Best Practices for Synchronous Online Courses
Are you teaching a 100% synchronous course? Here are some best practices for teaching synchronous courses.

Course Design and Syllabus Development
- **Consider your full course design.** As you plan your course, decide which portion will be synchronous and which part will be asynchronous. For example, in a live session, you might work on math problems together and then assign homework to students. You might also have students watch a video outside the synchronous time and then hold a discussion during the live session.
- **Align each synchronous session with course learning outcomes and module learning objectives.** Synchronous sessions should not just happen in a vacuum. Connect with your current, past, or future objectives.
- **Determine which technology you will use to hold each live synchronous session.** The Division of Information Technology (DoIT) supports Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and Microsoft Teams. Ensure that the technology you plan to use is accessible for any synchronous sessions and activities. Let students know the technology requirements ahead of time.
- **Keep accessibility in mind.** If you need support, work with the Student Disability Resource Center. Determine the accessibility needs of students.
- **Think about logistics.** How will students know where and how to access the live session? Will you use the same link for each session?
- **Make sure syllabus policies reflect synchronous sessions.** Specify the course delivery method. Include the dates, times, and location for synchronous class sessions based on the registrar information given to students (i.e., MW 8:00 am - 9:15 am.). Provide a clear attendance policy in the syllabus.

Plan Your Class Sessions
- **Inform students of dates and times.** Provide dates and times for synchronous sessions in the course syllabus and the learning management system.
- **Decide the session format.** Consider how you want to present your content. Present content in multiple ways/formats. This could be through lectures, activities, and/or reflection. If you need to lecture, make sure that participants are also involved, even as small as answering a question. Provide instructions for students to follow for all activities and interactions.
- **Focus on interaction and active participation.** Plan for instructor-student, student-student, and student-content interactions. Map out active learning strategies to help eliminate passive listening. During live sessions, use polls (Collaborate, Poll Everywhere), interactive, synchronous discuss boards (Padlet, Flipgrid), collaborative documents (Office 365), chat, live quizzes (Kahoot). Integrate group collaboration activities using breakout rooms.
- **Practice before the session.** Make sure you know your content and technology. Consider holding a practice session for students. Some students may need time to learn the tools and technology ahead of time. Practicing with a colleague is beneficial as well.
- **Set clear expectations.** Students should know what to expect in the session and what is expected of them. Share any resources or materials needed for the session.
- **Seek support.** Build support relationships. You are not in it alone. Refer to the Center for Teaching Excellence, Office of Distributed Learning, eLearning Services at DoIT, Student Accessibility Office, and Library for assistance.

- **Prepare students for the session.** Let students know what you plan to cover and ask them to prepare before the session. Assign a reading beforehand, post an outline of what will be covered, or ask students to prepare a question or talking point.

Facilitate Your Class Sessions

- **Prepare for the session.** Check your surroundings before you go on camera. Clean up your desktop if you plan to share your computer. Close all programs you do not intend to use. Log in early to the technology for the session and get everything set up and ready to go. Preload your materials (i.e., load PowerPoint presentation). Login to any websites you plan to use. This will save valuable class time and help eliminate any last-minute issues.
- **Arrive early and stay after.** Give students a chance to build community or ask questions outside of class time. Students can unmute themselves to talk, type in the chat, or send an email message.
- **Recording attendance.** If you have an attendance policy, you can use attendance reports in Blackboard Collaborate Ultra for check-in based attendance. To boost student engagement, participation-based attendance is recommended.
- **Keep students active.** Use technology tools for active engagement and participation. Include multiple activities and opportunities for student response. Use a structure in lecture-based classes that include variety, such as introduction, mini-lecture (part 1), student activity, such as poll, another mini-lecture (part 2), and then a wrap-up.
- **Be aware of the time.** Allow plenty of time for students to set up technology and for the completion of activities. Do not keep students longer than the scheduled time.
- **Record it.** Always record your live sessions and let students know before recording each session. Make recordings easily accessible to students. Use the learning management system to post recordings, post an announcement, and/or send an email.
- **Be flexible.** Even though you plan your session, the session might go differently than you envisioned. That's okay. Adapt to the needs of your students. Don't be afraid to make changes as you go.
- **Provide feedback.** Pause throughout the live class session. Let students know when they can ask questions and take notes of students' responses to address later. Acknowledge students who participate and are active in the class.
- **Avoid tests.** Don't use live class sessions for student test taking. Synchronous online courses have asynchronous components. Resources on assessment best practices in online courses and assessments and grading.
- **Keep students informed.** Provide in-class and out-of-class reminders about class meetings and due dates. Remind students about assignment due dates and asynchronous activities and assignments. Connect students with accessibility resources.
- **Share any resources or materials used during the session.** Use the learning management system to post or link to resources and materials after each session. Students can efficiently utilize them for studying, assignments, or review.
- **Self-reflection and follow-up.** After the live session, consider what went well and what could have gone better. Check-in with students and ask how the session structure worked for them. Update your materials or make notes for next time.

Adapted from:

Sabo, C. (2020). *Best Practices for Synchronous Online Teaching and Learning*. Learning Technologies.

Wilson, K. (2017). *Best Practices for Synchronous Sessions*. Northwestern School of Professional Studies