

WebLive Courses: Recommendations for Design & Delivery

In light of campus closures across the globe in March 2020 due to COVID-19, many institutions have adapted to a new form of instruction and turned to web-conferencing to continue live classes. Schedules at Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) offer WebLive (WL) courses which are offered synchronously online on the days and times listed in the schedule. Students must log into Canvas on the first day of class, at the time on the schedule. Students should complete an online tutorial prior to the start of classes. To access the tutorial or for more information, visit [WebCollege](#).

At TMCC, two web-conferencing tools are available to faculty via the institution's learning management system, Canvas. Those two web-conferencing tools are Zoom and Big Blue Button. Both web-conferencing platforms attempt to replicate the experience of a traditional classroom with live video streaming, screen sharing, breakout rooms for group interaction and discussion, and a live chat feature for questions to be answered as they arrive in real-time. Learn more about both by visiting the [WebCollege Faculty Resources](#).

If intending to retain a primarily synchronous approach to teaching, the following advice should be considered as you prepare for this course transition. These recommendations are designed to help move teaching practices forward in the synchronous online classroom, as well as to support the well-being of TMCC's instructors and online learners.

Student Recommendations

- Join class web-conferences on time.
- Join using your first and last name; using the web-conference link in your Canvas course will automatically identify you.
- For attendance purposes, please review the course syllabus and confirm whether or not your instructor will require a camera.
- Test your camera and audio before class starts: click to test below the "Join with computer audio" button.
- Locate yourself in a place free of noise and distractions.
- Dress appropriately, as you would if you were going to class.
- Use headphones or earbuds for the best audio experience.
- Mute your microphone when not speaking.
- With WL it is customary to speak up politely to get your teacher's attention as they may not see a raised hand. Your instructor may have other methods of interacting with you.
- Be proactive about seeking help regarding course issues (instructor) and technical troubleshooting ([helpdesk](#)).

Instructor Recommendations

Synchronous Session Preparation

Agenda: Consider producing an agenda that provides students with an overview of how much time will be spent on lecture, collaborative work, solo work, or group discussions. Also consider posting the agenda for your synchronous class session at least a day in advance in Canvas.

These considerations will help establish consistency for your online learners. Posting agendas on the same day each week will help them plan in advance and meet your expectations.

Practice: Practice at least once in advance and rehearse using the share screen and switching among the windows you intend to display. If you're teaching solo, practice clicking between the web-conferencing platform's presentation mode, screen share mode, presentation materials, and other technologies such as whiteboarding tools, polls, or videos.

Check connection settings and remember, you can never have enough bandwidth.

Be mindful of processor speed and memory capacity. Close heavy applications like Adobe Photoshop or pdf Writer to allow maximum processor usage.

Try to perform a test for students to see if they suffer from device incompatibilities or poor bandwidth problems. A test run can ensure less disruptions during live sessions.

Adapt: Adapt to the online synchronous classroom.

If you usually use a whiteboard as part of a class session, you have a number of options, but it's important to note that if accustomed to multiple simultaneous boards you may need to adapt to showing a single screen at a time.

Approach the syllabus and course materials with a critical eye. Consider how students will encounter things differently in an online environment and adjust learning activities, assessments, and instructional materials to accommodate.

Prepare: Prevent distractions and ensure a smooth synchronous class session by cleaning up your virtual classroom and preparing in advance. The smoother the synchronous session, the better the learning experience for your students.

Close all computer windows that won't be used (particularly personal email, messages, etc.) prior to the start of the synchronous class session.

Prepare class in advance. Attention spans online are low, so be ready to begin on time, have whiteboards ready as well as the files (PDF/ PowerPoint/ Word/ Excel) you will use, and check any links that will be shared during the session.

Open the session early if possible so that students can begin signing in and testing technology (and encourage students to do so). Have a holding slide with the class title and objectives. An example might read: "Welcome students. Please wait for two minutes; we will start the class shortly."

Configure the web-conferencing settings and preferences to support your teaching. For example, you are able to turn off the entrance/exit chime, allow or prevent student screen-sharing, pre-mute everyone, etc.

Time Management: Online synchronous class sessions go quickly; the time will fly by faster than you think. Below are a few tips which will help manage this important and limited time with students.

Watch your pace and timing. Always start and stop the meeting on time, and pay close attention to the pace so that all agenda items can be addressed.

Remember that, sometimes, less is more. When synthesizing the previous week or looking ahead to the next, a simple and concise slide deck for sharing is appropriate.

Try keeping classes on schedule.

Maintain a firm hand and be prepared to (gently) cut someone off, and to make sure that the agenda is covered and that everyone has the chance for input.

Be sure to leave plenty of time for information processing and questions.

Technical issues with some participants are inevitable, and may slow things down and hinder the efficiency of the live meeting time.

Make plans for how you will handle exigencies. If a class cannot be conducted for any reason or one of the attendees is having a problem, try to extend the session, reschedule, or ask the attendee to watch the recording later.

Continuously Learn: Remember that, regardless of the teaching modality, educators are constantly learning from mistakes, embracing constructive criticism, and adopting new teaching technologies.

