

Helpful Ideas

Course Structure

Faculty of Applied Science
Centre for Instructional Support

One of the first steps in preparing your course for online instruction is to establish a weekly schedule. A predictable routine is even more important in an online course. This will help students to manage workload across their full set of courses. Choosing a schedule that is sustainable for you will also help the term to go smoothly.

Learning time

With a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities in each course and increased challenges for students in replicating peer-to-peer collaboration online it is likely that the time required to master concepts and complete homework will be higher.

As effective as video content can be, consuming large quantities of content via video for a full term will be tiring for students. It will be important to ensure that the amount of content assigned each week is managed carefully.

- Create Weekly Rhythm for Course
- Consider a mix of sync and async
- Distribute deadlines
- Coordinate with other courses
- Use total async with caution
- Communicate plan in your syllabus

The weekly plan

Plan the weekly routine for your course in advance and include it in your course syllabus. If the students in your course are part of a cohort, consider coordinating with the instructors of other courses that the students will be taking to spread homework deadlines across the week. You may be able to coordinate midterm dates with other instructors as well and distribute them evenly for students. With the exception of larger assessments such as midterm exam(s), you should be able to lay out a pattern for a single week that repeats throughout the term.

Most courses will have students participating from various locations around the world. Creating a course structure that is accessible from anywhere in the world will be challenging. A mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities will help to make your course more accessible while still offering a formal structure and sufficient opportunities for student-instructor and student-student interaction. Despite the apparent convenience of an entirely asynchronous offering, student surveys conducted since the Covid-19 shutdown began indicate that students prefer to have some real-time lecture content to give the course structure and to preserve the opportunity to work through challenges they are having with course material.

Example

The original face-to-face offering of this course was a flipped classroom experience divided into two sections with one common tutorial. The course structure included:

Getting ready for the week (GRFTW): weekly video, avg 6 – 8 minutes, covering a key theory to be explored each week. References to open-source textbook and summary notes so that students could learn material using their preferred modality.

Getting ready for the week mini-quiz: a short quiz, delivered via WeBWorK (WW), to encourage students to prepare for week. Expected time commitment ~30 minutes.

Lectures: Class A and B, 90 minutes each, two sections

Tutorial: alternate weeks, 2 hrs, both sections together. Tests typically held in this block.

Homework: weekly assignments on WeBWorK (WW).

WW is an online platform that allows the use of variables. Students get individualized versions of the same question. Final answers are auto graded. Students get unlimited attempts.

| | F2F | Online |
|--------|--|---|
| Friday | GRFTW material released WeBWorK assignment X-1 due WeBWorK assignment X released | GRFTW material released Video and reading for Class A released WeBWorK assignment X-1 due WeBWorK assignment X released |
| Tues | GRFTW due 8am (online quiz) Class A - combination lecture and interactive problem solving | GRFTW due at 8am (online mini-quiz) Asynchronous Class A Office hour (original class time + evening) |
| Wed | Tutorial - alternate weeks (2 hr) Tests in the tutorial (2 per term) | Tutorial - alternate weeks (2 hours) Tests in tutorial period (online)* Additional online office hour |
| Thurs | Class B - combination lecture & interactive problem solving | Synchronous Class B (Zoom) Resolve student questions from Class A material, interactive problem solving Informal peer-collaboration drop in (evening) |

*made available for a longer portion of the day but time limited