

Quick guide – Blended synchronous teaching

Will you be delivering a face-to-face session with some participants joining remotely? This quick guide provides recommendations on how to manage this teaching scenario.

Caveat: Blended synchronous teaching is among the most challenging scenarios as it requires planning and equitable delivery for two different cohorts. Successful delivery usually involves additional tools, planning and practice. It is therefore worth considering if it is possible to place students into separate ‘face-to-face’ and online classes or making all classes online.

With enough preparation and planning, blended synchronous classes can enrich the learning experience of both online and face-to-face students.

The following provides an overview of what it takes to deliver successful blended synchronous sessions.

Pre-session recommendations and checklist:

Recommendation	Example	Checklist
Communication recommendations	Highlight benefits to both ‘face-to-face’ and ‘online’ participants <i>It might be challenging, but it is inclusive and builds resilience. It gives you a chance to practice working in this context, which is valuable for an ever-more-blended workplace.</i>	
	Set technical expectations Ideally all face-to-face participants will have charged devices with a headset to participate in the ‘whole-class’ discussions. Where this is not possible consider asking face-to-face participants to share devices, repeating questions for the online participants, placing the lectern microphone near a laptop speaker and/or using a double Zoom technique (see testimonial 1 below). Online students - please test your audio/video set up (provide link/ways to test).	
	10-minute testing ‘buffer’ If possible, ask online participants to login 10 minutes prior to the first session to test the technology.	
Teacher technical recommendations	Additional devices An additional device may be helpful to display the student’s view. If available, have it logged in as a student to have a clear display of student view/functionality A device for a ‘Roving microphone’. If available, consider using a ‘mobile’ device, e.g., a tablet or a phone, that can be passed around to act as a ‘class microphone’ OR use a roving microphone.	
	Visual input If your subject involves writing formulas, consider using a tablet as the device that gets projected onto the screen for face-to-face and online students.	
Planning lesson activities	Online as ‘default’ with additional tasks for face-to-face	Choosing and planning activities from a perspective of an online participant and adding ‘variations’ for face-to-face students can be a useful approach to planning activities.
Coping with a heightened cognitive load	Planning assistance If feasible, consider team teaching, having a teaching assistant or asking one of the students for support, e.g., monitoring online chat, in the first 1-2 sessions, especially if new to blended synchronous teaching.	

In-class recommendations and checklist:

Recommendation		Examples	Checklist
Headphones and mute reminders	Pre-empt audio echo issues	Ask students (both face-to-face and online) to use headphones where possible. Automatically mute students and ask them to unmute themselves only when they speak to pre-empt the echo loop.	
Visibility of online participants	Concrete strategies to pre-empt online students feeling ignored or left out	Ask online students to start their questions with Q (to make them more visible among other messages) and raise their 'hand' in Zoom. Assign a face-to-face student to monitor/respond to online chat. Make regular pauses and check the online chat.	
Inclusion of online participants	Increase co-presence of online participants.	Ask online participants for their contributions and project Zoom on the main screen for the whole group to see. Use breakout rooms to have small group discussions between face-to-face and online students. You can also ask face-to-face and online students to have discussions separately but report back to the whole group after.	

Advice from Macquarie University staff

Tips from colleagues who have used Blended Synchronous classes.

Instructor 1 (Jasna Novak Milic, Croatian Studies, sessions with 8-14 participants) A strategy which has been nicknamed the 'Double ZOOM' - log in from the laptop (host) and also join in from the resident lectern computer. The latter is projected in the room - that way both cohorts see the same content at all times (on campus students without needing to use laptops and joining zoom). Recording happens via ZOOM or, in the new language labs, with Echo360 (better).	Instructor 3 (Scott Barnes, Speech Pathology, sessions with 40 participants) Projecting a zoom meeting on the screen / Standard lectern and data projector. I have been holding a Zoom meeting, which is projected in the room. Alongside the Zoom meeting, both groups log their work in a Google doc that they all have access to, which is periodically reviewed with the teacher guiding the discussion.
Instructor 2 (Ronika Power, Ancient History, sessions with 30+ participants) Set up: in class - I use my laptop with Zoom alongside the normal lectern tools; in laboratories - I use my phone with Zoom. Strategy: in class - I need to stay in one place to ensure my image and sound is captured by both the lectern and the laptop; I repeat questions or comments made in class so that students on Zoom can hear them; I turn the laptop around to the class when Zoom students are speaking so that both on-campus and online students can see each other, and I put the lectern microphone near my laptop speaker so that the Zoom students voices are projected for the on-campus students to hear; I ask the on-campus students to switch on their Zoom cameras so as many students as possible are 'together' for the class.	Instructor 4 (Rachael Gunn, Media Internship and professional practice, sessions with 100+ participants) Sign into zoom on the desktop computer, project my slides so the face to face students can see them, and share my screen so the online students can see them. Bring an additional laptop to record myself. Encourage students in class to log onto zoom so they can participate in the online chat. Use the chat for students to answer questions, use breakout rooms for small group discussion. If an online student has a contribution to the class discussion, I move the mic to my computer so that people in the class can hear them.

Further resources

Teche blog post "Returning to campus: small group classes with an online option" <https://teche.mq.edu.au/2020/07/returning-to-campus-small-group-classes-with-an-online-option/>
 Extended guide: https://mqoutlook-my.sharepoint.com/:w/g/personal/amanda_parker_mq_edu_au/ETc2-T-PJlAoCBZIbmwNT4B7nKzuZkLMEh9lfpvekM_mQ
 BlendSync project site: <https://blendsync.org/>