

An Introduction to Hybrid Teaching

Learning Technologies

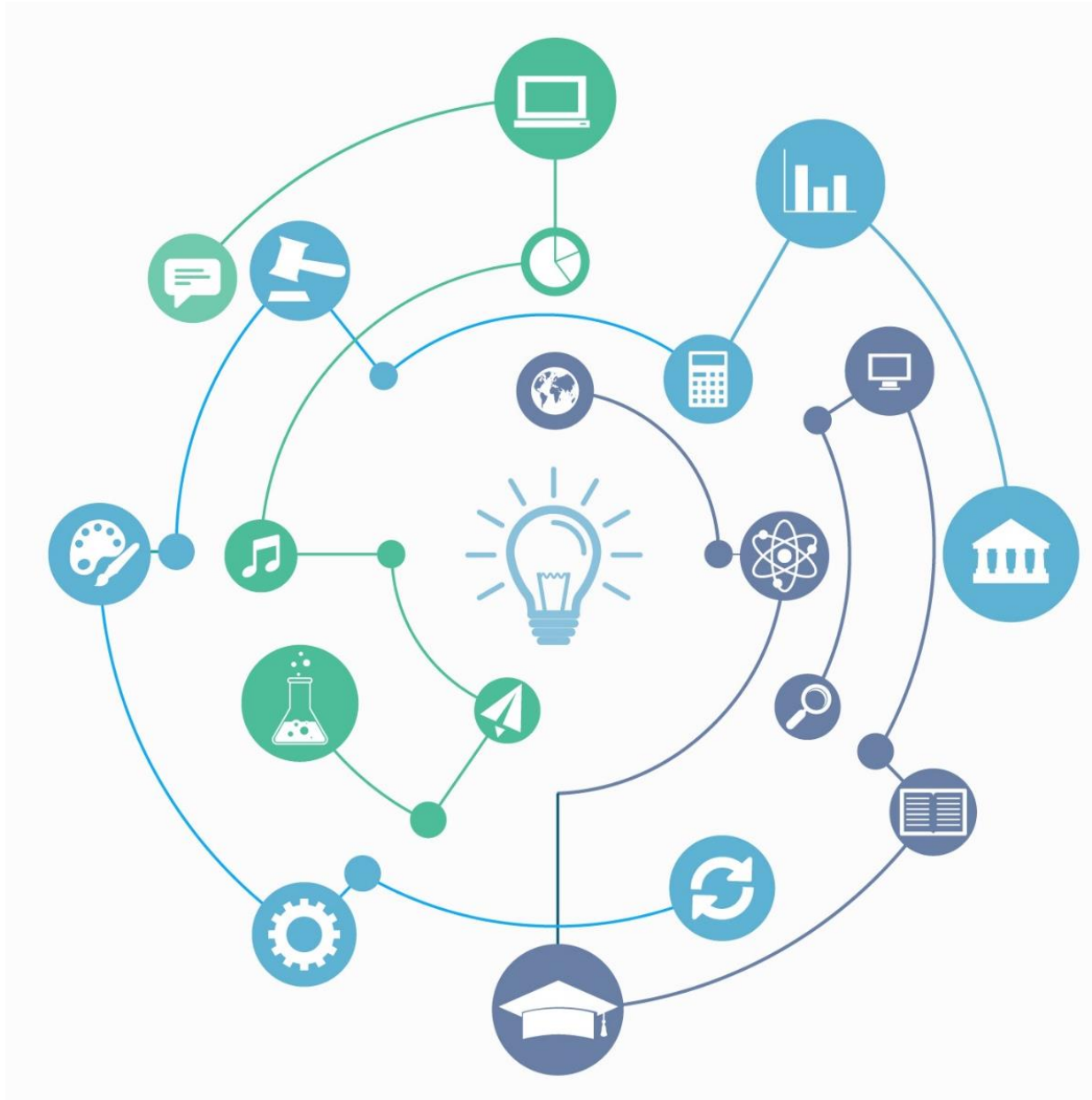


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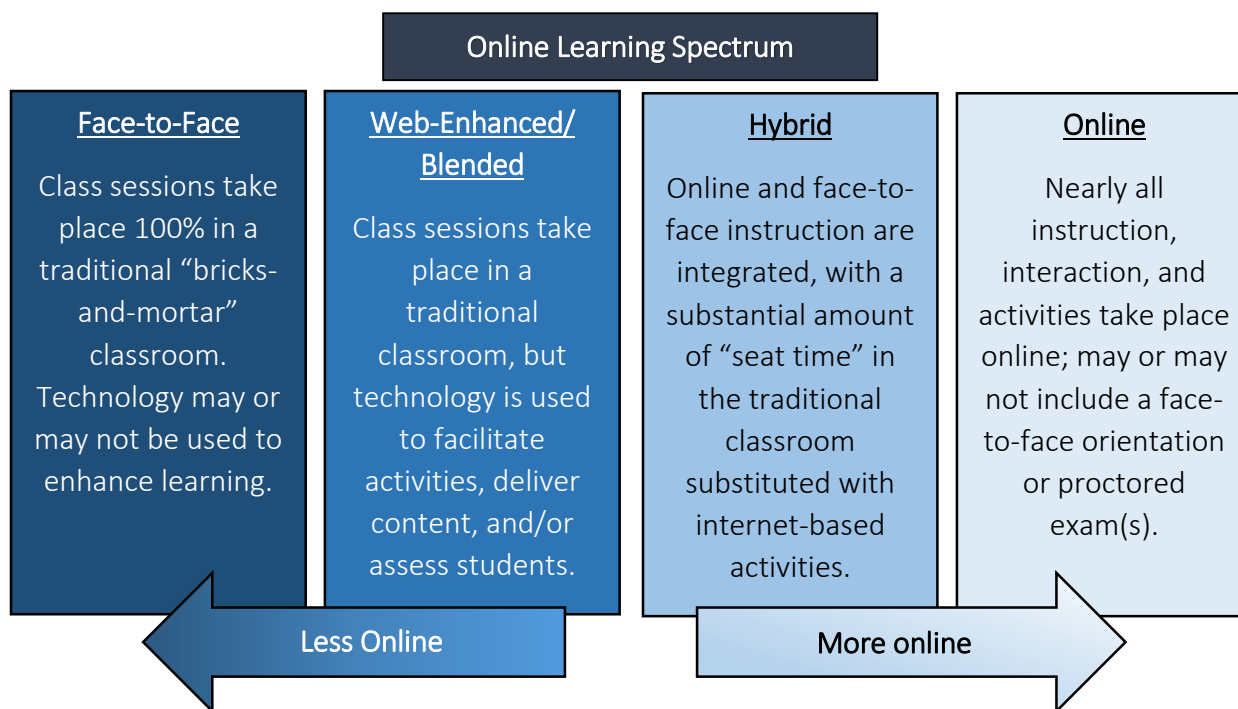
I. What is Hybrid Learning?

Hybrid learning combines face-to-face and online teaching into one cohesive experience. Approximately half of the class sessions are on-campus, while the other half have students working online. Although that may sound like a cut-and-dry formula, a lot of planning is needed to ensure that hybrid works well, allowing its two formats to capitalize on each other's strengths.



Given the unique opportunities that hybrid can offer, planning must be approached carefully. Instructors need to be familiar with not just the strengths of online and face-to-face teaching in their own rights, but also with how they can feed into each other over a longer term.

But before we take a deeper look at how to plan a hybrid course, let's make sure we're clear on terms. For example, many people might use the words "hybrid" and "blended" interchangeably, but in fact they mean different things. That difference is based primarily on the proportion of face-to-face and online sessions and/or instructional material in a given course. Whereas hybrid refers to teaching that is roughly balanced between its two formats (think 50/50), blended refers to a mostly traditional face-to-face course that also incorporates a few class sessions' worth of online instruction (think 25/75). Keep in mind that these are approximate definitions, because there is no exact science in quantifying how much instruction equals another kind of instruction (with the obvious exception of entire class sessions). That said, hybrid and blended are but two terms in what we might think of as a larger "online learning spectrum" (see chart below).



II. Benefits of Hybrid Learning

In the more than ten years that hybrid learning has been widely practiced,¹ numerous studies have been done on its effectiveness. The results are pretty clear: not only do students tend to prefer it as their format of choice, but the **learning outcomes and academic achievement are stronger with hybrid than for either face-to-face or online teaching alone.**



Why is this the case?