Try to make time for a debriefing with colleagues about what worked well and what did not, so adjustments can be made quickly for subsequent course offerings.

Analyze student feedback, as your best guide will be the students. Talk to them, gather feedback, and analyze their behavior.

Engaging Students

Presentation Tips: There are a variety of ways to design a synchronous session to keep students engaged and prevent them from feeling distracted, lacking support, or detached from the class.

Make transitions explicit: be sure to provide clean, well-defined transitions between topics and learning activities.

Watch the pace and keep an eye on students' comprehension and engagement. In order to achieve this, you may need to check in with students more frequently than you might normally in a face-to-face classroom, to make sure that they follow the material and remain engaged.

Collaboration Tools: Both of the web-conferencing platforms in Canvas offer collaboration tools that you should take advantage of, including chat, polling, breakout rooms, and more.

It is difficult to listen to a lecture attentively on a small screen. Consider taking advantage of pedagogical tools to keep them engaged, such as breakout rooms, questions and discussions via chat, polling, annotations, or invited Q&A (using the "raise hand" feature). Also, remember to let the class know they can send you a private message if necessary.

Take turns and try to go down the list of all students in the meeting, asking for questions or comments.

Take breaks if necessary and encourage your students to stand up, stretch, and walk around.

Engage Visually: The beauty of a fully online and synchronous classroom is that there are numerous ways to engage visually with learners.

Remain visible, as it helps students stay engaged if they can see a face as material is presented. Set up devices so that even when using screen share students can see your face. If you want to be able to see students while you screen share, you may need to log into the web-conferencing platform via two devices at the same time. This allows you to screen share on one device (e.g., a tablet for whiteboarding) while having the gallery view of students on the other.

Encourage using cameras and microphones or, if a camera is required and stated in your syllabus, be sure to remind students. The most important thing is to make expectations for student participation clear at the start of class.

Make use of graphs, diagrams, emoticons, images, video, and audio. This will bring the class alive and help students learn by associating with visuals and sounds.

Engage Asynchronously: Remember to utilize Canvas tools and engage students asynchronously as well. Students should be able to review materials and notes through content sharing and class recordings.

Supplement live sessions with resources that can be explored independently, and consider posting summaries and key discussion points from synchronous sessions via announcements or email.

A major contributor to establishing a connected learning environment is frequent and authentic communication. Engage with students between scheduled class sessions, and think of your course in terms of weeks, rather than class times/sessions. This will help you and your students use all time well, intentionally tapping into opportunities for reflection and processing that happens outside of scheduled sessions.

Consider student workload in terms of total hours, rather than contact hours. The credit hour definition is 1 hour of lecture, 2 hours of homework per credit hour per week (135 hours total work time for a 15-week course). Take a look at what you are asking your students to do using this simple [guideline for workload calculation](#), which can help avoid cognitive overload and maximize time spent outside of class sessions.

Assessing Participation

Make Expectations Clear: In classes where participation is a heavy component of the grade, be sure to let students know early and often what forms or participation you will be tracking and how often you expect them to participate.

Emphasize Participation Tools: Design your synchronous class sessions to include a variety of tools so as to find a way to pry the quieter students from their shells and get them to engage with you, the session, and their classmates.

Encourage students to use chat to participate; this tool can draw in students who have great ideas to contribute yet may be somewhat quiet during discussions or debates. Reminding students that the quantity and quality of chat comments contribute to the participation grade can help limit frivolous chat and improve the sophistication of chat threads.

One-on-one or small-group meetings can be held using the web-conferencing platforms, almost the same way as in-person. But it is important to maintain the same norms around minimizing distractions as in the classroom, and to remember that your level of engagement will determine the students' level.

Remain Flexible: Be flexible and offer alternatives when possible for students who are unable to attend or may need to leave early or arrive late. Recorded class sessions are not the same as being there in real-time, so consider some other ways to have students engage with content and each other, such as questions to frame their reading/viewing, informal discussions or observation threads, and plenty of others!

Pros and Cons for Camera Use During Synchronous Classes

Pros	Cons
<p>Sharing faces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates a sense of connection and accountability.• Fosters community and enhances presence.• Helps build engagement and trust.• Simulates in-person instruction. Students have to show their faces in class.• Makes it easy to identify students by name especially in large-enrollment classes.• Gallery view or the “Brady Bunch view” makes everyone visible to each other at the same time. May help to break perceived power differential.	<p>There could be issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The digital equity gap for example limited bandwidth, internet access, and no camera on older laptops.• Invasion of privacy. Students can see other students’ faces all the time.• The element of video overshooting; students do not want to show their surroundings.• Self-consciousness is also an issue.• The stimulation of staring into faces at close range can be exhausting.• Concerns about FERPA-protected information.

Advice

Please consider the following recommendations for web-conferencing in an online classroom:

- Establish and communicate expectations for the use of web cameras early on in the class, and explain the reasoning for these expectations.
- Set norms for synchronous meetings and the use of a web camera.
- You may ask students to make themselves visible if they are asking or responding to a question but, otherwise, they can turn off the camera and use the chat box.

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