tools for video-recording short lectures with each described briefly, along with some helpful links.


4. *Skype for Business*—record videos following these easy steps:
   a. Open Outlook calendar and then click on New Skype Meeting at the top.
   b. Click on the link to Join Skype Meeting.
   c. Click on More Options (the three dots on the bottom right of the Conversation box), then click on Start Recording.
   d. Click on the camera icon to record video.
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e. Share desktop screen or a PowerPoint slide by clicking on the screen icon.

f. Pause or stop using the icons on the bottom of the conversation window when finished recording,

g. Locate recordings in the Lync Recordings file, saved in Videos within “This PC.”

h. Upload these files to Mediasite or YouTube for students to view.

The fifth option includes more details for teachers using Blackboard as the learning management system. This enables teachers to teach synchronously and record lectures “live” and archive them for absent students to view or students to use for review.

5. *Blackboard Collaborate Ultra*—create all class sessions in advance and then add recorded short lectures for viewing by students.

   a. Set up tab on the left for students to click to view class *Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Sessions* using the + click on top left of the course and then click on the Tool Link.

   b. Click on the new *Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Sessions* link.

   c. Click on Create Session and then name the session, such as a class date or topic.

   d. Add details for the start and end of the session under Event Details.

   e. Leave 15 minutes early checked, unless a longer time for early entry, if desired.

   f. Change attendee role to Moderator under Session Settings.

   g. Click only on Allow Recording Downloads.

   h. Add information about checking attendance, if desired.

   i. Share the screen, such as for viewing slides, by clicking on the purple icon with two arrows, clicking on the icon box with an arrow, clicking on Share Application/Screen, and clicking on Share; stop sharing the screen by clicking Stop Sharing at the bottom.
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j. Use a Whiteboard by clicking on the purple icon with two arrows, clicking on the icon box with an arrow, and clicking on Share Blank Whiteboard; stop sharing the screen by clicking Stop Sharing at the bottom.

k. Start recording by opening the Session Menu, which appears as three lines in upper left of the screen, and selecting Start Recording (the recording camera shows “on” with a red dot while recording is in progress).

l. Stop recording by opening the Session Menu and clicking on Stop Recording.

m. Click on the Session Menu under sessions to view Recordings.

To enhance these videos, next the reader will learn a few suggestions for making their lectures more effective for student learning.

Suggestions for Effective Lectures

Whether teachers chose to teach courses synchronously or asynchronously, effective lectures should include all seven of these components. First, in starting each class, state one to three learning objectives describing the main content students need to learn. Second, organize each lecture into three parts (i.e., tell students what you are going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you have told them). Third, review or summarize briefly the key points from previous information presented. Fourth, conduct a short diagnostic assessment (verbally, in writing, or technologically) to learn what students already know about the topic or planned content. Fifth, use effective questioning strategies through a variety of synchronous and asynchronous interactions with students (see Lumpkin, 2019, for effective questioning strategies). Sixth, include story-telling and real-world examples and applications to capture students’ attention and bring concepts to life; also ask students to share examples and stories. Seventh, provide a succinct synthesis of the two or three most important ideas presented as “take-home points,”
which are most likely to be remembered by students. Remember, teachers teach students, not textbooks. The next sections will help teachers learn to design and deliver quality online courses.

**Online Course Design and Organization**

The overall design and organization for an online course is essential to the success of teachers and students. For all teachers, this process requires extensive, thoughtful consideration about how to help students succeed in, probably for the majority, a different learning modality. Greater attention to details and clarity in course design and organization become even more imperative. Additionally, teachers need to help students gain confidence in their abilities to navigate through the organizational structure and motivate themselves to complete readings, assignments, and assessments prior to deadlines while mostly working independently.

