

# Introduction

## Background and Purpose of the Guide

This *Guide for Design and Implementation of Hybrid–Flexible Models in Adult Education* (hereafter, the *HyFlex Guide*) is intended to help adult education practitioners (teachers, staff, and administrators) and professional development leaders to initiate or improve their flexible multimodal instruction or courses. The guide is based on Dr. Brian J. Beatty’s seminal work with Hybrid–Flexible (HyFlex) models in higher education and is informed by the practice of innovative adult educators.

This publication is the product of our collective efforts working with adult education practitioners who, inspired by their success with remote online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, took it upon themselves to better understand how to implement a HyFlex model to provide more flexibility for their learners. The guidance presented here was gleaned from several data sources. Each of us has facilitated technical assistance and professional development initiatives, such as the IDEAL Consortium HyFlex Study Group, the LINC’s Technology Integration Community, and a Google Group devoted to peer support on HyFlex instruction issues. We have also had opportunities to observe HyFlex classes in action and interview 25 practitioners. With the permission of the educators involved in all these activities, we drew out salient themes from notes, transcripts, and video recordings — themes that characterize HyFlex implementation in adult education classes and have defined the benefits and challenges it presents.

## Intended Audience(s)

Although the key audience for this guide is practitioners in adult foundational education<sup>1</sup>, the guide may be useful for those planning or offering HyFlex models in post-secondary education, and in other education contexts where HyFlex models are offered.

## Definition of the HyFlex Model

The term *HyFlex model* as used in this guide refers specifically to an instructional model that offers learners maximum flexibility in selecting the mode and timing of learning: in-person, synchronous online, and asynchronous online (see Figure 1), and the ability to frequently shift among these options at any time (Beatty, 2019). Each mode of instruction is always available, except when in-person classes must be canceled because of weather, pandemics, and other emergencies. In a similar model, called BlendFlex, learners can choose any or all the three modes but, if they choose the in-person mode, the institution may assign them days and times. In any form of the model, learner outcomes should not depend on which mode or modes a learner chooses.



**Figure 1.** The different modes of HyFlex and BlendFlex instruction or courses

## Potential Benefits of Using a HyFlex Model

Although HyFlex began and continues in credit-bearing post-secondary education, this model has a range of uses. On one hand, HyFlex models can be used to shape formal learning opportunities – such as courses leading to credit or certification – and to inform outcomes data for program improvement or accountability to funders. On the other hand, HyFlex models can offer structure in less formal educational programming. For example, adult education programs might use HyFlex for short-term, facilitated learning circles for immigrants and refugees seeking to improve their English language skills or to prepare for U.S. Citizenship and for adults preparing for a high school equivalency exam or adult diploma. HyFlex might also be used in programs that rely on the use of mobile learning apps (such as [Learning Upgrade](#), [Cell-Ed](#), and others delivering content to support English language learning, U.S. citizenship preparation, or high school equivalency exam preparation), accompanied by periodic in-person and synchronous online sessions.

Although instructors experience challenges getting started with HyFlex models, they also report benefits to adopting the model, including being able to deliver three instructional modes with one preparation instead of three separate ones, being able to quickly and easily adjust modes and sustain instruction when the in-person mode is suddenly not available (e.g., if students face a health crisis, a change in work schedules, severe weather, or unforeseen emergencies). Perhaps most important is that one of the most prevalent structural barriers to learner retention – having to regularly attend a class in person – is removed. As a result, practitioners have reported that learner attendance, retention, completion, and learning gains have all improved after their program switched to a HyFlex model.

## Brief History of HyFlex and Underlying Values or Principles

Dr. Brian J. Beatty, a professor in the Instructional Technologies (ITEC) graduate program at San Francisco State University, and his graduate students coined the term *HyFlex* in 2007 to describe a three-mode (in-person, synchronous online, and asynchronous online) Hybrid–Flexible course design model built on four fundamental values or principles:

- **Learner choice:** Provide meaningful alternative participation modes and enable students to choose between participation modes daily, weekly, or topically.
- **Equivalency:** Provide learning activities in all participation modes which lead to equivalent learning outcomes.
- **Reusability:** Utilize artifacts from learning activities in each participation mode as “learning objects” for all students.
- **Accessibility:** Equip students with technology skills and equitable access to all participation modes. (Beatty, 2019).

