

Instructional Guidelines for Success: teaching in person, remote and hybrid courses in 2020-21

The following recommendations serve as a summary of lessons learned from the Spring 2020 term (gleaned from HEDS surveys), and as a guide to faculty preparing courses in an exceptionally challenging year requiring either new or modified modes of instruction. As we embark on this journey, we will all benefit from a healthy dose of compassion—for our students who are doing their best, and for ourselves—by setting limits on what we can reasonably take on during these extraordinary times.

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I. Key Findings from the Student HEDS Survey

Connectedness. Students want to retain the feeling of connectedness and shared endeavor that characterizes the normal in-class learning experience. Courses with no instructor contact beyond optional office hours left students feeling especially disconnected and dissatisfied. Students expressed a strong desire for regular contact with instructors and classmates alike.

Clarity. Students were often confused and unsure of the motivations behind some pedagogical decisions. They expressed a desire for enhanced clarity and sent us a signal to err on the side of more information and guidance than we would normally offer.

Coursework. Students were clear that faculty should *not* assume that being home means that they have more free time or fewer distractions than on campus. Many asked for more sensitivity to workload in a remote learning context, as well as shorter assignments, to accommodate the stressful, fragmenting circumstances many are facing. Students found timed online exams extremely stressful, especially those with poor internet connections.

II. General Tips and Guidelines

Communication

- Check your LU email regularly and encourage students to do the same.
- Consider communicating via multiple channels, including text message. Apps like remind (<https://www.remind.com/>) allow texting between instructors and students while keeping phone numbers private.
- Include a response time estimate on the syllabus and hold to it.
- Gather all materials pertinent to your course, including the syllabus and any subsequent updates, in one spot (e.g. a "topic zero" in Moodle).
- Send out redundant communications for important announcements (e.g., Moodle and an email).

Connectedness

Office Hours and Availability. Schedule regular office hours and include them on the syllabus. Demystify them by explicitly inviting students and suggesting how they might use this time (e.g., clarifying assignments and content, relationship building). Explicitly inform students how office hours will be conducted—in person or remotely on Zoom (see the [Moodle water cooler](#) site for suggestions)—and if alternative arrangements can be made by appointment. Assuage social anxiety around multi-student Zoom office hours by using a breakout room for one-on-one discussions. If the course is asynchronous, require a Zoom check-in with your students every week or every other week.

Video Chats. Brief videos (<5 min.) posted on Moodle that include class updates, explanations of assignments, or responses to student work enhance clarity and connectedness. See "Zoom and Recorded Video" below for tips on making video recordings.

Break-out Rooms. Use breakout rooms on Zoom for small group work to encourage student interactions and build a sense of community. Encourage students to use their full name and pronouns on their Zoom profile.

Study Groups Consider providing space and time for students to discuss the material informally with one another. Help students stay connected with and supportive of each other by setting up Zoom "study hall" groups or scheduling physically distanced study groups on campus.

Coursework

Workload. It is reasonable to expect students to do the same amount of work in a hybrid or remote course (albeit in a potentially different form) as they would do if the class met in person. However, we should remember that reduced "face time" does not mean that our students are not working and be careful not to overcompensate with additional assignments. Bear in mind that it may be harder for students to figure out how long tasks will take in an online environment; online coursework often takes more time. For example, watching videos takes more time than one might expect, because students will usually take notes, pause the video, and watch parts of it again. Consider checking in with students (maybe with an anonymous poll on Zoom) and asking about the workload. Students may mistakenly perceive an increase in overall workload if, for example, you require less face-to-face synchronous work but impose higher expectations for preparation and work done outside of class meetings. As noted above, clear and transparent communication as to the nature of the coursework should help forestall any misunderstandings as to what is being required and why.

Group Work. Use group work advisedly and with caution. In a hybrid or remote setting, many students may find it hard to coordinate and to hold partners accountable, especially if the group work takes place outside of regular class time.

Assessment and Testing. Given the pace and length of our terms, early assessments (i.e., by the end of the second week) and frequent feedback (e.g., low-stakes assessments) have always been paramount; however, it is especially important now as students struggle to stay engaged with remote learning. For testing and exams in remote courses, we suggest not administering tests "live" (via Zoom) unless it is absolutely necessary (e.g., to test conversational ability in a language course). Instead, consider embracing remote/open-book testing or, where possible, replace tests with some other form of assessed work. If using Moodle quizzes, consider providing a broad testing window (e.g., 24 hours) and if a time limit is necessary be sure that it is sufficiently long (ask for student input). In addition, make sure when planning your exam timing that you have considered students' official accessibility accommodations.

