This guide supports Stanford faculty and instructors to move your in-person courses online. From understanding the benefits of online learning, to facilitating your online class, we guide you through a series of critical steps when planning, developing, and delivering your online course.
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Quick-start checklist

This interactive checklist covers all the steps needed to get your online course ready, with links to the relevant support materials contained within this guide.

PLANNING YOUR COURSE

☐ Learn what to expect when moving your course online.
☐ Explore how online learning can help students learn effectively.
☐ Explore what effective online learning looks like.
☐ Investigate where to go to get support.
☐ Familiarize yourself with laws related to copyright and educational privacy.
☐ Review your department’s guidelines and expectations around online learning.
☐ Identify your course goals.
☐ Consider the diverse needs of your students.
☐ Create an outline of your online course.
☐ Determine the types of synchronous and asynchronous activities you need for your online course.
☐ Familiarize yourself with the educational tools and technologies available to you.
☐ Make a list of all the things you need to produce.
☐ Identify which items are a high priority for achieving the course learning goals.

DEVELOPING YOUR COURSE

☐ Establish your teaching team.
☐ Gather equipment.
☐ Work iteratively to develop your course materials.
☐ Organize your course materials into a supportive online learning environment.
☐ Test your asynchronous activities, such as online quizzes.
☐ Do a trial run of your synchronous activities, such as video conferencing.

DELIVERING YOUR COURSE

☐ Review advice for facilitating effective online learning.
☐ Provide ongoing support and guidance to your students.
☐ Actively work to promote engagement.
☐ Provide timely, constructive feedback on your students’ learning.

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What can I expect when moving my course online?

Moving courses that have traditionally been taught in a physical classroom to an online format may seem overwhelming. We are here for you. There are many types of interactions and activities that you can still have with your students, even online, and in some cases, particularly online. Below we’ve outlined both the benefits and challenges of online courses.

**BENEFITS OF ONLINE LEARNING**

**Helping students learn effectively**

There is a large body of research suggesting that online learning can be as effective as traditional face-to-face learning. As with face-to-face learning, much of the quality of online learning depends on the time and energy you put into making your course a success. To help students learn more effectively online, learn as much as you can about effective online teaching strategies and best practices. This guide is a useful place to start.

**Rich interactivity**

The digital medium provides a rich set of tools for embedding interactivity into a learning experience. Interactive content can be in the form of assessments that provide immediate feedback, simulations, activities, discussions, and more.

**Many possible delivery methods**

One of the advantages of the online format is the many different educational tools available (videos, interactive chats and forums, simulations, etc.). Each tool possesses its own pedagogical strengths and resource requirements.

**Fewer logistical constraints**

Online, neither instructors nor students are constrained by time or space. Instructors can present their content at any time of day from a location of their choosing. Students can digest content on their own schedule. Class sessions are no longer constrained to a full class period, and courses can be longer or shorter than a full quarter.

**Individualized learning**

It is possible to structure online learning to enable students to choose the order in which and pace at which they explore materials. Students can even be provided with multiple pathways tailored to their individual learning needs.

In a video, the instructor can speak directly to the camera as if she is speaking to an individual rather than addressing a classroom full of students all at once. Consequently, videos can sometimes feel more personal than a classroom environment.
What can I expect when moving my course online?

Finally, instructors can create online assessments that provide students with immediate feedback about their grasp of the learning goals. Many studies have shown that students’ learning improves and their understanding deepens when they are given immediate and targeted feedback on their work. 1, 2, 3, 4

**Iteration and reuse**
Once your course has been produced and delivered in an online format, it can be used again in an online or blended format, with gradual improvements over time.

**CHALLENGES OF ONLINE LEARNING**

**Labor-intensive**
It can take a considerable amount of time to plan, design, and prepare all the content for delivering a fully online course.

**Lack of social presence**
Social presence refers to the sense of community and togetherness that students and instructors feel and experience in a class. Fostering social presence is often easier in a face-to-face context.

**Content-specific needs**
Some types of content or classroom activities do not transfer well to an online format. If you encounter this challenge, consider reaching out to offices or individuals at Stanford who have the technical and instructional skills to support your efforts.

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What does effective online learning look like?