The two key components for initiating a positive trajectory for each student are the Home Page and Getting Started tabs. On the course’s Home Page, each teacher becomes a real person to each student. With a smile and welcoming tone of voice, teachers introduce themselves with a two- or three-minute video that provides name, title, department, brief academic background, and the best way to contact the teacher (see [https://er.educause.edu/multimedia/2019/10/4-tips-to-make-an-online-course-more-welcoming-video](https://er.educause.edu/multimedia/2019/10/4-tips-to-make-an-online-course-more-welcoming-video) for an example of a teacher’s introductory video). Teachers might want to add why they enjoy teaching in general and specifically this course. Teachers need to describe briefly the course and its purpose, such as within a degree program, an institutional requirement, or an elective. The Home Page is a great place to ask students to participate in an icebreaker (see [https://tophat.com/blog/classroom-icebreakers/](https://tophat.com/blog/classroom-icebreakers/) and [https://icebreakerideas.com/icebreakers-college-students/](https://icebreakerideas.com/icebreakers-college-students/) for several examples of icebreakers). Alternatively, teachers might ask each student to post a two-minute video as the first class
assignment or the first class discussion board post. Teachers could assign students to view the videos to get to know classmates or give a few points on the course grade for its completion.

The other key component that helps start a course in an upbeat manner is using the Getting Started tab as an effective map or guide. Each teacher should begin by stipulating the “terms of engagement” to captivate students’ interest in the course. After directing students to the Syllabus tab, the teacher describes how the course is organized, such as in learning modules, by topics, or by weeks. The teacher states explicitly how much time each week students need to dedicate to course-related assignments and assessments. The teacher explains the consistent inclusion of content in each module, such as assigned readings, PDFs of presentation slides, video links, learning activities, and assignments. The teacher demonstrates on the learning management system how to use the Assignments Tab for uploading completed assignments for grading.

The teacher provides guidance for learning how to be successful in the course, such as strategies for helping students learn how to learn. These suggestions for learning for each student, as proven effective by McGuire and McGuire (2015), should include the following:

a. State expectations for reading with guidance about how to outline a reading.

b. Stop frequently while reading to paraphrase information read.

c. Take notes in margins while reading.

d. Jot down questions to ask the teacher about readings.

e. Complete muddiest point exercises to identify any confusions about content.

f. Require answering questions and asking questions, such as in a discussion board or blog.

g. Complete self-assessments and homework assignments to assess understanding.

h. Study with a “study buddy” or group.
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i. Use a reflective journal as a forum to monitor thinking and record study sessions.

j. Develop a growth mindset to increase self-efficacy about ability to learn.

k. Teach material to a real or imagined audience.

l. Create practice exams to self-assess learning.

Building on this foundation for overall design and organization, a four-part expanded description of the analysis, design, development, and evaluation of quality online courses follows.

**Analysis, Design, Development, and Evaluation**

Quality online courses require analysis, design, development, and evaluation (Texas Tech Worldwide eLearning, 2020). Analysis along with Planning encompass understanding one’s personal teaching style and students’ learning characteristics and styles and include use of universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, variety, and chunking. Additionally, each teacher must decide if this course will be taught synchronously, hybrid, or asynchronously and inform students in the syllabus about use of the one chosen delivery method or planned use of a combination of these modalities.

Design begins with the end in mind by establishing measurable learning outcomes about what students should know and be able to do after completing the course. The design stage begins with planning the course including the course description, an overview of modules or topics, each with objectives written in measurable terms such as define, describe, explain, and apply, and alignment of objectives with a variety of assessments. Proper course design contains content sequencing of modules or topics for the course. Each module includes detailed explanations of each topic with learning activities and formative assessments; each module also should emphasize student learning progressing from simply remembering to evaluating and creating documenting greater critical thinking using Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy.
a. **Remembering** is recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory.

b. **Understanding** is making sense of information learned.

c. **Applying** is using knowledge gained in new ways.

d. **Analyzing** is breaking a concept into parts and understanding how each part relates.

e. **Evaluating** is making judgments based on a set of guidelines.

f. **Creating** is putting information together in an innovative way (Krathwohl, 2002).

Teachers are encouraged to introduce each new topic or module with a “hook,” such as a visual image or illustration, short video, quotation, intriguing question, statistic, open-ended question, or story to capture students’ attention.

*Development* requires making course materials like PDFs, Word documents, presentation slides, and captioned videos available in one folder for each topic, module, or week. Clarity in the course’s navigation system is imperative, including using 12-point font as a minimum, accessible font such as Arial or Times New Roman, easily readable headings and styles, and text displayed in a linear format. Each teacher should provide a detailed, clear, and printable syllabus containing these components.

