Chapter 25
Strategies to Maximize Asynchronous Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides suggestions on how educators and learners can thrive in asynchronous learning environments. A review of what constitutes an asynchronous environment and how it contrasts to synchronous learning environments is discussed. Constructivist, social constructivist, constructivist learning environments, and active learning strategies are reviewed in the context of asynchronous learning. In addition, key tools, applications, and strategies that can be used to support successful asynchronous learning environments are reviewed. This includes the inherent tools within a learning management system, video, and collaboration tools. Finally, educator best practices and recommended areas of future research are discussed. Within the best practices section, strategies to create a more effective and empathic learning environment are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

During the initial days of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators across higher education found themselves in a strange, new world. Both educators and students had to acclimate to the new normal. Teachers had to determine how to best teach their previously brick-and-mortar students in online environments. Not everyone was ready for the change; this includes students, educators, and administrators. One of the modalities that educators and students encountered in the new normal of 2020 was asynchronous learning.

The challenge is in understanding what makes a good asynchronous learning environment. Asynchronous learning involves much more than just assigning work that students will complete on their own time. There is a choreography that includes both the student and the educator. This choreography includes the merging and nuance of pedagogical, technological, and content knowledge, filtered through

the modality of asynchronous interactions. How can educators ensure that students are engaged in the course, and do not feel abandoned and left to teach themselves the materials? How can asynchronous sessions be both a meaningful and effective modality for learning? Moreover, how can educators be successful in asynchronous modes of learning using the inherent tools from their institutional learning management system (LMS)? What other external tools could be used to support students in asynchronous learning environments? Finally, how can educators actively engage their students, while also creating connections despite the distance afforded in asynchronous environments?

Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to provide guidance and answers to these questions. In addition, key tools and strategies that can be used to address these questions will be discussed based on research and proven best practices. This chapter will provide educators with an understanding of what constitutes an asynchronous environment, and how technology can be used to create engagement through proven active learning and online social presence strategies. The chapter will be organized into six key sections:

1. Introduction, that will frame the problems posited in the previous paragraphs
2. Understanding Asynchronous Learning
3. Social Constructivist and Community of Inquiry Perspectives
4. Exemplars of Tools for Asynchronous Environments
5. Instructor Best Practices
6. Future Research Directions

An explanation of the six key sections is included below.

The first section, "Introduction," will focus on introducing the purpose of this chapter. Specifically, we will discuss how the proposed chapter is relevant in the current and post-COVID world. Asynchronous modes of learning are not new. What has changed are the tools and resources that support the ways that we can best maximize learning in such environments. We will explain our approach for the rest of the chapter and why all educators need to understand the difference between well-designed and poorly designed asynchronous learning activities.

The second section, "Understanding Asynchronous Learning," will focus on defining asynchronous learning. A brief historical review of asynchronous learning is included. Asynchronous learning benefits and areas of opportunities are highlighted in this section. We will also compare asynchronous and synchronous learning. We will end this section with the assertion that asynchronous learning will continue to be an important learning modality, post-COVID, in higher education.

The third section, "Social Constructivist and Community of Inquiry Perspectives," will provide a literature review on the concept of social constructivism, communities of inquiry, and active learning theory, in the context of asynchronous learning. The focus will be on how active learning strategies that are grounded in constructivist and social constructivist learning environments have been used to support asynchronous learning environments. The work of Vygotsky (1978) is discussed; including the linkages that the theory has to collaboration, community building, and active learning. Garrison et al.'s (1999) *communities of inquiry* are also reviewed as a viable framework to engage asynchronous learners. We review how these learning theories are still relevant today in asynchronous learning environments. Key online communication platforms, such as Blackboard, Zoom, and Adobe Connect, and their ability to replicate active learning strategies in online environments will also be discussed.

The fourth section will focus on the use of "Tools and Strategies for Asynchronous learning." The three categories of tools that will be discussed include the inherent tools within an LMS, such as discus-

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