An Introduction to Hybrid Teaching

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I. What is Hybrid Learning?

Hybrid learning combines face-to-face and online teaching into one cohesive experience. Approximately half of the class sessions are on-campus, while the other half have students working online. Although that may sound like a cut-and-dry formula, a lot of planning is needed to ensure that hybrid works well, allowing its two formats to capitalize on each other's strengths.

Given the unique opportunities that hybrid can offer, approach planning carefully. Instructors need to be familiar with not only the strengths of online and face-to-face teaching in their rights but also how they can feed into each other over the longer-term.

But before we take a more in-depth look at how to plan a hybrid course, let's make sure we're clear on terms. For example, many people might use the words "hybrid" and "blended" interchangeably, but in fact, they mean different things. That difference is based primarily on the proportion of face-to-face and online sessions or instructional material in a given course.

Whereas hybrid refers to teaching that is roughly balanced between its two formats (think 50/50), blended refers to a mostly traditional face-to-face course that incorporates a few class

sessions' worths of online instruction (think 25/75). Keep in mind that these are approximate definitions. There is no exact science in quantifying how much instruction equals another kind of instruction (with the apparent exception of entire class sessions). That said, hybrid and blended are but two terms in what we might think of as a broader "online learning spectrum" (see chart 1 below).

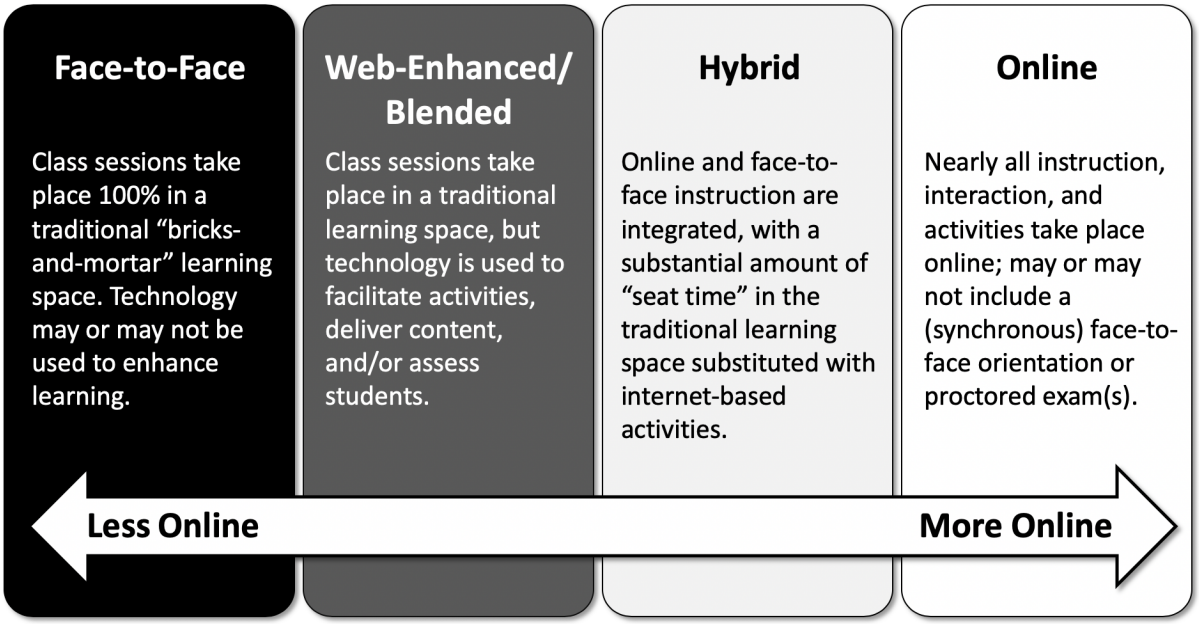

Chart 1. Online Learning Spectrum

II. Benefits of Hybrid Learning

Research completed in numerous studies states the effectiveness of the hybrid learning approach to teaching1. The results are pretty clear: not only do students tend to prefer it as their format of choice, but the learning outcomes and academic achievement are more substantial with a hybrid course than for either face-to-face or online teaching alone.