In a traditional face-to-face classroom, interactions occur synchronously, meaning at the same time. Synchronous online activities are therefore a popular choice for instructors transitioning their courses online. Effective courses that feature synchronous activities have the following key characteristics:

**REAL-TIME INTERACTIVITY**

For learning to take place synchronously, instructors and students must be able to interact in real time. While it is possible to interact through text alone, this often fails to engage learners and lacks vibrancy and personal connection. Video-conferencing software, such as Zoom, allows participants in the class to see and hear one another, fostering a sense of community and genuine back-and-forth discussion. When instructors can see their students in the virtual classroom, they can easily see who is engaged without needing a stream of text. Likewise, instructors can read verbal cues to determine how confidently a student responds or their enthusiasm for a subject and adjust their approach accordingly.

**DOCUMENT SHARING AND ANNOTATION**

In addition to video, audio, and text chat, an optimal video-conferencing setup for synchronous learning includes a workspace for document sharing or a virtual whiteboard. This space can be used for freehand drawing, live note-taking, sharing PDF files, a slideshow, or other forms of multimedia. Sharing documents with students facilitates engagement with the course material. Markup tools allow drawing, highlighting, and entering text on preloaded documents or a blank page. Using these tools, students can work out practice problems in math and science, annotate a text in humanities, or engage in a variety of other learning activities. Real-time annotation not only engages students in learning the material but offers a shared experience as they work together.

For more information on Stanford-supported tools, see the Stanford Teach Anywhere website.

**EFFECTIVE USE OF MEETING TIME**

Research has shown that students learn better in an active and engaged classroom, and this holds true online as well. Time together online is often limited, though. To make full use of time together, it is beneficial to apply a flipped classroom model in which students are guided through online preparation activities such as readings or videos with prompts for self-reflection, guided forum discussions, or lessons with automated feedback. Synchronous time together can then be spent engaging students in activities that build on their preparation. For example, students can analyze literature together, solve problems, work on more complicated computations, and examine the nuances and context of the material.
What does effective online learning look like?

**ASYNCHRONOUS ACTIVITIES**

In addition to synchronous learning, try to make use of the available tools and technologies for supporting asynchronous learning. Asynchronous activities allow students to work through materials at their own pace, often with built-in guidance and feedback from the instructor. Asynchronous activities are useful for preparing students for class, reinforcing or consolidating learning after class, giving students opportunities to reflect on their understanding, and assessing learning.

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There are many different tools available. Some content types to consider include:
How do I make online learning work for my students?

CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Avoid using the learning management system as a resource repository. Instead, create a guided path through your online content that conveys all the contextual information students would normally have access to in a face-to-face setting.

Examples

- Provide an orientation or getting started section that gives an overview of the course, introduces students to their instructors, and explains what online activities students are expected to complete each week.
- Organize content into manageable chunks with clear learning goals. Use text to introduce each topic or module, communicate the key learning goals, and highlight any assignments or due dates.
- Include the durations for different online activities, so students can more easily schedule learning into their day.
- Set clear expectations around how students should engage with the online course materials.

MAKE LEARNING FLEXIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE

Build flexibility and accessibility into your course to meet the needs of your diverse students in an equitable and inclusive way. What will you do to ensure all students can participate in the course on equal terms? Create a culture where students feel safe approaching you for support and troubleshooting, and allow extra time to address any specific student needs.

Examples

- If students will be dispersed across different time zones, consider what the optimal meeting time is and whether due dates/times should be adjusted.
- Slow Internet connections may make it difficult for some students to engage with your course. To address this, make content downloadable and provide low-bandwidth alternatives such as text transcripts.
- Improve accessibility by adding captions to videos, choosing more accessible content types such as HTML, and adding text alternatives for visual and multimedia elements.
- Explain jargon. Be certain to define words and phrases, including discipline-specific jargon and platform terminology, the first time they appear in your course materials.
- Only use third-party software that meets Worldwide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0 Level AA).
- Support students to get access to the hardware or software they need to participate in your course.
- Incorporate ideas from Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

See our resources on Accessibility for more information.
How do I make online learning work for my students?

**MAXIMIZE ENGAGEMENT**

The digital medium provides a rich set of tools for embedding interactivity into a learning experience. Where possible, you should use these tools to create an engaging online experience for your students. Interactive content can be in the form of assessments that provide immediate feedback, simulations, activities, discussions, and more.