1. Name, telephone number, email address, virtual office hours, and timeframe to expect responses to students’ questions and other communications.

2. Course description.

3. Student learning outcomes matched with a variety of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments while including some authentic assessments, such as presentations, projects, and case studies, not only tests and exams.

4. Required textbook, readings preferably in PDFs, or other learning materials; if available, use of open educational resources is recommended.
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5. Technology requirements for success in the course, such as internet connectivity, computer or tablet, software, microphone, and webcam; teachers should only use technology tools meeting accessibility standards and student privacy policies.

6. Course requirements with due dates, purpose of each assignment including skills and knowledge students will learn while completing each, detailed task expectations, and criteria for success, such as grading rubrics and examples of exemplary work, for each summative assessment.

7. Multi-faceted grading system with low-stakes assessments (e.g., formative), authentic assessments (e.g., projects), and high-stakes assessments (e.g., tests); also, ensure timely posting of grades to an accessible gradebook.

8. Policy for missing deadlines for assignments, such as no assignments accepted late or the consequences of late submissions.

9. Course outline with a list of topics and overview of content, assigned readings, and due dates for assignments.

10. Institutional and department policies on academic integrity and academic misconduct, such as cheating, plagiarism, and collusion.

11. Institutional policies about religious observances, officially approved and excused trips, illness and death notification, and statement about services to students with disabilities.

Evaluation is the fourth component of a quality online course. Completion of this evaluation before teaching the course helps ensure it meets national standards, such as the Open SUNY Course Quality Review. Once an evaluation affirms excellence and best practices in quality online course development, next comes the actual teaching of this course.

Teaching Quality Online Courses
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Quality online courses use best practices in online teaching (Texas Tech Worldwide eLearning, 2020). Teachers must communicate often and clearly, including meeting virtually with students during office hours and getting to know each student individually. Teachers must provide students frequent and meaningful feedback. Providing examples of exemplary work helps students understand expectations and format. Teachers in quality online courses facilitate active participation and collaborations among students in formative assessments, blogs, discussion boards, discussion groups, and question and answer forums.

Teachers should infuse, as appropriate, their online courses with digital content resources and materials, such as review games, informative videos, and current events. They should remind students frequently about deadlines. Teachers in quality online courses invite feedback from students through anonymous surveys and use feedback received to enhance students’ learning opportunities. They should assign capstone assignments or culminating learning activities to bring effective closure to the course.

Teachers in quality online courses prepare students for online learning. They can help students resolve technology issues, use their preferred learning styles, and overcome feelings of isolation. Teachers should establish and maintain presence in the course through communications provided via the learning management system and communicate explicit expectations for themselves and each student. This helps meet the federally mandated requirement of regular and substantive interaction in every online course. They reinforce “they are there to help each student have a feeling of being engaged.” For example, the teacher might send out a first-of-the-week email message including deadlines for assignments due that week, a brief review of information presented and discussed the previous week, and a focused preview of information about the topic.
for the upcoming week. They provide timely and constructive feedback throughout the semester on discussion board posts, assignments, quizzes, and tests.

Teachers in quality online courses facilitate ongoing interactions [teacher to student(s) and student(s) to student(s)]. Teachers should add announcements on the learning management system about deadlines for assignments and any adjustments in the syllabus. They should schedule virtual meetings with each student and hold virtual office hours weekly. One option for virtual office hours uses Blackboard Collaborate Ultra: first, click on Course Room and Join Course Room (which the teacher unlocks); second, click on the purple icon with two arrows; third, click on the icon bubble for chat; and fourth, type in a chat message about being available for office hours. Teachers are encouraged to set up a questions and answers forum and respond to students’ questions in a timely manner. Teachers may assign weekly posts to discussion boards (for suggestions and links to tips for threaded discussions, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eq4vw8ROGlo&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eq4vw8ROGlo&feature=youtu.be)). They could set up blogs to hold students accountable for completion of assigned readings. Maybe teachers can include a current events forum for posting real-world applications related to course content. Alternatively, they might require students to maintain a journal with weekly entries about study habits and key information learned. Teachers might choose to incentivize compliance with weekly journal entries with a few points on the final grade.