Pacing and Workflow. Due to the special challenges imposed by the pandemic, it may be necessary for us to move more slowly than would be the case in a "normal" iteration of the course. Consider offering work schedules with intermediate deadlines (for parts of longer projects) and guidance on managing workflow. A sample weekly schedule, with suggested time investments for activities (e.g., videos, readings, project work) will aid student time management, serve as a powerful motivator, and may inform whether or not the course is suitable given their situation. The [Work Load Estimator](#) developed by Rice University can help faculty arrive at reasonable time estimates.

Course Materials. If possible, choose course materials available in multiple formats to serve diverse learning styles (e.g., paper, e-book, audio). Printed materials provide a relief from screen overload and are easy to mark up and move through; however, electronic texts are often more readily acquired and less expensive.

Flexibility. Where possible, allow for a variety of ways for students to learn, communicate, collaborate, and participate in the course. The school of thought called Universal Design for Learning suggests offering multiple ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, as a matter of general accessibility in all course formats. (For more on this and other suggestions, check out the recent UDL Lawrence webinar [here](#)).

III. Suggestions for Specific Modalities

In-Person and Hybrid

Teaching in person under social distancing conditions will present special challenges for pedagogies we normally employ. Here are some things to remember and consider:

- Maintaining social distancing for the instructor and students will greatly limit movement around the room.
- Instructors and students may not share materials (books, handouts, lab equipment, art supplies, etc.) without planning specific measures for disinfection.
- Due to masking, instructors and students will need to enunciate more clearly and speak more loudly. We are exploring the possibility of portable speakers and microphones for instructors.
- Although we do not want to put faculty in the position of policing students, realistically it may fall on faculty to enforce social distancing and mask wearing in the classroom. We do suggest asking students who do not follow these guidelines to leave the classroom. Consider, too, discussing this at the beginning of the term and encouraging the class to support one another in following health rules.

- Paradoxically, lecturing may be one of the more effective in-person activities under social distancing. Unlike on Zoom, you can more easily see the entire class and students can more easily interrupt and ask questions, especially in larger courses.

The Committee issued guidelines for including students studying remotely in in-person and hybrid courses based on their need to take a course to fulfill major, minor, or IA requirements. Even if you do not have such students in your in-person or hybrid course, you should have a plan for the possibility that a student will fall ill or be required to quarantine or enter isolation. Consider how you will include such students in classwork and assignments in those circumstances.

Remote Asynchronous

Clarity and communication is critical in remote asynchronous courses. We strongly encourage faculty to have regular check-ins with students on Zoom, email, or other means (see suggestions under “communication and connectedness” above). This teaching format requires substantial planning and technological willingness on the instructor’s part to be successful. Faculty working in this format should refer to and take advantage of the resources available on the [Instructional Technology webpage](#).

Remote Synchronous

The following suggestions relate primarily to the successful management of class discussion via Zoom, and other forms of participation.

Provide clear guidelines on Zoom etiquette. Should they raise their (virtual) hands to speak? Are they allowed to interrupt? Would you prefer that they use the chat feature? If so, is it acceptable to use the emoji? During the spring term, uncertainty as to classroom expectations kept some students from contributing to discussions even when they had things to say.

Optional camera use. While having all participants visible can enhance engagement in a Zoom discussion, students may not be willing and/or able to do so in some circumstances (e.g., poor internet connection). Given this, faculty should not insist that students be visible on video.

Avoid monotony. 70 minutes of lecture via Zoom felt like a lot to most students. Consider breaking up each class period into different blocks or types of learning activities.

Offer an alternative channel for participation. Student comments indicate that they want live discussion, but some students were uncomfortable participating via Zoom. Offering an alternative method for students to share their ideas (perhaps asynchronously) may help to address this issue. For example, encouraging students to

use the chat feature in Zoom or participate in Moodle forums may provide low-stress alternatives for sharing.

Recordings. While students express a preference for live discussion, they also appreciate being able to access recorded lectures and other class materials outside of class. Consider arranging for your lectures and/or class discussions to be recorded (see below under Zoom and Recorded Video). Remember that recording of lectures and discussions requires permission from all participants.

IV. Technologies

Moodle

Moodle Page (Required). Every course should have a Moodle page containing a syllabus (or at least a brief description of the course, including modality) **no later than the Friday** before the term starts and should remain open for the first week until enrollment stabilizes. After that point, an enrollment key can be introduced and students who are not enrolled in the class can be removed.

Page Design. Be intentional about organizing course Moodle pages. Cluttered pages can overwhelm students, leading to missed assignments and activities. Jedidiah Rex, LU's instructional designer, offers suggestions [here](#) for using Moodle as an all-encompassing course-organizing tool.

Moodle Forums. [Moodle forums](#) and discussion boards can serve as substitutes for in-class discussion. Beware, however, that while some students valued them, *many* more saw them as frustrating, anxiety provoking, and, sometimes, fruitless exercises. While our intention may be to foster engagement with peers, this format often results in thoughtless box checking.

