Best Practices for Teaching Remotely

Determine Your Approach

There are two options for teaching remotely: synchronous or asynchronous.

- **Synchronous**: the instructor and students meet (virtually) in real time. This approach allows for more interaction, but has the potential for more technical challenges.
- **Asynchronous**: Instructors share course materials with students, who consume and interact with the content on their own schedule. With this approach, instructors have more control over the content and students can choose when and how long they interact with the material, but there is less social connection between students and with the instructor.

Classes can be held live (synchronously) using Zoom with instructors hosting a video conference and students logging in to watch a lecture or have discussions. Alternatively, instructors can pre-record videos using Panopto and share them with the class, to be watched at a later time (asynchronously).

Depending on the course, video may not be the optimal method of instruction, and sharing files, facilitating online discussions, and creating online assignments and assessments may be better.

See the Tools for Online Teaching page for more information on available tools.

Set Expectations for Students

If teaching remotely isn’t part of the normal routine, students may need guidance for communication and participation in the class. Let students know what you expect from them.

Set Expectations for Yourself

It is time consuming to create polished videos. It can take experience to facilitate effective online class discussions or video conferences. Review the expected outcomes for your course and figure out what approaches will be most likely to lead to the desired results. Spending hours editing a video to increase the visual appeal may be less important to the educational outcomes of the class than time spent reframing assignments or holding online office hours with students.

Differences between in-person and remote teaching

Be clear, concise, and comprehensive

You can’t walk in as an instructor and ad lib the session like you might in the face-to-face classroom. It has to be very organized. Logical flow, clear instructions, and accurate placement of content. You don’t want students to be frustrated because things aren’t where they’re supposed to be.

Provide a variety of learning activities

Consider which types of activities are appropriate and how you might offer different types of assignments to make the course more interesting and engaging for the students. Don’t try too many types of activities in one session, in order to minimize the chance of technical problems and confusion.

Avoid making last-minute changes

Making changes can have unintended consequences such as inconsistent information. This can create confusion for the students and it may be more difficult for you to recognize their confusion online. It may also take more time for you to explain things.

Assessment

Moving to an online format provides both opportunities and challenges for assessment. Instructors are freed from the constraints of holding an exam during class time and the pain of reading handwritten blue books. At the same time, holding a traditional closed-book exam can be difficult and there are increased concerns with academic integrity. Consider replacing larger high-stakes exams with more frequent short quizzes or replacing an exam with a project or paper.

Take advantage of existing resources

If you already use Moodle for your course content, look at tools such as online assignments, discussion forums, quizzes, and the gradebook to handle tasks remotely. Moodle can help by automating the release of new information, auto-grading quizzes, or automatically importing class videos.

Look to existing resources to replace the need to create new online content. MERLOT, MIT OpenCourseWare, and discipline-specific repositories may have content that can be repurposed for your class.
Handling Accommodations

Changing the format of the class or using different technology can present accessibility challenges. Check with Student Disability Services or accessibility@swarthmore.edu with questions or concerns. Read through out Accessibility and Online Teaching guide.

Resources from Other Schools

Stanford has an informative site for faculty teaching remotely, including a set of best practices for lectures, lab activities, fostering collaboration among students, and assessing student work.