

With the ever-increasing demand and changes in Higher Education, online learning in some form is part of all courses. This guide focuses on online synchronous sessions and how to maximise engagement and opportunities for consolidation of learning through live activities. The guide suggests practical ideas that can help enhance the online learning experience for both staff and students.

Whether you are delivering a lecture to a large group or facilitating a small group tutorial, online engagement is important for students' retention, progression, and success (JISC, 2020). The aim is to utilise the tools and delivery approaches to increase engagement and build relationships with your students.

There are many digital tools available that can support a range of pedagogical approaches in the online learning environment (JISC, 2020). Teaching in an online space is different to a traditional face to face environment and whilst you may not be able to observe physical cues (body language etc.), engagement can still be monitored using online tools. These technologies provide opportunities to interact with your students and create stimulating and engaging activities. (For information on [in person classroom delivery please see the separate guide](#)).

Online synchronous learning works best when learners have an opportunity to participate by asking questions, sharing ideas, and receiving feedback (JISC, 2020).

From the beginning, be clear about your expectations of how students should behave and interact in an online learning environment. Write these expectations in the module handbook or MyBeckett space so students can refer to them throughout the year. Think about the accessibility of tools and equal opportunity for learning and participation from all students (JISC, 2020). This may vary depending on the size of the group, the mix of the cohort and access to digital equipment and connectivity. The time that students have synchronously with staff is limited, maximising the effectiveness of the time you do have online is key.

Familiarise yourself with the tools you plan to use. Think about which resources you could prepare in advance (the quizzes, video snippets or feedback on student work).

How to manage online synchronous engagement:

- Agree and establish clear expectations from the start: establish agreed ground rules for everyone (staff included). These include language, interruptions and respectful behaviour.

- Communicate clearly about the session outline, break times and guidance for how students can ask for attention during the session and how they should interact when asked e.g. hand raising, audio only, using the chat box. Be strict with timings.
- Allow time for welcomes and introductions especially early in the course and at the start of new modules (to you, each other, for the session outline and the tools used for teaching). This will allow participants to familiarise themselves with the software and troubleshooting at the beginning of sessions. Have library links available for where students to get technical support if they are having issues.
- Make the most of functions you have – utilise built-in tools e.g. chat function, voting, polling questions, annotation, microphone, video, break out rooms and screen share. This reduces the chance of students getting 'lost' moving into different spaces for different tools.
- Make it interactive, ask a question to be answered in chat, create discussion questions between peers, encourage responses using emotion icons and voting.
- Use a range of activities and chunk these as part of your session but be careful not to over-use tools or create too many 'chunks' to the detriment of the session plan and flow.
- Check in with your students to ensure everyone is on track. This also allows students to voice any concerns. You can use external polling tools or in-built functions if you want students to be able to respond anonymously.
- Feedback is important. Some tools can provide instant feedback e.g. quizzes, but others will require you to dedicate some time to review student responses and summarise the learning. Ensure you have allocated time for this.
- Be prepared for disruption (connectivity issues) and think about how you can handle it in advance. For example, if the video you are sharing via screen share is staggering, you can share the link in the chat function.
- Minimise distractions and connectivity issues by asking all participants to turn their video and microphones off before you begin your session.
- Recording your session, and any supplementary learning content can make the session more accessible and inclusive, it helps support students to revisit content and stay on track.
- Explore assistive technology to support all students. This includes text readers, captions and transcripts. [Resources available](#) from the library have information that can be shared with students ahead of sessions and as part of induction so they can explore what works best for them.
- Check your students' geographic locations. They may be in a different time zone and/or have a varying degree of connectivity.
- Plan your session. You will be able to prepare for your session in advance i.e., preparing quizzes, gathering your resources, and testing the tools you are going to use.
- Review your presentation design, limit the amount of text and bullets on each slide. Use high quality graphics and choose the appropriate text typeface and font size. A guide to creating accessible presentations can be [viewed here](#).

- Consider aligning the use of tools with the overall learning objectives of the course i.e. are there any student presentations that could be recorded?
- Encourage students to build a community online with each other. Provide signposting to guides on how they can work collaboratively outside the session.

Microsoft Teams is the primary platform used for online delivery of lectures and seminars at Leeds Beckett. It has many of the functions discussed above i.e., polling, break-out rooms, note-taking, file-sharing, whiteboards, chats etc.

Bibliography and Resources

Talis list for [Online Synchronous Engagement](#)