**Examples**

- Platform tools such as [discussion forums](#) and course announcements help students feel in sync and connected with the course.
- Choose presentation formats that are dynamic and interactive, such as a [stand-alone slideshow](#).
- A live online lecture without interaction poses little benefit over prerecorded videos. Instead, use video conferencing tools to hold interactive class discussions and problem-solving sessions.
- Foster social presence, for example by asking students to create profile pages, engage in periodic group chats or web conferences, collaborate on co-editable documents or wikis, engage in discussion forums, or do peer grading activities.
- Send frequent email announcements.
- Participate actively in discussion forums. Provide summaries of forum discussions and highlight thoughtful student questions and posts.

**PROVIDE FEEDBACK**

Provide positive, targeted, constructive feedback that gives students actionable advice on how to improve and become more competent. Feedback can be provided in a number of ways: written comments, video comments, or general comments posted to discussion forums are all ways to direct students toward success.

**Examples**

- Establish consistent feedback mechanisms such as polls, self-check quizzes, or other formative assessments that help students gauge how well they are grasping the material.
- Break assignments into discrete, manageable chunks, and give students feedback at each step.
- Incorporate automated feedback into online quizzes and activities.
- Enable progress tracking tools in your learning management system to help students stay motivated.
How do I develop my online course?

Here we cover three key steps for developing your online course:

1. Make a plan
2. Develop your content
3. Test your course

### MAKE A PLAN

**Get the support you need**
Reach out to offices or individuals at Stanford who have the technical and instructional skills to support your efforts. See the [Stanford Teach Anywhere](#) website for more information.

Whenever possible, talk to colleagues who may have developed an online course or even online course components for a blended course. This group can also serve as a good audience for trying out material as you develop it.

**Determine your course goals**
Why are you creating this online course (or portion of a course)? What do you hope to accomplish? *What are the learning goals?* Your various goals will affect your decisions about what technologies to use, how to structure your course, and so on.

**Think student first**
Before choosing a style that best showcases your content, it is important to ask yourself, “Who are my students?” Putting yourself in the students’ seat and taking issues such as accessibility and student support into consideration during the design and planning stages will increase the chances for successful course outcomes.

**Create an outline of the entire course**
Even if you are not completely sure how you want everything to go, mapping out the bigger picture before you start is important for a couple of reasons:

- The process of creating an outline will force you to think through overarching themes and structures. You might realize, for instance, that you want every module to contain one lecture, one reflection, and one assignment.

- It might lead you to change your mind about what technologies you want to use or decide that rather than creating your course content from the beginning to end, it makes more sense to start in the middle.

- It is very likely that as you create your course, your original course outline will change. You will come up with new ideas and notice inconsistencies. That is completely fine! This first draft is not intended to be detailed or beautiful; it should just be a sketch.
How do I develop my online course?

**Determine what types of activities you need**
Online course delivery allows you to re-evaluate the way you teach. Perhaps lectures aren’t necessary to teach your content? Eliminate them! Perhaps students could benefit from more practice problems? Create short videos where you work through additional problems on your tablet. The possibilities are endless.

Start by asking yourself the following questions:

- What do I want students to do before, during, and after class? How can a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities support this?
- What essential course activities will it be difficult for me to move online (such as labs or field trips)? If it’s not possible to continue offering these activities in person, how can I recreate them for the online space?
- Does it make sense for the course to be entirely asynchronous—in other words, with no real-time component like video conferencing? If so, how will I foster social presence and continue to make the course engaging for students?

**Review your toolset**
Understand the different tools and technologies available to you to support your course goals and online course design. For more information on Stanford-supported tools, see the [Stanford Teach Anywhere](https://teachanywhere.stanford.edu) website.

**Scope your developments**
Make a list of all the items you need to produce and estimate how long it will take you to produce them. You may need to adjust your scope as you learn how long it takes to produce certain types of content. Your available timeline will dictate how ambitious you can be.

**Prioritize learning goals**
Consider which elements of your online course must be present for students to achieve the course learning goals. Prioritize working on these “must-have” items. Lower priority, “nice-to-have” elements can be supported using less resource-intensive solutions or rolled out in a future offering of the course.
How do I develop my online course?

2 DEVELOP YOUR CONTENT

Gather your team
If you have teaching assistants or undergraduates who can help you, enlist them. Make certain everyone is on board with the production schedule and is aware of deadlines and deliverables. To help keep things organized, you might employ a collaboratively editable spreadsheet, calendar, or document.

Gather equipment
Assess what hardware (including computers, cameras, etc.) and software is available to you. Consider what equipment you and your teaching team might need, such as a stable WiFi connection, a quality microphone, or a quiet space for recording. For equipment recommendations, see the Stanford Teach Anywhere website.

