Maximizing Synchronous & Asynchronous Learning Time

Return to School 2020-2021
Middle and High School

This resource provides recommendations for how to maximize synchronous and asynchronous learning with a focus on relationships, active engagement, differentiation and building students' agency in a virtual environment.

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Academic Learning Time (not the first week of school)

Classroom time (approximately 90 minutes per day) should be divided into synchronous learning time (whole group and small group) and independent learning time during which students have access to the teacher. Whole group (direct instruction) synchronous time should be no more than:

- 35 minutes for middle school students and 45 minutes for high school students; or
- 2 hours and 20 minutes per week for middle school; 3 hours per week for high school.

The remaining time in the class period should be for students to have independent work time or group work in which the teacher is accessible or working synchronously with the individual or group(s). This time does not count against the 35/45 minute limit on whole group synchronous learning.

Synchronous[1]

Synchronous learning refers to all types of learning in which student(s) and teacher(s) are in the same place, at the same time, in order for learning to take place. This includes live online meetings when the **whole class** or **smaller groups** get together. In synchronous learning, students usually go through the learning path together, accompanied by their teacher who is able to provide support while students are completing tasks and activities.

Asynchronous

Asynchronous means that learning occurs in different times and spaces particular to each learner. In asynchronous learning, teachers usually set up a learning path, which students engage with at their own pace. Asynchronous learning should take place on Fridays for all students and can take place on weekdays if it meets the needs of students and is developmentally appropriate.

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[1] definitions adapted from https://www.brynmawr.edu/blendedlearning/asynchronous-vs-synchronous-learning-quick-overview

Synchronous, Whole Group Instruction

- When planning for "whole group", consider:
  - Being concise/intentional with teacher talk/moves; not a lecture-style.
  - A focus on relationship-building and a sense of belonging.
  - Active engagement: How are students critically thinking, communicating and collaborating? What digital tools align to these outcomes?
- With learning outcomes in mind, prioritize what is most valued for synchronous (whole group vs. small group) instruction and asynchronous instruction.
- Consider the sensitivity of students' comfort for turning on their camera. Keep that consideration in mind before establishing an expectation that students are required to turn on their cameras.

Whole Group (limited within the classroom cap of students)	
Purpose	**Suggestions**
Community Building	● Focus on SEL to include community-building ● To support relationship building and to set shared goals
Routines & Procedures (linked is a planning checklist)	● Co-constructing classroom norms/agreements with an emphasis on digital citizenship ● Modeling procedures (For example, logging onto learning platforms, how to use specific digital tools, how to access assignments, how to use a class daily schedule, structures for feedback, etc.) ● See link to the left for a comprehensive checklist of routines and procedures to consider
Mini-Focus Lessons	● Launching a task, problem or project *(May be interdisciplinary)* ● Introducing **key** concepts ● Modeling skills ● Facilitating class discussion for deeper levels of thinking *(Ensuring structures for active engagement are in place)*
Setting Expectations & Facilitating Group Collaboration	● Provide clear directions/structures for collaborative thinking routines or a group task ● Opportunities for peer interactions to include communication, feedback and learning from peers *(Teachers can use this time to monitor, provide feedback and take anecdotal notes about student understanding, use of skills, & students' level of participation.)*
Celebrations & Reflection	● Support relationship and community building; set shared goals ● Provides formative information on what went well and what did not go well collectively as a class today/this week *(Teacher can adjust instruction, procedures or routines in response)* ● Reflections can help students develop their identities as learners and it allows for metacognition of content understanding and Lifelong learner competencies. ● Can be a time for transitioning with clear expectations into asynchronous or small group instruction.