A big reason is flexibility – not just in terms of how time is used, but for how courses are taught, how students can engage with material and demonstrate learning, and how they interact with each other and the instructor. Whereas with face-to-face or online instruction, one format is chosen and used exclusively (and thus cut off from the benefits of the other), hybrid learning can offer the best of both in one unified experience.

Face-to-face teaching, on one hand, allows a kind of immediate, real-time engagement that can be difficult to capture online. Back-and-forth discussions, group work, presentations, and in-depth conceptual scrutiny can often be more robust in this setting, where visual cues (such as confused faces) and immediate interaction can offer meaningful learning opportunities. Deeper collegial relationships can be fostered among students and the instructor, leading to a community atmosphere that can be more difficult to forge online.

Online learning, on the other hand, can excel with independent exploration, innovative collaboration, information and technology literacy, and content mastery. Students can watch videos and read articles again and again to reinforce conceptual familiarity, complete assignments in a time and place that best suit their individual needs, and take more time crafting written dialogue with their peers. Online discussion forums offer opportunities to develop a more sustained and richer exploration of material than the more rapid-fire interaction of a face-to-face classroom, and students who may not be comfortable speaking in a room full of people often blossom as strong contributors online.

Both formats offer unique advantages which can be difficult if not impossible to replicate in the other, which is why combining the two into a single experience can create powerful learning opportunities. But the advantages can reach beyond that – studies also suggest that hybrid learning leads to lower rates of attrition and more efficient use of campus resources (especially classrooms and parking). It should come as no surprise then, that hybrid learning is often cited as the most effective format.

¹ Specifically, the combination of online and face-to-face teaching. Other forms of hybrid teaching have been used for more than 40 years.

III. Using Time Wisely

With fewer in-seat sessions than a traditional face-to-face class, hybrid makes the time that students and their instructor spend together a more precious commodity. As such, greater focus needs is placed on using that time more purposefully.

Whereas in a traditional classroom, a certain amount (sometimes a significant amount) of in-seat time might be spent watching videos, reading texts, and taking notes during faculty lectures, in a hybrid course, students are more often assigned these kinds of content-centered tasks in the online portion of the course, and spend face-to-face time more deeply exploring it, analyzing it, deconstructing it, and collaborating together to develop new ideas.

This kind of teaching approach is similar to what is called the “flipped classroom” model, in which students review video lectures and other resources online on their own, who then come to class ready to go further with what they covered. But the flipped classroom model is not a totally appropriate comparison for the potential of hybrid teaching. The sessions that are designated for online work in a hybrid class are not merely for reviewing material – they are intentionally much more active.



The expectation in a hybrid course, of both students and the instructor, is that in-seat time is more actively used. The question, “Can students do this on their own (alone or in groups)?” becomes a primary consideration in the course planning process, so much so that if students come to class only to be given a read-and-review assignment, they are often irked by what they see as an inadequate use of time, a wasted opportunity.

With the rapid rise of Web 2.0 tools, which focus on user collaboration, sharing of user-generated content, and social networking, the time that students spend online can go far beyond passive reading and watching. Students can actively engage with it and with each other – even create entire projects together – all online.

Of course, as with any course (regardless of format), there must be appropriate time given to both the introduction of new content, as well as opportunities to engage more deeply with it. The possibilities and flexibility that hybrid teaching offers, however, are arguably unmatched by purely online or face-to-face courses. The key to taking full advantage of that potential all lies in planning.

IV. The Student Experience

A hallmark of any good hybrid course is seamless integration of online and face-to-face activities.

This integration necessitates a thoughtful focus on the student experience, so that students are presented with engaging material and prompted to interact with it in innovative ways. That is not meant to imply that activities need always be terrific fun (although fun can be good), but they should be engaging, because this leads to students being more motivated to learn and succeed. **The possibilities of how students interact with content and with each other are greatly expanded in a hybrid course;** just having them read articles online and then meet to discuss them in-class, for example, takes no real advantage of a class format that can otherwise be a transformative experience.



But engaging students can be challenging in any course – how do we make it happen in hybrid?

