Teaching Strategies and Best Practices

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Online Environment

Diversity is a fact of every group learning environment, although not all instructors are responsive to the diverse needs of students. Equity and inclusion do not happen organically and must be built into the design of your course. Equity issues will arise throughout the semester in diverse ways. To be aware of this means asking “What impact is this [policy, decision, practice] going to have on the most marginalized students and families? How are we prioritizing their interests?” ([Equity Literacy Institute](https://www.equityliteracy.org/equity-principles)).

All students benefit from a course design that is clear, safe, and transparent. During the semester, talk to students about events as they happen to build connection and community. Here are some additional suggestions:

**Know Your Students**

* Get to know your online students: Why did students register for this course? Where are they living? What is their linguistic/cultural background of the individuals in your class?
* Be available: Choose a flexible format and times for office hours. Promote options for synchronous discussion.
* Create community agreements and guidelines for discussions in advance.
* Ask students anonymously about their level of access to technology

**Acknowledge and Embrace Differences**

* Teaching with an equity mindset means acknowledging that students are not all the same. They come to your classroom with very different backgrounds and experiences. You can address this in the virtual classroom by remaining aware of:
  + students’ different capacities to manage remote learning
  + microaggressions in discussion boards and student groups
  + culturally relevant materials

**Look out for early warning signs that students are struggling**

* Use more low-stakes, formative assessments
* Reach out to students proactively
* Have a plan for giving timely feedback
* Encourage the use of office hours

**References**:

* RICE University Center for Teaching Excellence, “[Inclusion, Equity, and Access While Teaching Remotely](https://cte.rice.edu/blogarchive/2020/3/13/inclusion-equity-and-access-while-teaching-remotely)”
* San Diego State University, “[Maintaining Equity and Inclusion in Virtual Learning Environments](https://diversity.sdsu.edu/cie/resources/inclusive-pedagogy)”
* CORA Learning. **Video**: [Employing Equity-Minded and Culturally Affirming Teaching Practices in Virtual Learning Environment.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMrf_MC5COk) [1:24: 39]

# Synchronous, Asynchronous, and Blended Formats

Once you have decided whether to include some synchronous elements in your course, you need to decide what kind of content is best suited to which modality?  This list of content formats can help you think about the best way to present information.

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| ASYNCHRONOUS CONTENT FORMATS  **\*\* For all activities and materials that are presented asynchronously, provide clear access, instructions, and deadlines.** | | |
| Text | **Pros**: Low-tech, reliable  **Formats**: PDF, Word, collaborative document (Google, Microsoft 360) PPT  **Good For:** Transcript, Instructor Notes, Reading guides | **Recommendations**:   * Link document to lesson page in Sakai * Make sure students know where to find this material * Make links active * Write clearly, at student level |
| Audio | **Pros**:   * Social presence * Less data/bandwidth than video * Flexible, easy to access   **Formats**:   * Voice memo recorded in Sakai * VoiceThread * Podcast hosted on Sakai or elsewhere?   **Good For**:   * Audio comments on student work * Podcasts * Student-created content | **Recommendations**:   * Provide a transcript * Use alongside text or video * Keep under 20 minutes * Create a script     Further info: [Podcast Design Strategies](https://secure.onlinelearningconsortium.org/effective_practices/podcast-design-strategies-student-use-audio-online-classes), by Judy Oskam (OLC)  [Planning Your Educational Podcast for an Online Class,](https://elearnmag.acm.org/featured.cfm?aid=3343234) by Christopher Drew (July 2019)  [Sakai podcasts tool](https://sakai.screenstepslive.com/s/sakai_help/m/13982/l/604843-what-is-the-podcasts-tool) |
| Videos | **Pros**:   * Social presence * Word/image teaching   **Formats:**   * WarpWire or VoiceThread * YouTube videos embedded in lessons * Screencasts * Narrated PowerPoints   **Good For**:   * Introductions * Demonstration Videos * Student-created content | **Recommendations**:   * Check UNC Accessibility standards for videos * Recommend using mp4 format * Keep videos short * Review Lesson 3 resources |
| SYNCHRONOUS CONTENT FORMATS  **\*\*Be intentional about integrating synchronous activities, using them for activities that have a specific value for the class meeting together.** | | |
| Zoom lecture | **Pros**:   * Similar to F2F lectures * Students can ask questions * Used with break-out rooms, students have the chance to discuss content as it is presented   **Good For**:   * Demonstrations where students may have questions | **Recommendations**:   * Lectures should be clearly organized and have a defined purpose * Assign student self-reflection or activity to be submitted after the lecture to help students process the information * Keep lecture times short and focused. * Use Poll Everywhere to engage students during the lecture |
| Group work | **Pros**:   * Groups can decide how to meet and collaborate * Peer interaction and learning   **Formats:**   * Collaborative documents * Zoom Breakout room * (Async) Group Discussion Forum * (Async) VoiceThread   **Good For**:   * Think-pair-share * In-depth discussion * Project work | **Recommendations**:   * For group projects, assess the process not just the final submission * If relevant, have students create group contracts * Have students assess their contributions * Create an agenda and goals for small group discussion * Send out prompts in advance to increase participation |
| Full class live discussion | **Pros**:   * Most similar to F2F classes (less modification needed) * Allows for real-time conversation * Auto captioning available   **Formats:  Zoom**  **Good For**:   * Guest speakers * Class presentations and feedback | **Recommendations**:   * Encourage students to use webcams, but know you can’t require it * Make sure you have good audio and bandwidth |
| Office Hours | **Pros**:   * Learn more about your students and their individual circumstances * Build trust * Discuss problems before they become serious   **Formats:**   * Zoom, Telephone   **Good For**:   * Open office hours for “drop-ins” * Group meetings * Scheduled meetings | **Recommendations**   * Try to avoid talking about being busy and overcommitted. This tends to discourage students from attending office hours * Consider giving out important grades only during office hours * Send students conversation starters for office hours   (Adapted from Nunn, *33 Simple Strategies*) |