Synchronous, Small Group Instruction

- Small groups should not be static, but flexible. Flexible grouping:
  - assumes that groupings will and must change, because students' readiness needs, motivations, and learning preferences routinely change
  - builds community, as it continually exposes students to different perspectives and reinforces ongoing relationship-building.
- When planning for flexible, small group instruction, it is crucial that:
  - Groupings change based on goals and student characteristics that matter for the task.
  - Groupings vary in composition, duration, and size
  - Students consistently work with a range of peers
- *Homogenous groups* are preferable for targeted instruction (based on need as revealed by formative assessment).
  - **Readiness:** Are students in different places in their mastery of a certain skill (e.g., reading complex text, solving equations, or conducting experiments)? If so, then it makes sense to place students in groups of like-readiness and give each group work that targets their *particular areas of strength or weakness.*
  - **Interest**: Does the lesson topic need more "spice"? Perhaps placing students in groups of similar interest to explore the topic through that "lens" will increase motivation.
  - **Learning Preferences**: Students' partialities for accessing content (e.g., reading about it, watching a video about it) can be a way to form like learning-preference groups.
- *Heterogeneous groups* work well when a mixture of perspectives and backgrounds–including experiences, beliefs, leadership styles, extracurricular endeavors–is important.
- Consider the size of the group based on your goals
  - **Partners or trios:** if students are not yet accustomed to working in groups; also ideal for students learning English, as it gives them a safe and contained space to practice using their new language skills (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012).
  - **Groups of 4** work well for collaborative analysis and problem solving.
  - **Circles of 6 to 8** tend to produce more robust discussions than do smaller groups
  - **Splitting the class** can harness the power of diverse viewpoints and contribute to a lively discussion. The split-class configuration also works well for activities such as review and a co-teaching context.

Synchronous, small group instruction should consider:	
Purpose	**Examples/Suggestions**
Building community or **collaborative skills**	● **Examples**: connectors, greetings, simple tasks ● **Composition/size:** small (2-3), heterogeneous groups might be preferred for these activities ● **Duration**: 5-10 minutes
Exploring new content	● **Examples:** watching and discussing a video, exploring and investigating source material ● **Composition/size:** Small (3-4), heterogeneous groups might be preferred for these activities ● **Duration**: 15-20 minutes
Practicing new or complex skills in context	● **Examples:** applying or demonstrating concepts, models, and techniques, analyzing sources, reading complex text, analyzing mathematical concepts, reviewing and analyzing data, discussing and reviewing student responses to FRQ/DBQ ● **Composition/size:** readiness groups (homogeneous), groups of 4-5 are ideal for collaborative analysis. ● **Duration:** 20-30 minutes
Investigating a truly complex problem	● **Examples**: conducting an experiment, working through an inquiry, completing a design challenge or engineering project, rich mathematical tasks, problem solving tasks ● **Composition/size:** readiness/interest/learner profile (homogeneous), groups of 4-5 are ideal for collaborative analysis. ● **Duration:** may be an extended period of time
Completing a multifaceted PBL	● **Examples:** High Tech High and Buck Institute type projects, Mathalicious ● **Composition/size:** readiness/interest/learner profile (homogeneous), groups of 4-5 are ideal for collaborative analysis ● **Duration:** group work may consume the majority of the week, but be introduced by a full-class launch at the beginning and a whole-group share at the end

Synchronous, Individual Instruction

Individualized, synchronous instruction could include:	
Purpose	**Suggestions**
Learning Partnership	Examples--reading/math conferences with students ● Relationship building ● Goal setting ● Reflection ● Feedback
Assessment	Examples include: ● Quick Checks ● Probing for student thinking (clarify thinking /check for misunderstanding) ● Summative assessments (Quizzes and tests)

Asynchronous Learning
- Asynchronous should include both learning in the virtual environment and activities that do not require screen time.
- Considerations
    - Provide an intentional and meaningful purpose. Avoid assignments or tasks that resemble "busy work" or "seatwork"
    - Consider audio or video recordings to support different modalities of communication for asynchronous expectations to students and families.
    - Consider how asynchronous learning will be differentiated to meet the needs of different learners; intentionally plan for scaffolds and enrichment opportunities. The asynchronous opportunities must be accessible to all students.
    - Provide clear time expectations and directions within daily/weekly schedule for asynchronous learning.
    - Communication is key with families.

How to use asynchronous time:	
Purpose	**Suggestion**
Student Voice & Choice (Inquiry, Authentic Learning within the relevance of home & community) May provide multiple pathways (flexibility) for student demonstration of learning	Examples include: ● Choice Boards ● Project-based learning ● Design challenges ● Student-driven research ● Development of digital portfolios and student reflection ● Opportunities to collaborate on projects and provide feedback to peers ● Activities that support health & wellness or student interests ● Reading and writing based on students' interests *(consider both on and off screen)* ● Games *(consider both on and off screen)*
Reinforce Learning of Essential Standards during that Week/Unit	Examples include: ● Hyperdocs/ Hyper Slides ● Choice Boards ● Reading and researching using databases ● Engaging with virtual field trips ● Assigned activities within Schoology (reinforcing and practice) ● Interdisciplinary projects ● Use of digital resources ● Time for self-reflection ● Opportunities to provide peer feedback ● Reading books and writing based on students' interests *(consider both on and off screen)* ● Games *(consider both on and off screen)* ● Activities that promote SEL and health & wellness ● Use formative assessment to determine who needs what
Building New Knowledge	● Exposure to content that has been identified as "Essential" like virtual field experiences. ● Activating prior knowledge through mini-lessons, video, text, audio using a thinking routine/graphic organizer