In his article, "Blended Learning: Strategies for Engagement," educational consultant and Edutopia online editor Andrew Miller offers the following strategies to maximize student engagement:²

1) Leverage Virtual Class Meetings with Collaborative Work

One of the most prominent features of blended learning is the virtual (or synchronous) class meeting. Sometimes teachers spend the entire class in a virtual meeting room lecturing and presenting content. These meetings are often recorded and available for students to watch later, so they can be a more flexible learning activity than traditional in-class lecturing. With the potential time savings of having students watch recorded lectures, students can instead problem-solve together, collaborate on projects, and use virtual break-out rooms for guided practice. If you want students to be engaged in the class meetings, it must be meaningful. Collaborative work can be meaningful when students problem-solve together, plan, and apply their learning in new contexts.

2) Create the Need to Know

The key here is an engaging model of learning. Teachers can use project learning to create authentic projects where students see the relevance and need to do the work --

² Note that Miller uses the term “blended” to describe what would more often be called “hybrid.”

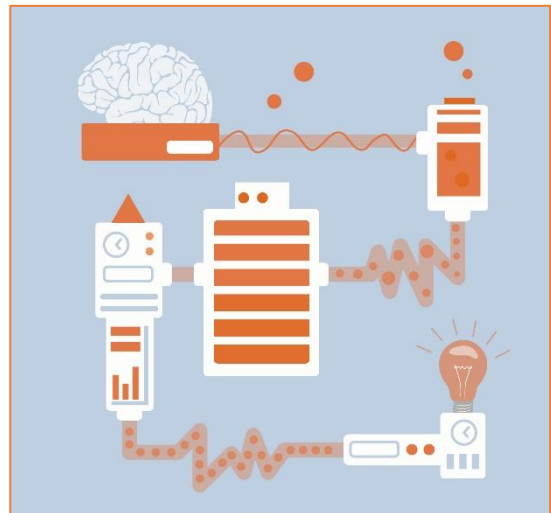
whether that work is online or in the physical classroom. The same is true for game-based learning. If students are engaged playing a serious game about viruses and bacteria, then teachers can use the game as a hook to learn content online or offline. Through metacognition, and the "need to know" activity, students "buy-in" to the learning -- no matter when and where that learning occurs.

3) Reflect and Set Goals

Related to the comment on metacognition above, students need to be aware of what they are learning as well as their progress towards meeting standards. Teachers need to build in frequent moments, both as a class and individual, to reflect on the learning and set S.M.A.R.T. goals [specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound]. Through these measurable and student-centered goals, students can become agents of learning, rather than passive recipients. Use reflecting and goal-setting both online and offline to create personal connection to the learning and personalized goals.

4) Differentiate Instruction through Online Work

In a blended learning classroom, there is often online work that needs to occur. This might be a module on specific content, formative assessments, and the like. However, students may or may not need to do all the work that is in a specific module. In an effort to individualize instruction, use the online work to meet individual students needs. Whether an extension of learning, or work to clarify a misconception, the work that occurs online can be more valuable to students when it is targeted. Students are no longer engaged in uninteresting busy work, but focused, individualized learning.



5) Use Tools for Mobile Learning

Edutopia recently published a guide called "Mobile Devices for Learning." This guide provides a variety of apps and tips, proposing that teachers use mobile devices as part of the learning environment. The great thing is that blended learning can partner well with many strategies and apps. If you use the flipped classroom model, for example, apps like Khan Academy, BrainPop, and YouTube are incredibly useful. Leverage the flexibility of where students can learn, and engage them outside the four classroom walls. Use scavenger hunts, Twitter, and back-channel chats to engage students in a variety of mobile-learning activities to support your blended-learning model.

V. Structuring Classes and Activities

Just as when translating a face-to-face course to online, there are few if any one-to-one equivalents; the same is equally true for hybrid. Although you might find a good home for some of the things that you already use, hybrid can so fundamentally transform the way that you interact with your students that you should expect to rework or revise them.



