

Tips for Participating in Hybrid Classes

By Kate Miffitt

The *HyFlex* course format affords a lot of flexibility in how you manage your coursework and your schedule. You will find that classmates participate in different ways, with some mostly online, others mostly in-person, and a few who will participate in both formats evenly. Below are some tips geared towards the varying participation styles. Read through them, and think about what approach might work best for you.

Mostly/Only Online

When deciding if you will participate exclusively online, consider your personality in addition to your schedule. Students who work well independently, manage their time, and communicate effectively thrive in the online environment. If you like a lot of feedback and interaction or find the course material challenging, you should consider attending class in-person.

Set a schedule, and stick to it. Because you don't have a face-to-face meeting to prepare for every week, it is easy to procrastinate and put off assignments until the last minute. While you may be able to get by with this approach, ultimately you will find that you cheat yourself out of richer discussions and valuable feedback by not being involved in the class in a timely manner. Set a realistic schedule of about 8 - 10 hours a week, and then meet your deadlines. One approach is to designate a day for reading/ working on assignments, a day for participating in discussions, and a day at the

end of the week to reply to classmates and revise your posted assignment.

Think quality, not quantity. When participating in discussions, focus on writing quality posts, even if it means you will post fewer times. If you are posting to a discussion that is about a reading for the week, try to write something different than what others are writing, even if you don't necessarily agree with it. Another way to contribute original posts is to relate the reading to an experience you had in the workplace; just be sure to tie your example back to the reading. Playing devil's advocate or highlighting a different point from the reading will keep the discussion fresh and will ultimately benefit all participants. If you are giving feedback to classmates on posted assignments, take the time to really review one or two and give critical feedback. It is more valuable to help one classmate improve his/her project by giving detailed feedback than it is to tell five classmates "good job", and you will learn more by applying the class concepts thoroughly to other projects.

Get familiar with classmates' projects. It is likely that as the semester progresses, more discussions will relate to giving classmates feedback on their project progress. One way to make it easier to interact with whoever is online for the week is to have a basic idea of what most of your classmates' projects are about. Remember that early in the semester, everyone will post a brief project description, which is a good resource to go back to in order to be able to give feedback to different classmates.

Don't wait to ask questions, or ask for help. It is imperative that you be proactive and reach out to classmates or the instructor if you have questions or need help. If you are having trouble with a discussion topic, explain your confusion as clearly as possible so that others can respond. If you are stuck on an

assignment, email the professor right away. It is likely that your confusion can be cleared up rather easily, even though it feels like it is just easier to just give up when you are alone.

Mix of Online and Face-to-Face

If you plan to participate face-to-face some weeks and online others, you will be getting the best of both mediums. However, it will require some work on your part to be able to change gears from online to in-class.

Get on a schedule that works for both. If you plan to go back and forth between meeting online and in-class, you will probably find that the deadlines for each are a little different. Because many online students participate on the weekend, they are often posting assignments and discussions *after* the face-to-face class has met. Therefore, you need to find a working schedule that allows you to be prepared on time for the weeks you attend in-person. That will likely mean posting ahead in the online forums so that you are also on schedule with the face-to-face class.

Be strategic in deciding in-class weeks. The hybrid approach is great in that it allows you to accommodate things that come up in your schedule (events, illness, etc) while still participating in class. It is valuable, though, to be strategic in deciding the weeks you will be in-class in advance. If there will be a guest speaker, for example, or if the class will be going over a topic that is particularly challenging, those are good times to prioritize making it to the face-to-face session.

Mostly/Only Face-to-Face Class

Attending face-to-face classes enhances the social experience for many students. Because the class makes use of a robust LMS like iLearn, it is a good idea to think of yourself as an online student who participates in-person.

You will still be expected to access course resources and post assignments online.

Check out the online discussions. It is a good idea to skim the online discussions, even if you are not going to participate in them. Keep in mind that classmates participating online have more time to craft responses to weekly topics. While the in-class discussion is likely to be more dynamic, the online discussion is more likely to be thought out and summarize key concepts. Use it as a resource and to potentially get a different perspective on topics.

Get familiar with the online format. Even if you plan to be in class every week, it is likely that you will participate online at least once. Don't wait until week 9 with a looming deadline to try to figure out how to post. Make sure you know how to use the various online tools and resources.

Editor's Note: Kate Miffitt is a 2007 graduate of the ITEC MA program. Kate completed 3 HyFlex courses during her program of studies.