

Key Effective Practices in Blended and Hybrid Courses



GOAL: As you plan or redesign your course, consider how to integrate the key effective practices of blended and hybrid courses to build an effective, engaging, and intentional course.

[Blended, hybrid, hyflex, and flipped course designs](#) use multiple modes to engage students and share course content. When using multiple engagement modes (e.g., in-person, asynchronous, synchronous virtual), it is important to consider the structure and flow of the course and how to balance these modes to support learning and engagement. See our **Course Design Models handout** for more information about course designs.

1. Focus on the pedagogy

What elements of your course will be delivered synchronously and asynchronously? What elements will be delivered in-person and virtually? What will the overall structure of your course look like?

Regardless of the teaching context, ensuring that your course learning outcomes, assessments, and learning activities are aligned is the first step in creating an effective course. Use [backwards design](#) to ensure [constructive alignment](#) among your course elements:

1. Review your **course learning outcomes** for needed changes or modifications
2. Develop or modify **assessments** to align with your outcomes
3. Create **learning activities** that support your assessments and outcomes
4. Select technological and pedagogical **tools** to support outcomes

After deciding on your course elements, the next step is to decide how each course element will be delivered, while considering the overall structure and flow of your course across in-person and virtual environments.

- Decide what to keep, repurpose, modify, and remove from prior versions of the course. Download our **Session Worksheets** and **Delivery and Engagement Modes** handout to guide you through this process.
- Use the [Student Workload Calculator](#) to estimate the expected workload for your students
- See our [Planning the Structure of your Remote Course Instructor Planning Guide](#) for ideas and examples of course organization and structure. Although this guide was designed for remote courses, many of the same principles apply to blended or hybrid courses.

2. Apply Universal Design in course design

How will you design your course to ensure it is equitable, accessible and inclusive?

Creating a learner-centred, equitable, inclusive, and accessible course, regardless of delivery mode or physical location of your learners, may involve different considerations than an in-person course. [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) and [Universal Instructional Design](#) (UID) are two models that offer guidance about how to design and deliver instructional materials and activities that support and promote access and inclusion.

- [Inclusive Teaching and Learning Online](#) contains strategies and resources for inclusive teaching online
- [Why Universal Design for Learning Is Essential to Higher Education's "New Normal"](#) offers a discussion about universal design in online environments



3. Use technology intentionally and purposefully

What tools will help you achieve your learning outcomes for your assessments and activities? What tools will help to create community? How will you and your learners become comfortable with new technology?

Technology selection should be based on the format, delivery modes, and nature of your assessments and learning activities. Keep it simple and consider learners' access and their expertise with various technologies.

- Use a [short survey](#) to understand students' expectations, needs, and challenges related to how they will be learning (in-person, virtual) and their use of technology
- Discover tools with [OpenEd's Remote Teaching and Learning](#) site and their [Webinar Series](#)
- See our [Evaluating Teaching Tools and Resources](#) section (page 32-35) in the [Adapting your Teaching and Learning Activities for the Remote Environment Instructor Planning Guide](#)

4. Create active and varied learning experiences

How can you make the most of your in-person time with students? What active learning opportunities can be offered to support students' learning in in-person and virtual environments?

Encouraging learners to engage in course material, with each other, and with you, supports their learning and helps to build community. To support engagement, provide multiple and varied active learning opportunities that are aligned with your outcomes and assessments. Consider how active learning can be incorporated throughout the learning process: before, during, and after learners engage with content and ideas.

- Discover several active learning strategies for hybrid, hyflex, and physically distanced classrooms in these posts from [Vanderbilt Center for Teaching](#) and [Trefny Innovative Instruction Center](#)
- Explore active learning techniques for the remote/online environment in our [Adapting your Teaching and Learning Activities for the Remote Environment Instructor Planning Guide](#) (page 21-31)
- Implement activities and interactions to [support students' self-directed learning](#)

5. Build course community and rapport with your learners

What will you do to intentionally create community and connection in your course? How can the community you create during in-person meetings be carried forward and enriched in the virtual environment?

The [Community of Inquiry Framework](#) provides a model for facilitating effective learning experiences and community building through these interdependent elements: teaching presence (student-instructor interaction); social presence (student-student interaction); cognitive presence (student-content interaction); and [emotional presence](#).

- Learn about strategies for [Community Building in Online and Hybrid/HyFlex Courses](#) (Columbia University) and [Building Community in a Flex-Hybrid Course](#) (Champlain College)
- Incorporate elements of a Community of Inquiry (for examples, see Indiana University's [Types of Interaction](#) and Western's [guiding questions](#) for facilitating an online course)
- Include intentional, frequent opportunities to [build belongingness, community, and connection](#)
- Read about how to [Humanize your Online Class](#)



6. Provide regular feedback

Who will provide feedback, how will feedback be shared, and how often will feedback be offered? At what points in the course is it essential for students to receive feedback so that they can progress in their learning?

Frequent feedback is an important opportunity for communication about content and expectations and plays a critical role in helping learners stay on track, accountable, and engaged. Identify key points in the course where students must receive some form of feedback to move forward with their learning.

- Consider different methods of offering feedback. Refer to our **Grading and Feedback section** (page 36-38) in the [Adapting your Assessments for Remote Teaching and Learning Instructor Planning Guide](#) for ideas about different types of feedback to lessen the grading workload.
- Use [CourseLink functions](#) to support grading and feedback, including CourseLink rubrics, audio feedback, and the Peer Evaluation, Assessment and Review Tool (PEAR)

7. Manage the “classroom”

How and when will you communicate with your learners? How will they communicate with each other and with you? What are your expectations for students in the in-person and virtual environments in your course?

Frequent and transparent communication is essential to build community and trust and to help learners successfully navigate the course and their learning. Share your expectations around how students should interact with you, their peers, and course technology. Communicate information about the course, assessments, technology use, support, and resources.

- See our [Classroom Management in the Remote Environment site](#) for strategies to prevent classroom management challenges and for managing difficult situations in online/virtual environments
- Adopt strategies for [Building Community and Managing the Classroom](#)
- Ryerson’s resource on [Effective Online Communication](#) contains several helpful strategies

8. Gather feedback, reflect, and revise

How are your learners experiencing the course? What feedback would be valuable to ensure the course is meeting students’ needs and fulfilling its goals and outcomes? How will you gather and implement feedback?

Create opportunities for feedback from your students and colleagues on your course. Reflect on what went well, what didn’t go well and why, and what could be changed. Teaching is a practice, and creating a successful course is an iterative process that takes time. Ask the OTL or your colleagues for help, be forgiving, take breaks, step away, reflect, and return.

- Gather [mid-semester feedback](#) from students
- Check the [OTL Events page](#) for upcoming workshops and drop-in office hours

Additional Resources

1. [Best Practices for Designing Blended Courses](#), University of Waterloo
2. [Five Tips for Hybrid/HyFlex Teaching with All Learners in Mind](#), Columbia University
3. [Blended and Online Learning](#), Vanderbilt University