Why is this the case?

A primary reason that students engage in the material and demonstrate learning, and how they interact with each other and the instructor is flexibility. Whereas with face-to-face or online instruction, one format is chosen and used exclusively (and thus cut off from the benefits of the other), hybrid learning can offer the best of both in one unified experience.

On the one hand, face-to-face teaching allows a kind of immediate, real-time engagement that can be difficult to capture online. Back-and-forth discussions, group work, presentations, and in-depth conceptual scrutiny can often be more robust in this setting, where visual cues (such as confused faces) and immediate interaction can offer meaningful learning opportunities. Deeper collegial relationships can be fostered among students and the instructor, leading to a community atmosphere that can be more difficult to forge online.

On the other hand, online learning can excel with independent exploration, innovative collaboration, information and technology literacy, and content mastery. Students can watch videos and read articles repeatedly to reinforce conceptual familiarity, complete assignments in a time and place that best suits their individual needs, and take more time to craft written dialogue with their peers. Online discussion forums offer opportunities to develop a more sustained and more productive exploration of material than the more rapid-fire interaction of a face-to-face classroom. Whereas, students who may not be comfortable speaking in a room full of people frequently blossom as strong contributors online.

Both formats offer unique advantages, which can be difficult if not impossible to replicate in the other, which is why combining the two into a single experience can create powerful learning opportunities. But the advantages can reach beyond that – studies suggest that hybrid learning leads to lower attrition rates and more efficient use of campus resources (especially classrooms and parking). It should come as no surprise then, that hybrid learning is often cited as the most effective format.

III. Using Time Wisely

With fewer in-seat sessions than a traditional face-to-face class, the hybrid approach makes the time a more precious commodity for students and their instructors to spend. As such, placing a more significant focus on using that time more purposefully is vital.

Whereas in a traditional classroom, a certain amount (sometimes a significant amount) of in-seat time may have students watching videos, reading texts, and taking notes during faculty lectures. Whereas, in a hybrid course, students are more often assigned these kinds of content-centered tasks in the online portion of the course, and spend face-to-face time more deeply exploring it, analyzing it, deconstructing it, and collaborating to develop new ideas.

This kind of teaching approach is similar to what is called the “flipped classroom” model, where students review video lectures and other resources online on their own, then come to class ready to go further with what they covered. But the flipped classroom model is not an appropriate comparison for the potential of hybrid teaching. The sessions designated for online work in a hybrid class are not merely for reviewing material – they are intentionally much more active.

The expectation in a hybrid course, of both students and the instructor, is that in-seat time is more active and not passive. A primary consideration in the course planning is answering the question, “Can students do this on their own (alone or in groups)?” This step is especially true if students come to class only to complete a read-and-review assignment and are often irked by inadequate use of time, a wasted opportunity.

With the rapid rise of Web 2.0 tools, which focus on user collaboration, sharing of user-generated content, and social networking, the time that students spend online can go far beyond passive reading and watching. Students can actively engage with it and with each other – even create entire projects together – all online.

Of course, as with any direction (regardless of format), there must be appropriate time given to both the introduction of new content, as well as opportunities to engage more deeply with it.

However, the possibilities and flexibility that hybrid teaching offers are arguably unmatched by purely online or face-to-face courses. The key to taking full advantage of that potential all lies in planning.

IV. The Student Experience

A hallmark of any well-done hybrid course is a seamless integration of online and face-to-face activities.

This integration necessitates a thoughtful focus on the student experience so that students are presented with engaging material and prompted to interact with it in innovative ways. This interaction does not mean that activities need always be terrific fun (although fun can be good), but they should be engaging because this leads to students being more motivated to learn and succeed. **A hybrid course expands the possibilities of how students interact with content and with each other.** So, just having them read articles online and then meet to discuss them in class, for example, takes no real advantage of a class format that should otherwise be a transformative experience.

