



Tierney King (0:01)

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching.

On Episode Two, we'll talk about the topic on everyone's mind, synchronous versus asynchronous. As instructors and teachers transition to online, many grapple with whether they want their classes to be a live online event for consistency, or if their lectures and content should be available to students whenever for flexibility. It's a hard

debate. But maybe there's not a one size fits all solution. Many have done quite remarkable things in both asynchronous and synchronous classes. And numerous instructors use a mix of both. In this episode we'll dive into specific techniques instructors are using. But first, let's really define what synchronous and asynchronous activities are. Which is exactly what Jill Schiefelbein does, in this 20-Minute Mentor, How Do I Choose Between Synchronous and Asynchronous Activities?

Jill Schiefelbein (1:12)

First, synchronous, this means occurring at the same place, same time, but different places, or sometimes even at the same place. So, when online is at different places, but in the classroom, we're synchronous. So, the focus here is on activities that need to be very timely and very instantaneous. In opposition, asynchronous is occurring at different times and at different places. So asynchronous communication, asynchronous activities are occurring all around the world, but at different times. So, you can have students in many different places many different locations at many different times. But within a certain time frame, they all communicate with each other and have that feedback, but they can look at it when it's convenient for them.

Tierney King (1:58)

Both of these types, synchronous and asynchronous, had the potential to build community, convey information, assess learning, and inject your personality. Schiefelbein says incorporating the human aspect is key.

Jill Schiefelbein (2:13)

If you get to teach face to face, you get a chance to inject your personality live and in real time. But if you're teaching online, it's a little bit more of a challenge. By using synchronous and asynchronous tools and variations of those tools, you can very much effectively inject your personality into the course. And what I mean by that is making the course and you as an instructor, human and not a computer. You'll notice it in these presentations. Sometimes I slip up, I use the wrong word. Maybe I slur a little bit that makes me human and not a computer, your students expect the same thing from you. They know you're not perfect. And when you have your personality put into an online course, when you make little mistakes, it's okay. And so, when you're thinking about using these activities to also think about the potential that you have as an instructor, to use these technologies to add your personality and to add some sarcasm if you're sarcastic some jokes if you're humorous some personal anecdotes if it connects to your material. Both types of technologies have the potential to do that. Make sure you use it.

Tierney King (3:17)

This integrated personality has been vital in numerous activities that many teachers and instructors are implementing in their own online courses. For instance, in the Faculty Focus article, *A Reflection on the Sudden Transition: Ideas to Make Your Synchronous Online Classes More Fun*, Siva priya Santhanam lists a number of activities. She plays a This or That game, where you choose if you like this or that pertaining to certain topics to class, and then has a student follow up by answering why they chose what they did. Additionally, she plays an emoji slides game before exams, where each slide displays a concept or a word, and students respond with a happy, sad, or neutral emoji. If she sees sad emojis, she spends time explaining that topic.

Lisa Forbes, author of the article, *A Game a Day: Fun and Dynamic Synchronous Online Learning*, has numerous icebreakers she has implemented, such as students taking a virtual group selfie screenshot, creating a virtual group handshake and showcasing it to the class. And even having students participate in a two-minute Flappy Bird competition. So, so far, we focus a lot on synchronous tools. So, let's move on to asynchronous tools, because there are just as many options. In Lisa Forbes other article, *Fostering Fun: Engaging Students with Asynchronous Online Learning*, she says the narrative you set for your class truly matters to your students, and can make the difference of whether your online class is an engaging student experience. She typically starts with something called This is Me, a type of welcome video where she pre-records herself divulges information about her family interest, passions and approach to life and teaching. She then has students create their own videos that represent who they are. Additionally, in her other prerecorded videos, she sometimes places Easter eggs or a hidden clue or prompt placed within the lecture. It could be as simple as a hint to a question and an upcoming quiz. Or one of our colleagues has even put an Easter egg in the syllabus, where it instructs students to email the instructor the funniest meme, and if they make her laugh out loud, they get an extra credit point. To add another element of fun to your modules, Forbes recommends that instead of referring to sections as module one, module two, and so on, come up with a theme, such as mission one mission two or first inning and second inning. Additionally, if you have missions, don't hesitate to include an escape room end-of-module quiz. There are numerous YouTube tutorials on how to set up a virtual escape room. But be sure to send the escape room link to a colleague prior to students trying it to test it out. So, whether you decide to use a synchronous or asynchronous activities or a mixture of both, the key is that your online classes engaging no matter what type of activity you're using. In Jeremy Caplan's *20-Minute Mentor, How Can I Maximize the First 10 Minutes of Remote Teaching to Spark Student Engagement?*, he explains six key factors to integrate into your own online class to successfully engage students.

