

# Overview: Asynchronous Class Activities

Whether you are teaching fully online, in a hybrid modality, or face-to-face, you can use asynchronous activities in service to your learning goals. Asynchronous activities refer to those that students do outside of live class time. This modality provides affordances such as providing students processing time to work on an activity, making student thinking visible, and allowing the instructor to provide thoughtful feedback and probe students' work to see how they are understanding the content. In the following pages, we'll review three key digital tools you can use asynchronously:

- Asynchronous discussions
- Collaborative documents
- Chat tool

Before we go in-depth with each tool, we first outline some general strategies that work across these tools.

## Asynchronous Strategies

### Align Your Learning Outcomes with Asynchronous Activities

Consider what learning outcomes would be best facilitated by asynchronous activities. Asynchronous work is well-suited for learning that requires students to reflect and integrate material on their own and to collect their thoughts before sharing out. For example, if one of your outcomes involves students sharing their work and providing feedback to each other, you could use a discussion board, such as Canvas discussions, to set up a gallery walk in which students post their work and provide feedback to each other either as a whole class or in small groups.

### Provide Clear Instructions and Set Students Up to Succeed

Students' self-efficacy and rapport with their instructors are enhanced when they feel they have been given the necessary resources to succeed. Provide explicit instructions for asynchronous activities and consider providing models and rubrics to guide students' work. While explicit, transparent instructions are important in any modality, they are particularly important in asynchronous work since there may not be an instructor or peer present for immediate answers to assignment questions. You can refer to the [Transparent Assignment Template](#) when creating your assignments.

### Guide and Focus Students' Learning

Students benefit from prompts and cues that direct their learning and attention. Whereas an instructor might know the most crucial parts of a video or text, a student may not focus

attention appropriately, spending too long on minor points and missing more crucial ones. Instructors can guide students' attention by:

- Signposting and breaking material into sections—for example, by using PowerPoint and text section headers.
- Providing questions for reading that lead into later instructional components like discussions or assignments.
- Supplying students with a guided notes templates in which you leave out information that students fill in as they listen to a lecture.

## Use Feedback on Asynchronous Work as a Way to Maintain Instructor Presence

Instructor feedback is one of the most impactful influences on students' learning. Not only does feedback provide information that makes students' cognitive representation of knowledge more accurate, it also has affective consequences and can enhance motivation when delivered effectively. Depending on your class size, you may give one-to-many or one-to-one feedback. For one-to-many feedback, you can browse discussion boards for common misconceptions or errors and create a course announcement to address it. You can also add comments to an individual or group collaborative document to highlight strengths and offer suggestions for improvement in their work. Both ways demonstrate that you are present and invested in students' learning.

Learn more about asynchronous strategies to promote inclusive teaching on [the Sheridan Center site](#).

### References

Johnson, S.M. (2020). *Interacting Asynchronously*. Vanderbilt University Course Development Resources. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/cdr/module-2/interacting-asynchronously/>

Winkelmes, M.-A. (2016). *The unwritten rules: Decode your assignments and decipher what's expected of you*. TILT Higher Ed. <https://tilthighered.com/assets/pdffiles/Template.pdf>