Synchronous Activities

Synchronous activities are activities that occur live in real-time. Synchronous activities can help to build engagement, connection, and community in distance education courses.

Tools for Synchronous Activities

- **WebEx**
  - U of S supported tool for online meetings and classes
  - Communicate with others via audio, video, and text
  - Ability to share your screen, applications, videos, etc. with others in the meeting

- **Chat rooms**
  - Communicate via text in real-time
  - Most Learning Management Systems, such as, Blackboard Learn have built-in chat room tools

- **Skype**
  - Very popular and easy to use online communication tool
  - Requires all participants to have a free account
  - Works well for one-on-one

- **Twitter**
  - Communicate in real-time via tweets, which can include text, images, videos, and links
  - Requires all participants to have a free account
  - Works well for fast-paced discussions around a topic

- **Other free online options include Google Hangouts and Periscope**

- **Telephone**

Types of Synchronous Activities

- **Live Virtual Classes**
  You can hold live online class sessions and give a lecture or lead a discussion just like you would in a face-to-face classroom. To enhance your class you can include a slideshow or use an editable whiteboard. Students can participate by raising their virtual hands, typing comments into a chat area, grabbing the microphone to make audio comments, or even sharing their webcam. These sessions can be a great way to bring your class together to explore a topic, but be aware that it is often very difficult to coordinate the schedules of your distance students. You may want to consider making these sessions optional or recording the session for students that cannot attend live.

- **Guest Speakers**
  Using the same tools that you would use for a live online class session, you could invite guest speakers to present to your students or be involved in a Question and Answer session.

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- **Student Presentations**
  Using the same tools that you would use for a live online class session, you can hand over the presentation tools to your students and allow them to present to their peers.

- **Virtual Office Hours**
  In a distance class, you will want to offer students the opportunity to ask you questions in a synchronous form because in some cases emails are not the best way to explain a difficult problem or solve an issue. You can use the telephone or Skype on a case-by-case basis, or you could schedule specific virtual office hours. To schedule specific hours, you will want to inform students of the time(s), give them access to a virtual classroom, and have the room open on your computer. When a student enters the room you will get a notification and can then communicate with him or her through the chat area, via audio, or via webcam. You can also use a virtual whiteboard to work through problems. Be sure to keep in mind your students' schedules when setting your office hours.

- **Student Collaboration**
  The synchronous tools may also be used for students to collaborate on assignments without needing to meet face-to-face. Students may want to use a familiar tool, such as Skype, to connect with one another. You may also set up rooms for them to connect as a larger group. The same tools that you would use for a live online class can be used for students to meet without the instructor present. When setting this up be sure to give the students moderator privileges so they can control all of the features of the room.

- **Twitter Chats**
  Twitter chats are live discussions that take place online using the Twitter website or app. Usually a moderator and a group of people will agree to be online on Twitter at a specific time. They will use a common hashtag (e.g., #math101) in their tweets allowing everyone interested in this chat to see all the tweets. Because of the 140-character limit of tweets the discussion pace can be quite fast. The instructor could identify a discussion topic and invite learners to respond while using a hashtag for the class. The instructor may also want to invite a guest to participate and discuss with students relevant course topics. When organizing a Twitter chat, schedule it for a specific and short period of time when everyone will be able to participate (e.g., 1 hour in an evening).

Also see the Remote Teaching Tools page for information regarding alternative remote teaching methods

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