But engaging students can be challenging in any course – how do we make it happen in a hybrid course?

Miller's (2012) article[2] offers the following strategies to maximize student engagement:

Leverage Virtual Class Meetings with Collaborative Work

One of the most prominent features of blended learning is the virtual (or synchronous) class meeting. Sometimes teachers spend the entire class in a virtual meeting room lecturing and presenting content. Record these meetings and make them available for students to watch later so that they can be a more flexible learning activity than traditional in-class lecturing. With the potential time savings of having students watch recorded lectures, students can solve problems instead, collaborate on projects, and use virtual break-out rooms for guided practice. If you want students to be engaged in the class meetings, it must be meaningful. Collaborative work can be valuable when students problem-solve together, plan, and apply their learning in new contexts.

Create the Need to Know

The key here is an engaging model of learning. Teachers can use project learning to create authentic projects where students see the relevance and need to do the work -- whether that work is online or in the physical classroom. The same is true for game-based learning. If students are engaged in playing a serious game about viruses and bacteria, instructors can use the game as a hook to learn content online or offline. Through metacognition, and the "need to know" activity, students "buy-in" to the learning -- no matter when and where that learning occurs.

Reflect and Set Goals

Related to the comment on metacognition, students need to be aware of what they are learning as well as their progress towards meeting standards. Teachers need to build-in frequent moments, both as a class and individual, to reflect on the learning and set S.M.A.R.T.

goals [**s**pecific, **m**easurable, **a**ttainable, **r**elevant, and **t**ime-bound].

Through these measurable and student-centered goals, students can become agents of learning, rather than passive recipients. Use reflecting and goal-setting both online and offline to create a personal connection to the learning objectives and personalized goals.

Differentiate Instruction through Online Work

In a blended learning classroom, there is often online work that needs to occur. This task might be a module on specific content, formative assessments, and the like.

However, students may or may not need to do all the work in a specific module. To individualize instruction, use the online work to meet individual students' needs. Whether an extension of learning or work to clarify a misconception, online work can be more valuable to students when targeted. Students are no longer engaged in tedious busywork but focused on individualized learning.

Use Tools for Mobile Learning

Lieberman's (2019) stated, "Beyond its function as a classroom tool, mobile technology is the primary conduit for some students' learning experiences." In 2012, Edutopia shared published a guide called "Mobile Devices for Learning." This guide provides a variety of apps and tips, proposing that teachers use mobile devices as part of the learning environment. The great thing is that hybrid learning can partner well with many strategies and apps.

For example, if you use the flipped classroom model, apps like Khan Academy, LinkedIn Learning, and YouTube are incredibly useful. Leverage the flexibility of where students can learn and engage them outside the four classroom walls. Use scavenger hunts, Twitter, and back-channel chats to engage students in a variety of mobile learning activities to support your hybrid learning model.

V. Structuring Classes and Activities

When translating a face-to-face course online, few, if any, one-to-one equivalents, the same is equally valid for the hybrid course. Although you might find an appropriate home for some of the things you already use, a hybrid course can fundamentally transform the way you interact with your students that you should expect to rework or revise.

In terms of activities, a hybrid course has access to all of the same things that you would use for a face-to-face or online course; there isn't a new set of things to learn about, so familiarity on your part may come as a comfort. That said, how you implement activities with your students may change dramatically, all due to the flexible structure that hybrid courses offer.

Here are a few examples of hybrid courses that illustrate different structures for the deployment of face-to-face:

- The instructor lectures and facilitates class discussion in the face-to-face classes. Students complete online assignments based on these classroom activities, then these online assignments are posted to asynchronous discussion forums for online discussion;

- An instructor places lectures online using voiceover PowerPoint or streaming media for students to review Then, subsequently, in-class students use these preliminary online materials to engage in face-to-face small group activities and discussions;
- Students prepare small group projects online, post them to discussion forums for debate and revision, then present them in the face-to-face class for final discussion and assessment.