Zoom and Recorded Video

Zoom is perhaps most relevant to Remote Synchronous courses; see above for suggestions specific to that modality. All course modalities, however, can benefit from deploying Zoom in various ways.

Multiple Links. Consider using multiple Zoom links: one zoom link for class meetings (if teaching synchronously), one for office hours and/or small-group meetings, and perhaps another for advising. Post these links (with one password for the whole term) in the syllabus, in "topic zero" on Moodle, on assignments, and in your email signature.

Recordings. There are various ways to get course content to students working remotely. Many students reacted positively to recorded lectures and narrated power points (roughly 3 to 1 in favor of the latter). Students appreciated the flexibility of watching when they wanted and the ability to pause and review material presented in this way. Complaints were more about specific uses of these formats rather than the formats themselves.

Some suggestions:

- Keep recorded lectures or narrated power point presentations short. Many students expressed despair with the length of recorded lectures during spring term and their inability to remain focused. Consider shorter presentations of no more than ten minutes. Limit the number of slides and amount of text per slide in power point presentations.
- Check out [Karen Costa's 99 tips](#) for creating lively online videos.
- Make videos interactive. For content-heavy, longer videos, students appreciated opportunities to interact with information (e.g., polls, quizzes, feedback). Interactive videos created within Moodle will allow you to do this. Instructions are [here](#).
- Turn some content responsibility over to students. Student videos can be pre-recorded in Zoom and viewed and commented on by classmates at any time.

Resources for creating, saving, and sharing videos. You can easily record a video in Zoom following these [directions](#) and save it on your hard drive. Share videos by uploading them to Microsoft Stream and sharing the link on Moodle. Directions are [here](#). Microsoft Stream provides automatic closed-captioning.

Other Tech Tips

Use accessibility features built into Office 365, Adobe, Chrome, Safari, etc.: These features help with screen/reading fatigue and for help with electronic note taking and writing. Remember that Microsoft streaming will automatically caption your videos but will require some editing to correct mistakes.

Podcasts provide an alternative to videos, reduce screen time, and encourage students to get out for a walk. Instructions on how to create a podcast are [here](#).

Recording equipment is available for check out at the library circulation desk. See what is available and fill out a request form [here](#). (Check out Jedidiah's podcast "[ID Corner](#)"!)

Other resources. Here are some other resources that can help you plan your courses and that will assist you over the course of the term:

- [On-line Tools](#)
- [Media Toolbox](#)
- [Moodle Water Cooler](#)
- [Inclusive teaching practices](#)
- Recent [ACM Workshops](#) on distance learning and the liberal arts

V. Other Recommendations and Policies

Provost's Recommendations

The [Provost's section](#) of the website for instructors lists several recommendations that are worth reviewing. We restate two of them here:

Every course should have a syllabus which details course requirements, deadlines, assignments, attendance policy (if any), and other information. The syllabus should be distributed no later than the first day of the term. Changes to the syllabus should be clearly announced and students should be given fair warning for significant changes to deadlines or assignments. Repeat your expectations, remind students of upcoming deadlines, and take extra care in keeping them informed. The HHMI Inclusive Pedagogy implementation team has developed an [accessible syllabus rubric](#), which includes an outline of recommended content.

Grading criteria for all assignments should be transparent and described on the syllabus and/or on descriptions of assignments. Students should know how their grades are being determined. We encourage you to keep track of grades in a way that makes it possible for students to know how they are doing in your courses at key points in the term.

Policies on Deadlines, Incompletes, and Accommodations

As a reminder, faculty must adhere to the following policies:

- Final examination times are scheduled by the registrar's office. Only the Subcommittee on Administration may grant students a change in their final exam time. Students must petition the Subcommittee directly.
- Examinations or tests may not be given in the tenth week of a term (by faculty legislation).
- The final deadline for all work in a course is the end of the final examination time for any scheduled course—even if a course does not have a final examination. You may not accept work after this deadline. We suggest including this policy on the course syllabus.
- Incompletes are requested by students directly and may only be granted by the [Dean of Academic Success](#).
- Academic accommodations for students with disabilities are determined by the Director of Accessibility in the Center for Academic Success, and instructors are obligated to follow them.

Policies on Extensions

In general, we recommend considering a more flexible policy than usual for extensions. Whatever you decide, though, please make clear to students how and when they can request an extension for coursework and under what specific circumstances an extension will be provided. It is best to be explicit. A phrase such as “if you are having difficulty completing an assignment, email me and I will determine whether the request merits an extension” is too vague; many students would not try contacting this instructor because they cannot tell if their situation "merits" an extension or when exactly they are supposed to ask for one. You can consult with the Dean of Academic Success if you want to discuss a specific student's request or you believe she needs to evaluate the situation.