Classroom management and facilitation are important in quality online courses. Teachers must maintain secure and accurate records and files (in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; see [https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html) for more information). With continuing communication central to the effectiveness of teaching online courses, teachers keep students informed about expectations, assignments, and grades. Teachers
of quality online courses facilitate student-centered discussions by controlling discussion threads, narrowing down topics, organizing forums and threads to reflect course chronology or topical sequence, asking students questions by name, encouraging students to build on classmates’ participation in synchronous discussions and discussion board posts, and preparing a strategy for handling potentially controversial discussions.

Classroom management and course facilitation also include planning how to manage any noisy, quiet, disruptive, and disengaged students. Teachers should utilize a variety of assessment strategies, such as open book exams, multimedia assignments, or student-developed e-Books to demonstrate their learning (see https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/student-e-books/ for more information about using e-Books). For teachers who use multiple-choice questions, these should be effective in measuring student learning (see https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/writing-good-multiple-choice-test-questions/; Brame, 2013). Teachers of quality online courses should provide students with resources for success, including links to the library, student services, technology support, disability services, and accessibility assistance listed in the course syllabus or available through the learning management system. Quality online courses ensure students feel a sense of community, which engaging learning activities greatly enhance. Next, these two aligned components are discussed.

**Active Learning Helps Build and Maintain a Sense of Community**

Many teachers may need to re-conceptualize the learning process from solely one-way communication (i.e., lecturing) to interactive lecturing that includes actively engaging students—synchronously and asynchronously (Barkley & Major, 2018). Each teacher should plan and use a variety of individual and group learning activities, with some choices of activities that will allow students to create and maintain a supportive online learning community. All teachers should
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maintain a continuous feedback loop between themselves and each student. Teachers need to ensure each activity contributes to student engagement and increases learning, which can deepen students’ knowledge of content and strengthen higher-order and critical thinking. They need to help students learn how they can learn more effectively through use of metacognitive strategies (see Lumpkin, 2020, for more information). Teachers in quality online courses need to help build a sense of community with other learners by facilitating student-to-student discussions and interactions and strengthening students’ self-motivation and interest in learning.

One effective approach is to develop questions students can respond to via internet-connected smart phones, tablets, and laptops to help the teacher know whether each student has read an assigned reading, understands it, or has questions. Free technologies teachers might choose to use include Kahoot! (https://kahoot.com/) for review games and formative assessments, Lino (https://en.linoit.com/) for real-time sharing of responses to open-ended questions synchronously and asynchronously via a virtual bulletin board, and Poll Everywhere (https://www.polleverywhere.com/) for real-time viewing of responses to objective and essay questions.

Teachers of quality online courses should use student feedback from formative assessments and quizzes to assign or adjust discussion questions, identify unclear or unknown information or content, and guide students in adjusting how they are reading, understanding, and learning. Teachers confirm learning materials are accessible to all students. To assist with providing captions, teachers can go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88WRbyUjn1c to learn how to use the YouTube auto-captioning feature using these steps.

a. Create a YouTube account or use an existing account.

b. Go to Your Channel.
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c. Click on a video within Your Channel.
d. Click on Subtitles.
e. Click on the right on Add under subtitles.
f. Click on Create new subtitles or CC (not on the first two options).
g. Edit the auto-generated text by clicking within each time section (click on each time section for making sure edits match audio correctly).
h. Click on Save at the top to keep all edits.

Teachers should make sure PDFs are accessible. They should begin with an accessible Word document and then convert it to a PDF. They should use descriptive links and full URLs, instead of only “click here.” For accessible PowerPoint slides, teachers need to select accessible templates with contrasting colors and describe all hyperlinks, not just “click here.” Teachers should include alternative text (i.e., alt tags) or long descriptions for all images in slides, documents, and email messages. This text should include the context for each image, be limited to less than 250 characters, and begin with action verbs, provide a general overview, and add specific details. Using some of the active learning strategies described in the next section can help build and maintain students’ sense of community in online courses.

**Examples of Active Learning Strategies**

Quality online courses should successfully use a variety of active learning strategies.

1. *Active Reading Documents*—develop a handout with tasks along with a brief description of exactly students should extract and record (Barkley & Major, 2018).

   a. For foundational knowledge, ask students to describe the main idea of the reading and three key points.
b. To make application, ask students to use an organizational structure like an outline, chart, or matrix and then answer three questions.

c. For integration, ask students to make three connections among the key ideas or concepts and three connections among these ideas or concepts with other readings or previous information presented.