Jeremy Caplan (6:34)

So there are six characteristics to engaging starts to online classes. One is that they're active. These are activities where students do something, they're not just passive receptacles. They're receiving something, they're actually doing something interacting. second characteristic is these are brief, these last maybe five to 10 minutes, they launch our class with enthusiasm and energy. And then they allow us to have the bulk of the class time for the primary learning objectives that we have set out for that day. Third, is that they are connected, ideally, to the topics that we're focusing on. In the class, the learning objectives, we have the issues that are of importance to students, and relatable to students as well, in some cases, if it's an icebreaker that students can relate to, that also helps draw them in. The fourth characteristic is that these are digital and that they're things that you can do over. And so that means

you don't have to start from scratch every single time. The fifth is that they're easy both for you to do and for students shouldn't be

something where they have to download some complicated software, read along manual, or figure out how something works in a complicated way. It should be something where you can say, here's what we're going to do. Here's how to do it. And by the way, here's why we're doing this as well. And finally, these should be fun, we should start class with something that's enjoyable, something that students enjoy doing, that we enjoy doing. And that gives us enthusiasm and energy leading up to the next activity in the class session.

Tierney King (7:55)

Experiment with your own types of activities to see what works and what doesn't. Maybe a mix of asynchronous and synchronous activities works best for you. But most of all, reach out to your students and get their feedback, ending your class with a poll on how they liked or didn't like the activity that day.

Jeremy Caplan (8:13)

Polling can be a great way of engaging students at the beginning of an online class as well. I use slideshow and PollEverywhere, as well as Zoom polls, for example. But you can use other polling tools like Socratic or whatever else you'd like to use. And I'm going to start with social polls. These are polls that basically just get a sense of how students are doing. And one I like to use is a word cloud poll, which basically asks students, what one word would you use to describe how you're feeling today? It allows students to express how they're doing in a single word. And we get a picture of a word card picture of how they're actually doing as a group. I also sometimes use an open text question for students. And in this case, I might ask them, if it's a social poll, what's one thing that's made you laugh recently or made you smile, and that's giving them an opportunity to generate some positive sentiment, and to also share something that's been interesting for them lately. In the second area of polls, were focused on topics related to the course these are topical polls. And again, it could be a word cloud type poll, and you could ask a question, for example, what word comes to mind when you think about World War I? And that's intended to get them thinking about the topic you're going to talk about today in a history class, for example, or you might ask them to an open text question to think about what would Schubert be most curious about, if he were to encounter the music of Milton Babbitt. And that might be a question for music history class or a music theory class. And again, that's an open text question. So, it allows students to think creatively, and you might also use functional polls to start class in an engaging way. You might ask them Students something like, would you prefer one longer break or two shorter breaks today? And that gets them to feel like they have a part in the class. It's a quick thing. They're responding to something thinking about something. You might also ask them an open question that's functional, in the sense that it helps you in the teaching of the class, like, Is there anything I can do? or What can I do? What's one thing I can do that might help you in your learning experience in this class?

Tierney King (10:21)

Whether you decide to use asynchronous or synchronous activities in your own online class, make sure to focus on why you're using a specific activity, how you're going to use that activity, and how your students are going to use it, and what feedback you can gain from students about the activity. All of these will help ensure a successful asynchronous or synchronous activity.

Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 10-minute thinking session, we hope Faculty

Focus Live will inspire your own teaching and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode summary

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