



## 10 Strategies for Engaging Learners in Blended and Online Classes

### Overview

This document outlines 10 strategies for engaging learners in your blended and online courses. This is not a how-to document; we simply describe some of the types of activities and strategies that may be useful in your course.

### 10 Strategies for Engaging Learners in Blended and Online Classes

**Strategy #1: Pepper Lecture Segments with Mastery Checks** The basics: Instructors create short-form lecture segments no longer than 15 minutes each. After each lecture segment, ask a series of questions using your LMS's quizzing features to gauge student understanding.

Variations on the Strategy: Use a mix of types of questions (multiple choice, short answer, matching, etc.) Use open-ended/short answer questions, and then allow learners to see an expert response to compare/contrast their answer. Offer immediate remediation opportunities if learners did not answer correctly.

Lecture capture tools to use to employ this strategy:

- [MediaSpace](#)

Quizzing tools to use to employ this strategy:

- [D2L Brightspace](#)

### Strategy #2: Create Weekly Group Assignments

The basics: "For e-learning and online educators, incorporating group work into courses is a non-negotiable, given the demands and needs for collaboration and [online] communication skills" (Morrison, 2012). By assigning weekly work groups, students can learn to collaborate online while learning collectively, providing peer mentoring, and increasing the amount of feedback from their peers. Create weekly assignments for students, such as discussing the weekly readings and submitting a collective summary.

Variations on the Strategy: Students can be encouraged to use a range of tools to collaborate, thereby enhancing their digital literacy skills while working toward your course goals. Consider offering extra credit to groups that try a new tool for collaboration. Make the work meaningful by requiring them to submit something for a collective small participation grade. Be sure to include a [social loafing policy](#) in your syllabus.

Collaboration Tools to Use to Employ this Strategy:

#### IT Solutions

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- [OneDrive](#)
- [Zoom](#)

### **Strategy #3: Provide Online Office Hours to Review Digital Work**

The basics: Office hours are a staple of the brick and mortar institution, but online they are often an afterthought. Hold regular, required office hours with your learners and discuss some of their latest work in depth by screensharing a paper, blog post, quiz, or project they've submitted.

Variations on the Strategy: Bring multiple learners together to discuss as a group. Have students work synchronously on revisions to a paper. Hold group office hours online.

Synchronous Tools to Employ this Strategy

- [Zoom](#)

### **Strategy #4: Use Synchronous High-end Presence Systems to Bridge the Distance**

The basics: Particularly when two locations both have high-end telepresence systems, hundreds of miles can feel like a few feet. When possible, gather learners into telepresence locations to "see" one another and hold class synchronously.

Variations on the Strategy: Even if you can't all meet in a telepresence room, consider using multi-point systems such as jabber video, Skype professional, iChat, or Google Hangouts to bring people together synchronously from a distance.

Telepresence and Virtual Presence Systems to Employ this Strategy

- Telepresence systems, contact Minnesota State, Mankato IT Solutions Center for more information,
- [Zoom](#)

### **Strategy #5: Create Weekly Collaboration Challenges**

The basics: Recent studies of the online learning environment have noted that online collaboration enhances learning outcomes and reduces learner isolation that can occur in online learning environment. "The likelihood of successful achievement of learning objectives and achieving course competencies increases through collaborative engagement" (Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Randomly assign students to a dyad or small group that changes each week and give them a mastery challenge related to the content for the course for the week.

Variations on the Strategy: Position the challenge as a game or a competition. Give extra credit for groups that use innovative technological approaches to solve the problem. Have the groups write about the process of collaborating together to solve the problem in a digital space.

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Tools to Use to Employ this Method

- [OneDrive](#)
- Encourage students to find their own tools -- but discourage using only email. (Note: Some of these tools might not be supported by IT Solutions)

### **Strategy #6: Show them your Face**

The basics: Instructors often lecture in online courses, but the format tends to be voice over slides. Instead of disembodiment, feature yourself! Recording your face along with your voice and slides helps students feel connected to you as a person and as an expert in the field. They should feel like they are getting a personal lecture from a world-class researcher -- not hearing some faceless drone atop slides.

Variations on the Strategy: Create a video introduction of yourself for your course. Add in some personal information. Don't be afraid to include some simple mistakes, ums, and ahs in your lectures. Let the learners see your sense of humor.

Lecture Capture Tools to Employ this Method

- [HD Recording Studio](#)
- [MediaSpace](#)

### **Strategy #7: Have Students Blog**

The basics: Blogs can serve as a very useful personal journal of learning for a course. Have students respond to a standardized or changing prompt each week and then provide feedback/comments on their thoughts.

Variations on the Strategy: Creating communities of blogging can be very effective and can reduce the amount of feedback you have to give to students. Consider having students share their blogs with other members of the learning community to provide feedback. Offer participation grades for their posts.

### **Strategy #8: Create Shared Notes Repositories**

The basics: Have students create, share, and edit one another's notes in a repository each week.

Variations on the Strategy: Have learners rate one another's notes and allow the best notes to be used as a study guide or cheat sheet during exams. Have students explain why the notes they rated highly are the best. Provide extra credit for exams.

Knowledge Base Tools to Use to Employ this Strategy:

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- [OneDrive](#)

### **Strategy #9: Use Your Discussion Boards Thoughtfully and Meaningfully**

The basics: Discussion boards can be powerful tools in online courses, or they can be simply one more task that learners have to get through toward their final grade. Use discussion boards thoughtfully and try hard to foster meaningful discussion. "...to get the most out of the learning experience, students must engage with course content and contribute to the class discourse. One method of contributing ideas, knowledge, and resources to the class is to participate in discussions" (Garrison, 2008).

Variations on the Strategy: Provide activities in the course discussion boards that foster meaningful dialogue; avoid questions that can be answered trivially. Get active in your own discussions to affirm for students that you value them, and that they should value them, too. Give feedback and grade contributions. Steer the conversation away from misconceptions or misperceptions; show your students that you care enough about the discussion to be a part of it.

Discussion Tools to Use to Employ this Strategy:

- [D2L Brightspace discussion boards](#)
- [Zoom](#)

### **Strategy #10: Host a Virtual Presentation Session**

The basics: Many instructors in face-to-face courses want students to present to one another on a research topic. This is imminently possible online as well, both synchronously and asynchronously. Have students make a presentation in PowerPoint or Keynote and show it online to their peers and to you.

Variations on the Strategy: Encourage learners to use cloud-based presentation software such as Prezi or Google Presenter. If learners are using PowerPoint or Keynote, have them record a version of their presentation using Camtasia Relay, VoiceThread, or another cloud-based tool and then post or link the tool to a blog or discussion board. Have peers review and respond to several of their peers' presentations. If students need to present live, use Adobe Connect or phone and QuickScreenShare.

Presentation Tools to Employ this Strategy:

- [OneDrive](#), (recommended)
- [Office 365](#)

Capture Software to Employ this Strategy Asynchronously

- [MediaSpace](#)

Meeting Tools to Employ this Strategy Synchronously

- [Zoom](#)

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## References

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Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2005, August). Learning together in community: collaboration online. Distance teaching and learning annual conference.

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