2. Know-Wondered-Learned—ask students to record what they already know, have questions about, and learned (Barkley & Major, 2018).

a. Know—students describe what they know about a topic prior to completing a reading.

b. Wondered—students list what knowledge they want to gain by completing a reading.

c. Learned—students explain what they learned while completing a reading.

3. Advanced Organizers—provide organizational structures for students to use for categorizing, synthesizing, and evaluating information on each topic (Barkley & Major, 2018).

4. Guided Notes—ask questions on a handout that students can answer while completing a reading (Barkley & Major, 2018).

5. Blogs—develop questions on assigned readings and require students to post responses to gain foundational knowledge about a topic (Achen & Lumpkin, 2015).

a. Explain expectations for blogs in the syllabus and provide a blog grading rubric.

b. Set up randomized groups of 5-10 students each on the learning management system.

c. Establish and list on the syllabus a consistent deadline for completing posts.

d. Develop specific blog prompts or questions requiring use of information from each reading.

e. Post all blog prompts or questions on the learning management system and encourage students to use these as guides as they read.
f. Provide an opportunity to complete one or more additional blog posts for extra credit as an incentive to complete all required blog posts.

6. *Skeleton Notes*—provide partial note handouts students can fill in or complete during lectures (Barkley & Major, 2018).

   a. Bookends begin with a review game or muddiest point exercise, such as by asking students to write down the most difficult or confusing point in an assigned reading; end class by asking students to prepare exit tickets on which they compose bumper stickers describing what they learned in this class.
   b. Interleaves describe alternating short lectures and learning activities throughout the class.
   c. Overlays are the learning activities used during class to facilitate students focusing their attention on the lecture.

8. *Real-World Applications*—ask students to make applications of new knowledge and understanding in different contexts (Barkley & Major, 2018).

9. *Think-Pair-Share*—ask students to think about the answer to a review question or application question; use social media to pair with a classmate and share their thinking and answers (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005).

10. *Jigsaw*—assign a topic to a group of students to investigate and gain greater knowledge (Barkley, 2010).
   a. Ask students during a week to meet via social media, Google Docs (https://www.google.com/docs/about/), Microsoft Teams (https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software), or Flipgrid
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(https://info.flipgrid.com/) with two classmates who are investigating the same topic and discuss what they are learning.

b. Assign each student to teach two other students via social media, Google Docs, Microsoft Teams, or Flipgrid what they learned individually and in communications with two classmates.

11. *Concept Map or Graphic Organizer*—ask students to draw a diagram that conveys their understanding of or ideas about a complex concept, procedure, or process studied; this concept map should depict relationships between ideas through a network of boxes or circles representing connections (Barkley & Major, 2018).

12. *Minute Paper*—after concluding a topic or unit, ask students to respond to the two questions below; the teacher provides feedback by summarizing responses and posting the answers to the questions on the learning management system and adds further clarifications in the module folder to reinforce student learning (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

a. What was the most important thing learned today in class?

b. What important question remains unanswered or concept remains unclear or needs further explanation?

13. *Check for Understanding*—develop and post in the module folder on the learning management system questions to help students determine has been learned and they still need to learn; students must attempt to answer these questions, but if they cannot answer the questions, the teacher provides answers (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

14. *Circular Response Discussions*—choose a theme or topic, form groups with 6-8 students, and get a student to volunteer to start each discussion. (This activity works well in breakout groups on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra or Zoom classes.) The first student speaks up to a
minute and then yields the floor to the second student. The second student must respond to or
add directly to the comments of the first student. After a minute, the second student stops
speaking, and the third student becomes the discussant; the discussion progresses until every
student has participated; then the discussion continues in a more free-flowing format.

Students may not interrupt a classmate who is speaking (Brookfield, 2015).

15. *Circle of Voices*—assign 4-5 students to each group; ask a question challenging students to
think critically about what they want to say; students in turn answer the question for about
one minute each; then the discussion continues in more free-flowing format; additional
questions can be asked and the groups can be randomized again (Brookfield, 2015).