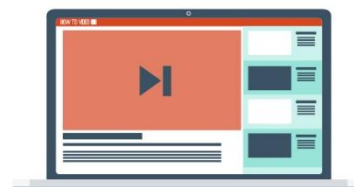
In terms of activities, a hybrid course has access to all of the same things that you would use for a face-to-face or online course; there isn't a new set of things to learn about, so familiarity on your part may come as a comfort. That said, how you implement activities with your students may change dramatically, which is all due to the flexible structure that hybrid courses offer.

The University of Wisconsin-Bothell's Learning Technology Center offers this helpful insight:

The schedule and structure of hybrid courses can vary significantly from one class to another. This underscores the pedagogical flexibility characteristic of the hybrid model. The instructor of a hybrid course typically determines what instructional activities should be online or face-to-face depending on the learning goals, course objectives, content, and available resources. Similarly, the timetable for face-to-face versus online work can be organized in quite different ways that may reflect not only pedagogical criteria but also the particular circumstances of the instructor and students.

Here are a few examples of hybrid courses that illustrate different structures for the deployment of face-to-face and online learning activities:

- *The instructor lectures and facilitates class discussion in the face-to-face classes, students complete online assignments based on these classroom activities, then these online assignments are posted to asynchronous discussion forums for online discussion;*
- *An instructor places lectures online using voiceover PowerPoint or streaming media for students to review, then subsequently in class students use these preliminary online materials to engage in face-to-face small group activities and discussions;*
- *Students prepare small group projects online, post them to discussion forums for debate and revision, then present them in the face-to-face class for final discussion and assessment.*



By the same token, hybrid schedules can be quite diverse:

- *A typical practice is for an instructor to meet with the class face-to-face for a couple of weeks, then go online for a week;*
- *Alternatively, the first few weeks of the course may be face-to-face preparation, followed by an extended period (such as a month or more) of online work;*
- *Or a night class that would ordinarily meet face-to-face for three hours once a week reduces each class meeting by 45 minutes and requires the students to complete assignments online in lieu of maintaining the full three hours of face-to-face class time.*



From the University of Wisconsin-Bothell Learning Technology Center website, "Hybrid Courses: Frequently Asked Questions." Used with permission.

VI. Planning Your Hybrid Course

Planning is key to the success of any course, and this is especially true for hybrid. **You want to make sure that what you ask students to do online are a good fit for online, and that the same is true for the face-to-face component. Each class session, regardless of format, should seem like a natural fit for the medium, that what students are doing *should* be done in that particular format.** The hardest part of teaching hybrid is figuring out how to integrate the two experiences so that they capitalize on and amplify each other.

Planning your hybrid course should begin at least 3-6 months in advance. Any learning materials or activities that you would like to incorporate from existing online or face-to-face courses should be reviewed and adapted during this time, in conjunction with a thorough review of your learning objectives.



A. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Below are ten questions to consider as you begin planning your hybrid course.

- 1) What do you want students to know by the time they have finished taking your hybrid course? Refer to your course's learning objectives for this, but examine them critically, through the lens of hybrid learning.
- 2) As you think about learning objectives, which would be better achieved online and which would be best achieved face-to-face?
- 3) Hybrid teaching is not just a matter of transferring a portion of your traditional course to the Web. Instead, it involves developing challenging and engaging online learning activities that complement your face-to-face activities. What types of learning activities do you think you will be using for the online portion of your course?
- 4) Online asynchronous discussion is often an important part of hybrid courses. What new learning opportunities will arise as a result of using asynchronous discussion? What challenges do you anticipate in using online discussions? How would you address these?
- 5) How will the face-to-face and online components be integrated into a single course? How will the work done in each component feed back into and support the other?

- 6) When working online, students frequently have problems scheduling their work and managing their time, and understanding the implications of the hybrid course module as related to learning. What do you plan to do to help your students address these issues?
- 7) How will you apportion the time spent in a face-to-face environment versus online? What would the term's schedule actually look like?
- 8) How will you divide the course-grading scheme between face-to-face and online activities? What means will you use to assess student work in each of these two components?



- 9) Students sometimes have difficulty acclimating to the course website and to other instructional technologies you may be using for face-to-face and online activities. What specific technologies will you use for the online and face-to-face portions of your course? What proactive steps can you take to assist students to become familiar with your website and those instructional technologies? If students need help with technology later in the course, how will you provide support?