Hybrid course schedules can be quite diverse:

- A typical practice is for an instructor to meet with the class face-to-face for a couple of weeks, then go online for a week;
- Alternatively, the first few weeks of the course may be face-to-face preparation, followed by an extended period (such as a month or more) of online work;
- Or a night class that would ordinarily meet face-to-face for three hours once a week reduces each class meeting by 45 minutes and requires the students to complete assignments online instead of maintaining the full three hours of face-to-face class time.

VI. Planning Your Hybrid Course

Planning is key to the success of any course, and this is especially true for a hybrid course. You want to make sure that what you ask students to do online are a good fit for online, and that the same is true for the face-to-face component. Regardless of the format, each class session should seem like a natural fit for the medium, and what students are doing *should* be done in that particular format. The hardest part of teaching hybrid is figuring out how to integrate the two experiences to capitalize on and amplify each other.

Planning your hybrid course should begin at least 3-6 months in advance. Any learning materials or activities that you would like to incorporate from existing online or face-to-face courses should be reviewed and adapted during this time, in conjunction with a thorough review of your learning objectives.

A. Questions to Consider

Below are ten questions to consider as you begin planning your hybrid course (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015):

1. What do you want students to know by the time they have finished taking your hybrid course? Refer to your course's learning objectives for this, but examine them critically, through the lens of hybrid learning.
2. What would be better achieved online, and which would be best-achieved face-to-face as you think about learning objectives?
3. Hybrid teaching is not just a matter of transferring a portion of your traditional course to the Web. Instead, it involves developing challenging and engaging online learning activities that complement your face-to-face activities. What types of learning activities do you think

you will be using for your course's online portion?

4. Online asynchronous discussion is often an essential part of hybrid courses. What new learning opportunities will arise as a result of using an asynchronous discussion? What challenges do you anticipate in using online discussions? How would you address these?
5. How will the face-to-face and online components be integrated into a single course? How will the work be done in each component's feedback into and support the other?
6. When working online, students frequently have problems scheduling their work, managing their time, and understanding the implications of the hybrid course module related to learning. What do you plan to do to help your students address these issues?
7. How will you apportion the time spent in a face-to-face environment versus online? What would the term's schedule look like for you and the students?
8. How will you divide the course-grading scheme between face-to-face and online activities? What means will you use to assess student work in each of these two components?
9. Students sometimes have difficulty acclimating to the course website, and to other instructional technologies, you used for face-to-face and online activities. What specific technologies will you use for the online and face-to-face portions of your course? What proactive steps can you take to help students become familiar with your website and those instructional technologies? If students need help with technology later in the course, how will you provide support?
10. There is a tendency for faculty to assign students more work in a hybrid course than they usually would have in a traditional class. What are you going to do to ensure that you have not created a course-and-a-half? How will you evaluate the student workload as compared to a traditional class?

B. Step by Step Guide

Once you are ready to begin planning out a hybrid course, make sure that you have plenty of time to build and refine it – for the planning process, creating content, and (if possible), piloting the course. As stated above, creating a successful hybrid course requires a lot more thought than merely taking half of your existing class sessions and converting them into online activities. Think of a hybrid course not as a twin of the face-to-face version, but a cousin.

Step 1: Start at the Foundation

Every course, regardless of format, has a course description, goals, and objectives. These comprise the overall picture of the course and should drive the course's entire development process, from why it exists to what students should know and do by the end of it.

Step 2: Plan Assessments

Determine what significant assessments you will use to allow students to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives. These should be the primary, summative assessments (projects, portfolios, etc.), as well as smaller, formative ones (homework, discussions, etc.). You do not

need to create them yet; you can simply plan out what they will be and what you will ask students will do. The assessments, taken together, should address everything in step 1.