Work iteratively
Consider creating small bits of content at a time. If you are creating videos, start with a short, simple video. Do a first draft, and then watch your video. Then design an entire lesson from start to finish. Again, do a first draft, and then look over your work.

There are several reasons we recommend you start small and work iteratively:

- Starting small gives you valuable information about what the entire process will look like and help you become a better online course designer.
- Once you have something small, test it out on students or show it to colleagues to get feedback.
- Keep track of how long it takes you to create this small portion of your project, so you can estimate for yourself how long the entire project will take.

3 TEST YOUR COURSE

Make sure you allow time to test your online activities, particularly if you are working with unfamiliar technologies, online quizzes, or complex activity types with many available settings. It is important that you test your course from the student’s perspective as well as your own.
Appendix A

ACCESSIBILITY

Policies and Resources
Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for all learners. As described in the Stanford University Online Accessibility Policy web page, Stanford “has adopted the Worldwide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0 Level AA) as its goal for accessible Stanford websites.”

The resources below are available to the Stanford community to support inclusion and accessibility.

- **Stanford’s Online Accessibility Program (SOAP)** provides online accessibility guidelines, standards, tips and tools for web designers, developers, and content creators. The SOAP website is the go-to location for reporting any online accessibility issues and for content creators to request online accessibility support or a consultation.

- **The Office of Accessible Education (OAE)** is a great resource for students and provides a variety of accommodations for on-campus students with disabilities. We recommend adding OAE’s prewritten syllabus statement to your course syllabi.

- **The Diversity and Access Office (D&A Office)** supports the University’s goal of providing equal access and opportunities for all learners. It is helpful to remind on-campus students that this office is available to them if they encounter discrimination or bias. The Diversity and Access Office has information on Stanford’s non-discrimination policy and on disability access for students, faculty, and staff for on-campus facilities, programs and activities.

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Appendix B

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Whether you are producing a face-to-face or online course, you will find the resources below helpful.

- **Stanford library website**
  Stanford University provides guidelines and information about [copyright](#) and [fair use](#).

- **Likeness or image release forms**
  If you will use images or videos that portray somebody's likeness or image, you will need to secure appropriate release forms. Please check with your department for advice on which release forms you should use.

- **Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**
  Under FERPA, educators are required to protect students' privacy rights regarding their educational record. The educational record can include information such as blog posts, creative work, grades, responses to questions, etc.

- **Technology, Education and Copyright Harmonization Act of 2002 (TEACH Act)**
  In certain instances, the TEACH Act allows educators to display copyrighted works without obtaining explicit permission.

- **Third party tools**
  A third party tool is a web site or app that is not hosted by Stanford, such as Khan Academy. You should be aware of [university security and privacy requirements](#) and [Stanford University guidelines](#). Make sure to read the license agreement before working with a third party tool. Some third party tools have an agreement with Stanford. However, if they don’t, you cannot require that students use them and must be prepared to provide an alternative.
Appendix C

ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

Much has been written about effective forum usage. Strategies for effective forum usage depend on what you are teaching and what you hope to accomplish with the forum.

Here are a few basic tips that apply across the board:

- **Communicate clearly** about the purpose of the forum and what students can expect from it.
- **Set guidelines for etiquette.** Here is an [example of an etiquette document](#).
- **Provide reasons to go to the forum.** Is the forum the main place for students to get answers from you and other instructors? Is it the central way for students to learn from one another? Will you post important material there? Is student participation required? Be sure that students know when and why they should use the forum.
- **Manage expectations about your presence.** Students should know in advance how regularly to expect you in the forum. Decide whether you will merely be reading the forum or if and when (daily, weekly, etc.) you and/or your teaching assistants will be answering questions. Inform students of your forum participation plan so they know what kind of engagement to expect from you.
- **Move relevant email to the forum.** If you receive a question by email on a topic of general importance to the class, move it to the forum. Be sure to anonymize the query, and of course be sure there is no private information in the email.
- **Endorse correct answers to questions by students.** Your acknowledgment will encourage them to answer more questions. Mention posts that you saw on the forum in class.
- **Remember: Not all forums are created equal.** Some forum platforms are much more effective than others for particular goals.
About this guide

This guide was created by the Stanford Center for Professional Development (SCPD). SCPD helps extend faculty teaching and research to a global community of learners via online, in-person, and blended and digital platforms.

scpd.stanford.edu