- 10) There is a tendency for faculty to assign students more work in a hybrid course than they normally would have in a traditional course. What are you going to do to ensure that you have not created a course-and-a-half? How will you evaluate the student workload as compared to a traditional class?

B. A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Once you are ready to begin planning out a hybrid course, make sure that you have plenty of time to build and refine it – for the planning process, creating content, and (if possible), piloting the course. As stated above, creating a successful hybrid course requires a lot more thought than simply taking half of your existing class sessions and converting them into online activities. Think of a hybrid course not as a twin of the face-to-face version, but a cousin.

Step 1: Start at the Foundation

Every course, regardless of format, has a course description, goals, and objectives. These comprise the overall picture of the course, and should drive the course's entire development process, from why it exists to what students should be able to know and do by end of it.

Step 2: Plan Assessments

Determine what major assessments you will use to allow students to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives. These should be both the major, summative assessments (projects, portfolios, etc.), as well as smaller, formative ones (homework, discussions, etc.). You do not need to actually create them yet; you can simply plan out what they will be and what students will be asked to do. Taken together, your assessments should address everything in step 1.

Step 3: Create a Course Map

You are now familiar with what the overall goals of the course are, and how you will be assessing for student learning. Now you can begin laying out how students will get from the beginning of the course to ultimately achieving its end goals. Create a chart (course map, table, etc.) that sequences what the units/modules will be, the order they should go in, and what resources and activities you plan to provide along the way within each module.



Step 4: Plan Activities

Identify activities that capitalize on the strengths of each type of environment (online or face-to-face), and include those in your course map. (Note: While the following activities may work better in one environment versus another, several can be adapted to both environments.)

Face-to-face is good for:	Online is good for:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establishing social presence and support• Nonverbal communication• Defining assignments• Negotiating expectations and responsibilities• Diagnosing students' conceptual problems and providing immediate feedback• Brainstorming• Role play• Student demonstration of psychomotor skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustaining group cohesion, collaboration, and support• Reflective, on-task discourse• Broader participation in discussions• Critical analysis• Self-paced learning and practice• Self-assessment quizzes with feedback• Automatic grading of multiple choice, T/F, fill-in-the-blank tests• Create a content outline, chunking content into modules.

Step 5: Create/Find Content

Developing online content is the most time-consuming aspect of designing a hybrid course. Plan to carve out the majority of your course development time on this step. It is here that you will be

creating assignments, finding resources, deciding on readings, writing the syllabus, etc. You have already done the planning for what all of these things are, and the order in which they will go, so once they're completed, just put them in their appropriate place in the course.

You may be able to use or adapt parts activities and resources that you have previously used in other courses. If you decide to do this, be very careful that it integrates well with the rest of what you are doing; don't force the foot into the wrong-sized shoe.

Step 6: Ensure for Quality

At this point, you should have an entire "draft" of your course complete. Now it needs some editing and refinement.

Consider the following options for this step:

- Have faculty colleagues (preferably, those who have taught online and/or hybrid courses in the past) and ask them to look at your course.
- Go online and find some quality checklists that apply specifically to hybrid courses and use them to "grade" your course.
- Talk to some of your current students and ask them to give you feedback on your description of the course.
- If possible, pilot the course with some willing students or fellow faculty members, and ask them to provide you with written feedback.

Whatever the case, don't skip this step! Especially if this is the first or second time that you're developing a hybrid course, it is extremely important that you go through some kind of quality review process.

C. TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Keep the following tips at hand to make your entire hybrid teaching experience go more smoothly, from planning to building to execution.

Tip 1: Take it easy!

- Start the entire course development process early — at least 3-6 months in advance — and produce actual learning modules that meet specific learning goals and are relatively easy to manage and grade.
- Redesign is an incremental process. Try not to include too many new activities at first. Start small and build it one piece at a time.
- Experiment and learn as you go. Do not be afraid of unfamiliar technologies
- Keep technology use simple in order to avoid turning the course into a support nightmare and gradually add more advanced technology.



- Remember that as you increase significantly the number of assignments and opportunities for feedback, you also potentially increase your own work load. Don't burn yourself out!

