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Designing

Designing learning is a big topic overall, but here are some key points that you'll want to consider as you think about designing your synchronous sessions.

Alignment with your Learning Outcomes

We said earlier that it is important for you to think about your purpose of why you think it's best to hold this particular session synchronously online and to get clear on the learning outcomes that you'd like your participants to be able to achieve by the end of the session. Once you are clear on these items, it's time to think about the content and activities that you'd like to incorporate into your session and how can help support your participants to achieve those outcomes.

Using a Lesson Plan

Similar to designing to facilitating sessions in person, it may be useful to create a lesson plan to design your synchronous online session and use it when facilitating the session. You may have a lesson planning structure that you are already familiar with using but if not, something like the [BOPPPS](#) framework could be useful.

At the very least it would be ideal to create a plan - perhaps like the table below - that notes timings of all your content and activity sections, duration of those sections, facilitator activities, participant activities and any resources needed. You may wish to script some of what you'd actually say or paraphrase during the session.

Here is the beginning of such a plan:

Time	Duration	Facilitator Activities	Participant Activities	Resources Needed
1pm	5 min	Welcome participants and thank them for coming.	Sitting and listening	
1:05 pm	20 min	Facilitate participant introductions using Five Finger Method	Introducing themselves and listening to each other	Five Finger Method slide

The [Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository](#) (TOPR) from the University of Central Florida also has [four detailed lesson plans](#) that cover four common types of synchronous learning sessions; interactive lecture, interactive lecture with a small group discussion, student interaction and discussion, and problem-solving practice in groups. These are downloadable templates that you can modify for your own needs.

Build community

Depending on who your participants are and how well everyone knows each other already and if you have some time, you may want to think about starting with activities that can help start to make everyone feel comfortable in the synchronous online space. Even something very quick in a short session could be beneficial to the overall goals of your session.

Some questions to think about as you design your opening activities to build community together include:

- How can the facilitators introduce themselves? If so, what should be shared in that introduction and how much time should it take?
- Should the participants introduce themselves? If so, what should be shared in those introductions and again, how much time should it take?
- How much time should the facilitators spend talking before participants are asked to do something active, such as introduce themselves? (Hint: not very long!)
- What will be comfortable for people to share if they don't know each other? What will be comfortable if they do?

Think Participatory Active Learning

A good synchronous online session is one that features interaction and a way for participants to engage in participatory, active learning. Thinking about how to design a session that actively includes your participants in contributing to their own learning is our ideal. Some of the questions we can ask

ourselves to be able to design these types of sessions are:

- How can I "share the air" with the participants in the session? How can I make sure that the facilitators are not the only ones talking?
- How I can create situations where participants are able to share from their own experiences, to contribute to group learning?
- How can I ensure that the session includes time and space to allow for questions and discussion?
- Are there ways in which I can use the platform's tools (see above) to contribute to an active learning situation, that are appropriate to my intended outcomes for the participants?
- How can I balance content sharing from facilitators with discussion or other participant activities? How can I "chunk" sections of the plan into short pieces, to keep the agenda moving and participants involved?
- How can I engage my participants visually and auditorily during the session?

Overall, thinking about how your participants could be not just passive "consumers" of information that you dump into their heads, but actively involved in the process is a useful lens to keep in mind. As a side bonus: facilitating sessions that are active and participatory often end up being less work for the facilitator and a lot more engaging for participants than the facilitator presenting content the whole time.

Preparing your participants

When planning your session, think about your participants and if you need to prepare them to come to your session. For instance:

- will they need to watch or read anything before they come? if so, when will you send this to them ahead of time?
- have they participated in this type of session before? do they know what to expect? will they know what is expected of them in terms of participation?
- are they aware of the timing of the session and the importance of arriving on time? (relatedly, it's within your role as the facilitator to start and end the session on time)

Preparing yourself

What about you, as the facilitator? What might you need to do yourself to prepare to facilitate the session? Some of these items might include:

- being very familiar with your lesson plan or session agenda
- being very familiar with the technology platform you are using and making sure your equipment is working (e.g. computer, headset, webcam)
- thinking about and planning how you're going to stay on time
- anticipating how you could be flexible with the session as it's happening, e.g. if a section takes longer than anticipated, can something be eliminated?
- and, as mentioned earlier, being aware and prepared of how you're working with your co-facilitator

Lastly, expect that you will likely make facilitator mistakes and know that this is a natural process of

facilitation, not to mention facilitating synchronously online. Plan to be a professional presence in the session but also make sure that you show up as a real person as well - a human who sometimes makes mistakes, as we all do. Finally, unless the topic is very, very serious, find ways to inject some fun and levity into the sessions.

Practical considerations

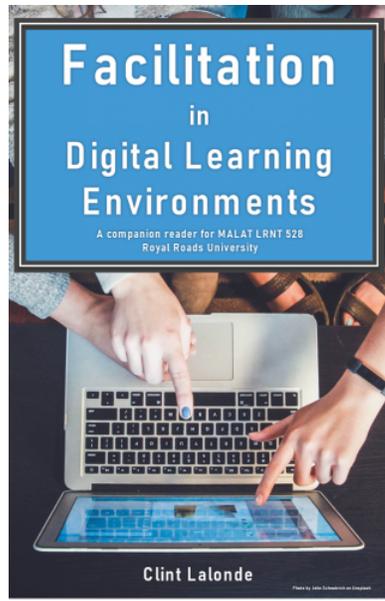
There are many practical considerations you should take into consideration when planning synchronous online sessions. These include:

- considering privacy issues - who will be there? what will be discussed? does the group know each other? will there be trust in the room or does it have to be built?
- distribution and longevity of the session - should the session be recorded? how will it be shared with others, if at all? what might we need to ask or tell participants about sharing the session itself or session details with others? what impact might recording the session have on the participants during the session itself - do people behave differently if they are being recorded?
- logistics - will an advertisement need to be created? how will people register for the session? how will they know how to connect to the session?
- testing the platform - have you used the platform before? how familiar are you with it? do you need to test it again? when? with whom? does anything need to be arranged in advance? does the platform work with your computer system? where will you be connecting from at the time of the session and how good is the internet connection? do you have a headset and is it working?
- your space - what does your space look like where you will be sitting during your session? what can be seen on camera? will pets, children, phones, partners or other noises interrupt or how could those distractions be eliminated or mitigated?
- and, as already mentioned on the previous page, working with a co-facilitator or producer - how will you work together? what will your roles be?

The online article [Interactive Web Conferencing Brings Benefits to the Online Classroom](#) has some additional practical "tips for success" to think about before and during your synchronous session.

Attribution

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Lalonde, C. (2020). *Facilitation in Digital Learning Environments*. EdTech Books.
https://edtechbooks.org/digital_facilitation