Since then, HyFlex course models have been spreading in graduate and undergraduate education in North America, more recently in community college courses, and now in adult education. To some extent, HyFlex models are also used in K–12 education.

## Early Use of HyFlex Models in Adult Education Settings

In the past three years, there have been several pilots and, most recently, full-scale implementation of HyFlex models in adult education. These include programs sponsored by community colleges, public schools, and community-based organizations. Some use two modes of teaching and learning — for example, synchronous in-person and remote instruction delivered online — in which the goal is often to have “Zoomers” and “Roomers” both feel fully a part of the class. Of those that offer all three modes, the way the asynchronous instruction is offered varies widely. It may include capturing and uploading video of the in-person and synchronous online classes so that any student enrolled in a class can easily access the video recordings of all the lessons; equivalent activities making use of video content; a commercial or free online course or curriculum; or a program- or teacher-made online curriculum. In some cases, the asynchronous curriculum drives the instruction in the synchronous remote and in-person modes. HyFlex models in adult education are now found in several states. In at least one state, New Hampshire, a HyFlex model is being developed for teacher and program administrator professional development.

## What Flex Models Look Like

There is abundant diversity in the way HyFlex is implemented in adult education and a solid knowledge of HyFlex is a great way to begin to imagine how it might look in your classroom. Section 7: HyFlex Program Vignettes of this guide includes vignettes written to reflect what we learned in interviews with HyFlex practitioners in six states: Arizona, California, Illinois, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin. All HyFlex models share some characteristics; for example, each highlights use of two or three modes of instruction and allows learners flexibility in the choice of mode. However, there are differences in other aspects of implementation: the hardware and software used, how practitioners are provided with professional development in using the HyFlex model; the kinds of data collected; and the outcomes associated with use of HyFlex.

In addition to these HyFlex implementation examples featured in this guide, we have produced a [series of short videos](#) that show authentic HyFlex practices and hardware used in a HyFlex model classroom.

## Conclusion

We have briefly described in this section the background and the purpose of this guide, the definition of HyFlex models, their potential benefits, the underlying values and principles put forth by the creator of the HyFlex model, Brian Beatty, and what has evolved in the use of HyFlex models in adult education in the past few years. We have also called your attention to where in this guide you will find information from practitioners about the HyFlex models they are using.

## Questions to Consider

What benefits, either stated in the guide or through your own reflections, do you see as reasons to offer HyFlex for your adult learners?

## References

Beatty, B. J. (2019). *Hybrid–Flexible Course Design (1st ed.)*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/HyFlex>.

<sup>1</sup> In this guide, adult foundational education, shortened to adult education, refers to a definition of our field developed by the steering committee of the Open Door Collective, a national program of Literacy Minnesota. The definition includes programs and classes that offer adult learners an opportunity to build core skills and knowledge needed for work, further education, daily life, and as citizens in a representative democracy. These include:

- English language skills for immigrants and refugees (ESL/ESOL [English as a Second Language/English for Speakers of Other Languages])
- Beginning literacy for adults who cannot read and write well, or at all
- Numeracy
- Adult Basic Education (ABE)
- Adult Secondary Education (ASE), leading to an adult high school diploma or high school equivalency certificate
- U.S. citizenship preparation
- Preparation for post-secondary education, occupational training, or apprenticeships
- Employability/work-readiness skills
- Family/intergenerational literacy
- Integrated Education and Training (IET)
- Other lifelong and life-wide education or skills, such as digital, financial, and health literacy; literacy for self-advocacy, civic engagement, and social justice; native-language literacy; and other life-wide skills

*Adult education* may be offered by community-based programs, public schools, community colleges, volunteer tutoring programs, public libraries, corrections institutions, adult public charter schools, employers, labor unions, faith-based organizations, and other kinds of organizations and institutions.



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