Tip 2: Focus on design, not technology

- Critically re-examine course goals and objectives and consider carefully how they can best be achieved in the hybrid environment.
- Develop new learning activities that capitalize on the strengths of the online and face-to-face learning environments.
- Avoid the common tendency to cover too much material and include too many activities in the redesigned course, resulting in a "course and a half."
- Don't overload the course: online activities take longer than you think they will.
- Focus on the integration of the online and face-to-face components. Connecting what occurs in class with what is studied online is critical so instructors do not end up teaching two parallel but unconnected courses.
- Review the examples of hybrid courses available through this site to think about different schedules for in-class/online work, and the implications of those different schedules for the learning activities you have planned.

Tip 3: Use resources already available

- Search for discipline-specific Web sites for available content.
- Search MERLOT, OER, Educause, and other flagship education websites.
- Look for publisher content available online, especially in lower-level courses.
- Use online help resources such as facilitation of group work, managing discussion forums, etc. (see below)

Tip 4: Don't go it alone

- Talk with and get advice/feedback from experienced hybrid course instructors.
- Discuss your problems and progress with colleagues, whether they are using the hybrid or not.
- Get feedback and support from faculty who have taught hybrid courses or professionals from your faculty development or technology centers, like the UW-Milwaukee Learning Technology Center.

Tip 5: Manage your students' expectations

- Explain and justify the hybrid course format and assignments clearly and repeatedly.
- Make sure that students understand the equivalence between the amount of work in traditional class and in a hybrid class.
- Draw your students' attention to special technical needs, or particular assignments that may require additional resources: not all online work can be completed at home.



- Make all assignments and other course expectations as explicit as possible right from the start. In particular, make sure that the schedule of in-class and online work is clear to the students, and that due dates are stated explicitly and repeatedly.
- Identify and develop plans, materials, and activities to help students with the technology and time management challenges many encounter.

Tip 6: Prepare for anticipated problems

- Use simpler technologies to reduce risk and complications.
- Break down and phase in longer assignments.
- Provide time management tips for students.
- Be very clear about what students are expected to do, and how you will grade them.
- Prepare technology help sheets.
- Identify place to go for live technology help.
- Develop a plan for conducting course activities when technology fails. For example, keep a backup copy of files on a home computer so you can e-mail important information to students.

Tip 7: The little things count!

- Things will occasionally go wrong; plan carefully and be flexible about making adjustments where needed.
- Ask for feedback from your students often and take their responses seriously.
- Don't organize your course too tightly. There's always some "slippage," and you need to leave room for any adjustments that you think necessary.
- During the course, falling behind or sloppy record keeping can be fatal: stay current and keep copies of everything. Set aside time to focus on the online components, including reading student postings and assignments.
- Use the tools in the course management system to get organized and stay organized.

VII. How to Fail in Hybrid Teaching

Course-and-a-Half Syndrome

A common mistake of many first-time hybrid instructors is to take the syllabus from a familiar face-to-face class and simply add some online assignments. This produces what is sometimes referred to as “course-and-a-half” syndrome, where students wind up overwhelmed with the amount of material and work assigned to them, much of it not necessarily adding to the educative effectiveness of the course.

Parallel Universes

Another problem with simply tacking online activities onto a preexisting face-to-face course is a lack of integration between the two formats. In such cases, assignments and activities may be topically related, but ultimately do not flow into one other, instead serving as shorter, disjointed pieces of some vague whole rather than successive markers along one cohesive journey.

Limited Interaction

It might seem natural to think of hybrid courses (consciously or not) in terms of online and face-to-face sessions dichotomously, with the former dedicated to independent work and the latter to collaboration and group interaction. But this need not be the case. You can have a great deal of student-student and student-instructor interaction take place online with discussion forums, synchronous chat/video sessions, and especially collaborative Web 2.0 tools.

Underutilized Assessment

Even instructors who take great advantage of the flexibility of hybrid teaching may yet remain doggedly committed to an assessment plan of “two exams, one term paper, one final.” Not only does this often fail to capture true student learning and growth, it also fails to capitalize on the opportunities inherent to the hybrid format. Frequent low-stakes assessments, rapid learning checks, online discussions, collaborative projects, and summative e-portfolios can replace the old model, and better allow students to demonstrate their learning.



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