# Grading Critieria for Online Coruses

Transparency and clarity around grades are arguably even *more* important in an online course than in your typical F2F course. This is because there are typically fewer opportunities to convey your goals to students, and often instructors assess learning less often. Providing students with explanations for how they will be graded reduces misunderstanding and saves instructor time.

As you seeing the table below,  rubrics can be analytic (where each criterion is reviewed separately and feedback on each component is often added), or holistic (where the grader evaluates all criteria at once). Each type of rubric has its uses.

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| **Type of Rubric** | **Definition** | **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Holistic or Analytic: One or Several Judgments?** | | | |
| **Analytic** | * Each criterion (dimension, trait) is evaluated separately. | * Gives diagnostic information to teacher. * Gives formative feedback to students. * Easier to link to instruction than holistic rubrics. * Good for formative assessment; adaptable for summative assessment; if you need an overall score for grading, you can combine the scores. | * Takes more time to score than holistic rubrics. * Takes more time to achieve inter-rater reliability than with holistic rubrics. |
| **Holistic** | * All criteria (dimensions, traits) are evaluated simultaneously. | * Scoring is faster than with analytic rubrics. * Requires less time to achieve inter-rater reliability. * Good for summative assessment. | * Single overall score does not communicate information about what to do to improve. * Not good for formative assessment. |
| **Description of Performance: General or Task-Specific?** | | | |
| **General** | * Description of work gives characteristics that apply to a whole family of tasks (e.g., writing, problem solving). | * Can share with students, explicitly linking assessment and instruction. * Reuse same rubrics with several tasks or assignments. * Supports learning by helping students see "good work" as bigger than one task. * Supports student self-evaluation. * Students can help construct general rubrics. | * Lower reliability at first than with task-specific rubrics. * Requires practice to apply well. |
| **Task-Specific** | * Description of work refers to the specific content of a particular task (e.g., gives an answer, specifies a conclusion). | * Teachers sometimes say using these makes scoring "easier." * Requires less time to achieve inter-rater reliability. | * Cannot share with students (would give away answers). * Need to write new rubrics for each task. * For open-ended tasks, good answers not listed in rubrics may be evaluated poorly. |
| *Source:* From *Assessment and Grading in Classrooms* (p. 201), by Susan M. Brookhart and Anthony J. Nitko, 2008, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. Copyright 2008 by Pearson Education. Reprinted with permission. | | | |

UNC's Gillings School of Global Public Health has created a tool for developing and sharing rubrics.

* [Rubric Generator](https://courses.sph.unc.edu/rubrics/?page=intro) (UNC Gilling’s School of Global Public Health)

# Managing Your Time

**Make a Plan**

Having a strong instructor presence doesn't mean hovering over students or being available 24/7! There are diverse ways to "stay in touch" with your students. Even asynchronous elements can convey a sense of presence. Some can be planned and set up in advance.

**Some time-saving strategies for feedback and presence include:**

* Create a video wrap up and feedback to the class at the end of a text discussion or transition
* Give audio feedback on student papers
* Include a mandatory synchronous meeting for all students
* Monitor and give feedback in the discussion forum
* Add a video introduction to your course
* Use video-based discussions (VoiceThread or Zoom)
* Incorporate personal examples, experiences, and storytelling into the course

This ebook by [Lehman and Conceição (2011)](http://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/lib/unc/reader.action?docID=697954&ppg=39) presents some first-hand accounts of faculty strategies to manage time while delivering the course. These are not stories of "ideal" courses, but of how individuals balanced their teaching and research duties.