

BEST PRACTICES FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

Synchronous Learning

A Guide for Justice Partners, Judicial College Instructors & Standing Committees

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As a result of COVID-19, education has seen a rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. The Illinois Judicial College has carried forward on this new wave of remote learning and it is here to stay. From now on, e-learning will provide us with an additional and valuable tool to help educate our fellow justice partners.

Research suggests that online learning has been shown to increase retention of information, and take less time, meaning the changes coronavirus have caused, might be here to stay. ¹

WHAT IS Synchronous learning:²

Synchronous learning is the type of learning you participate in when sitting in class or a training seminar. Synchronous learning is learning in real time with a teacher, tutor, or facilitator at the helm of the room leading the discussion, encouraging active participation in the learning material. Taking this format online, *synchronous learning* becomes *synchronous e-learning*. Synchronous e-learning refers to real time online learning best exemplified by online classes, training sessions, and webinars taught through an online virtual classroom.

WHY IS Synchronous learning important:

The best part of learning with a teacher and your peers in real time is the ability to learn and work together. Learning together gives learners the ability to engage with the content, teacher, and each other.

¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/>

² 9 Benefits of Synchronous and Asynchronous e-Learning

<https://www.newrow.com/9-benefits-of-synchronous-and-asynchronous-e-learning/>

When it comes to the retention from learning activities, people generally remember 90% of what they do. Much more than the 20% of what they hear. ³

Suggested best practices to keep the learner engaged with the class and content:

I. GIVE PARTICIPANTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERACT AND LEAD

Participants can read, watch videos, or look at web resources on their own time. What they can't do is interact with each other in real-time. Synchronous sessions can be used to take asynchronous discussion to a deeper level or bring up totally new points for discussion.

Participants can take responsibility for making the most of their time by planning part of the session. Depending on the number of participants in your course, this can be done individually, in small groups, or collectively as an entire class.

Assigning preparation activities, providing a schedule, and giving participants the opportunity to interact during synchronous sessions will show your students that you value their time and make your synchronous sessions more engaging.

II. COLLABORATIVE TOOLS IN THE A VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Virtual classrooms not only replicate the physical classroom experience, but they can improve upon it by offering a suite of collaborative tools that encourage active learning such as:

- Breakout Rooms to encourage practice and discussion. This is readily available using Zoom Meetings.
- Digital whiteboard for interactivity.
- Screen sharing for teaching others.

³ Active Learning Techniques in Online Courses
<http://blogs.onlineeducation.touro.edu/active-learning-techniques-in-online-courses/>

- You can present your course content such as videos, presentations, and quizzes in real time.
- Group Problem Solving
 - Discussion of hypotheticals
 - Q and A of student posed questions
- Bring in student participation through role playing.

III. ENGAGING THE LEARNER BEFORE AND AFTER THE CLASS SESSION

- **Use of Discussion Threads** - A number of steps can be taken to promote an engaging and interactive online discussion, beginning with drafting the discussion questions that students are asked to respond to.⁴ Posting these questions in an online community facilitates an interactive discussion among the students during the online session, and serves as a reference after the online session. This would help replicate what occurs in in-person sessions where judges and other justice partners can share personal experiences.

For example, topics could include:

encounters with self-represented represented litigants, sovereign citizens, dealing with difficult litigants/lawyers, etc.

- **Organize Small Group Discussions** - The discussion can start before or after the class, by creating group chat rooms, blogs, or online discussion forums. Allowing for real-time, synchronous conversation in written form.
- **Advance Assignment** - Assigning group or individual tasks before the class is to begin, with instructions to present findings during class or at break-out sessions.

⁴ How To Write Engaging Questions for Online Discussion Forums
<https://www.jasonrhode.com/discussionquestiontips>

- **Pre-Recorded Sessions** - Recording audio/vocal submissions that can be integrated into the live webinar. This would allow a diverse group of justice partners to appear as part of a presentation. It would join justice partners from a rural jurisdiction who could appear along with those from suburban and large urban areas in several cameos. The result would be an exchange of ideas and recommendations that emerge from the different contexts existing in Illinois' 102 counties. Each appearing justice partner would describe unique aspects of an issue that arises in their jurisdiction and directly affects the subject matter, making the instruction more universally applicable.
- **Synchronous Chat Space** - Text only web based synchronous forum that enables multiple users to be online and in the same online "room" typing their comments to each other.⁵ Gives students an environment to share ideas, information and prepare group projects.
- **Review/listen to pre-assigned content** - For example, participants can be given access to a video of a mock jury selection, a pre-trial risk assessment interview, a clerk interacting with a non-English speaking person, a law clerk dealing with a difficult judge, a GAL interviewing a child, or a hearing where maintaining a good record is difficult for the court reporter. Prior to class, the student can be asked to compose a review of that content for discussion during live presentation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Use Online Activities:

<https://www.uis.edu/ion/resources/instructional-activities-index/>

⁵ https://www.d.umn.edu/~hrallis/professional/presentations/cotfsp06/indiv_tools/sync_chat.htm