Homework:
Middle School students will not be assigned additional homework beyond the independent work in the synchronous class time or asynchronous work assigned on Fridays. If a middle school student is enrolled in a high school course, the homework assignments will follow the high school policy.

High School students will be assigned homework according to the high school [homework policy](#).

Subject	Average Homework Time Per Week Per Subject
English	2 Hours Per Week
Math	2 Hours Per Week
Science	2 Hours Per Week
Social Studies	2 Hours Per Week
Health and Physical Education	1 Hour Per Week
World Languages	2 Hours Per Week
Electives	1.5 Hours Per Week
AP & DE Courses	3 Hours Per Week

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Student	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
9:30-9:55	**Homeroom/Advisory Period**			
9:55-11:20	Block 1 (85 min)	Block 1 (85 min)	Block 1 (85 min)	Block 1 (85 min)
11:20-11:35	**15 minute Break** (grab a snack, take a walk, connect with a friend, quiet time, read a book, complete work assignments for class, work in small groups on assignments/projects)			
11:35-1:00	Block 2 (85 min)	Block 2 (85 min)	Block 2 (85 min)	Block 2 (85 min)
1:00-1:30	**30 minute Lunch Break**			
1:30-2:55	Block 3 (85 min)	Block 3 (85 min)	Block 3 (85 min)	Block 3 (85 min)
2:55-3:05	**10 minute Break** (grab a snack, take a walk, connect with a friend, quiet time, read a book, complete work assignments for class, work in small groups on assignments/projects)			
3:05-4:30	Block 4 (85 min)	Block 4 (85 min)	Block 4 (85 min)	Block 4 (85 min)

Friday	
Student Schedule	**Teacher Schedule**
Asynchronous Work Time for Students	9:00-10:00 Faculty Time/Department Meetings/CRT work/Division PLC (1/month)
	10:00-11:30 PLC (school)
LUNCH 11:30-12:00	
12:00-1:00 Clubs/Int./Enr	
Asynchronous Work Time for Students and Time to Connect with Teachers	1:00-1:45 Office Hours for Block 1
	1:45-2:30 Office Hours for Block 2
	2:30-3:15 Office Hours for Block 3
	3:15-4:00 Office Hours for Block 4

HIGH SCHOOL:

Student	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
9:30-11:00	Block 1 (90 min)	Block 1 (90 min)	Block 1 (90 min)	Block 1 (90 min)
11:00-11:15	**15 minute Break** (grab a snack, take a walk, connect with a friend, quiet time, read a book, complete work assignments for class, work in small groups on assignments/projects)			
11:15-12:45	Block 2 (90 min)	Block 2 (90 min)	Block 2 (90 min)	Block 2 (90 min)
12:45-1:15	**30 minute Lunch Break**			
1:15-2:45	Block 3 (90 min)	Block 3 (90 min)	Block 3 (90 min)	Block 3 (90 min)
2:45-3:00	**15 minute Break** (grab a snack, take a walk, connect with a friend, quiet time, read a book, complete work assignments for class, work in small groups on assignments/projects)			
3:00-4:30	Block 4 (90 min)	Block 4 (90 min)	Block 4 (90 min)	Block 4 (90 min)

Friday	
Student Schedule	**Teacher Schedule**
Asynchronous Work Time for Students and Time to Connect with Teachers	9:30-10:15: Office Hours for Block 1
	10:15-11:00: Office Hours for Block 2
	11:00-11:45: Office Hours for Block 3
	11:45-12:30: Office Hours for Block 4
LUNCH 12:30-1:00	
1:00-2:00 Clubs/Int./Enr	
Asynchronous Work Time for Students	2:00-3:00 Faculty Time/Department Meetings/CRT work/Division PLC (1/month)
	3:00-4:30 PLC (school)