16. *Synthesis*—Use a closing activity, such as asking students to identify the key terms or
concepts taught in class (Barkley & Major, 2018).

17. *Review Games*—students enjoy the competitiveness of participating in review games with
these and other games helping students have fun learning.


   d. Quizizz (https://quizizz.com/).


   f. Who wants to be a Millionaire https://www.superteachertools.us/millionaire/.

18. *Free Interactive Tools*—engage students more actively with videos, discussions, readings,
and classmates with the teacher providing feedback.

   a. Edpuzzle (https://www.commonsense.org/education/videos/how-to-customize-videos-
      with-edpuzzle)—allows teachers to customize videos.
b. PlayPosit ([https://go.playposit.com/](https://go.playposit.com/))—allows teachers to add quiz questions to existing videos.

c. FeedbackFruits listed under Build Content within Blackboard—each category (comprehension; interactive audio; assignment feedback; skill feedback; discussion; interactive video; interactive document; group member interaction; and peer feedback) includes a short video describing how to use each option to facilitate students’ active engagement and/or provide feedback to students.


a. Begin with a low-stakes initial discussion board post, such as posting a photo with a two-sentence self-introduction along with responses to two classmates’ introductions.

b. Set a consistent deadline for an initial post, such as noon on Monday of each week.

c. Set a consistent deadline for two posts to two classmates’ posts, such as Saturday at midnight of the same week.

d. Require one initial post responding to the question written in complete sentences and grammatically correct of between 200-250 words.

e. Require two additional posts of 150-200 words in response to other students’ posts by the end of the week with each post including a new idea or expanding on an idea expressed by two different classmates (i.e., not an “I agree” comment).

f. Stipulate that citations are required for any quote included in a post.

g. Provide a grading scale such as

5 points = for initial substantive and meaningful comments in post.

4 points = for substantive and meaningful comments to two classmates’ posts.

3 points = somewhat substantive initial post.
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2 points = for substantive additional comments to one classmate’s post.

1 point = for attempting an initial post.

1 point = for making two general comments to one or two classmates’ post(s).

0 points = for no, late, or inadequate posts.

h. Clarify the teacher’s role of reading all posts, responding to questions, adding helpful information, and clarifying any perceived misunderstandings.

i. Provide feedback to help students improve their future posts.

j. Track students’ participation and the teacher’s posts to all students.

k. Consider establishing discussion groups instead of an all-class discussion board if the class has an enrollment over 20.

l. Create questions students and the teacher care about discussing.

m. Ask students to serve as discussion leaders to summarize posts and reflect on these posts—maybe as an extra credit opportunity.

n. Encourage students to take notes on weekly discussion board posts—maybe as an extra credit opportunity or to increase learning.

20. Use Breakout Groups on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra—see https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Breakout_groups for visual guidance.

a. Assign students to the number of groups preferred (maximum of 20) after they have joined the session or Collaborate will randomly assign students to groups; click Start.

b. Share files with groups by clicking on Share Files, Share with Groups, and Share Now.

c. Set a timer for how much time remains for groups to complete the assignment by clicking on Share Content and Start Timer; students in the groups can see the timer.
d. Monitor breakout groups by assigning yourself to a group using the Attendees’ panel and click on Join Group; the teacher can move around to all groups by this repeating process.

e. Bring students back to the main room by clicking End Breakout Groups.

f. Make a student the presenter, such as to report out from a group discussion, by clicking on the purple icon with two arrows, then the second icon with two silhouettes, then on the small circle with three dots on the right side of the student’s name, and then on Make Presenter, which gives this student access to the icon box with an arrow that will allow them to share the Whiteboard, their screen, or a file; after the student’s presentation, change the student back to a participant.

Conclusion

Successful pedagogical practices help faculty actively engage online students synchronously and asynchronously. Short video lectures focusing on essential content and information unavailable in the textbook or readings serve a vital role in student learning.

Building on the Home Page and Getting Started tabs, quality online courses require analysis, design, development, and evaluation. Teaching quality online courses must include regular and substantive interaction and communication between and among the teacher and all students. Because active learning strategies can help build and maintain a sense of community, interactive lectures interspersed with a variety of assessments and engaging learning activities significantly contribute to student learning.

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