Step 3: Create a Course Map

You are now familiar with the course's overall goals and how you will assess for student learning. Now you can begin laying out how students will get from the beginning of the course to ultimately achieving its end goals. Create a chart (course map, table, etc.) that sequences what the units/modules will be, the order they should go in, and what resources and activities you plan to provide along the way within each module.

Step 4: Plan Activities

Identify activities that capitalize on the strengths of each environment (online or face-to-face), and include those in your course map. (Note: While the following activities may work better in one setting versus another, several will adapt to both environments.)

Face to face is good for:	Online is good for:
• Establishing social presence and support • Nonverbal communication • Defining assignments • Negotiating expectations and responsibilities • Diagnosing students' conceptual problems and providing immediate feedback • Brainstorming • Role play • Student demonstration of psycho-motor skills	• Sustaining group cohesion, collaboration, and support • Reflective, on-task discourse • Broader participation in discussions • Critical analysis • Self-paced learning and practice • Self-assessment quizzes with feedback • Automatic grading of multiple choice, T/F, fill-in-the-blank tests • Create a content outline, chunking content into modules.

Step 5: Create/Find Content

Developing online content is the most time-consuming aspect of designing a hybrid course. Plan to carve out the majority of your course development time on this step.

You will be creating assignments, finding resources, deciding on readings, writing the syllabus, etc. Decide what all of these course materials are, the order in which they will go, and determine where to put them in their appropriate place in the course.

You may be able to use or adapt parts activities and resources that you have previously used in other courses. If you decide to do this, be very careful that it integrates well with the rest of

what you are doing; don't force the foot into the wrong-sized shoe.

Step 6: Ensure for Quality

At this point, you should have an entire "draft" of your course completion. Now it needs some editing and refinement.

Consider the following options for this step:

- Have faculty colleagues (preferably, those who have taught online or hybrid courses in the past) and ask them to look at your course.
- Go online and find some quality checklists that apply specifically to hybrid courses and use them to "grade" your course.
- Talk to some of your current students and ask them to give you feedback on your course description.
- If possible, pilot the course with some willing students or fellow faculty members and provide you with written feedback.
- Whatever the case, don't skip this step! Especially if this is the first or second time that you're developing a hybrid course, you must go through some kind of quality review process.

C. Tips for Success

Keep the following tips at hand to make your entire hybrid teaching experience go more smoothly, from planning to building to execution.

Tip 1: Take it easy

- Experiment and learn as you go. Do not be afraid of unfamiliar technologies
- Keep technology simple to avoid turning the course into a support nightmare and gradually adding more advanced technology.
- Remember that as you increase the number of assignments and opportunities for feedback significantly, you also potentially increase your workload. Don't burn yourself out!

Tip 2: Focus on design, not technology

- Critically re-examine course goals and objectives and carefully consider how to achieve them in the hybrid environment.
- Develop new learning activities that capitalize on the strengths of online and face-to-face learning environments.
- Avoid the tendency to try and cover an excessive amount of material and having too many activities in the redesigned course, resulting in a "course and a half."
- Don't overload the course: online activities take longer than you think they will.

- Focus your planning on the integration of the online and face-to-face components. Connecting what occurs in class with what is studied online is critical, so instructors do not end up teaching two parallel but unconnected courses.
- Review the examples of hybrid courses available through this site to think about different schedules for in-class/online work, and the implications of those different schedules for the planned learning activities.

Tip 3: Use resources already available

- Search for already created content on discipline-specific websites.
- Search MERLOT, Open Education Resources (OER), LinkedIn Learning, Educause, University of Central Florida's (UCF) Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository (TOPR), and other flagship education websites.
- Look for publisher content available online, especially in lower-level courses.
- Use online help resources such as facilitation of group work, managing discussion forums, etc.

Tip 4: Don't go it alone

- Talk with and get advice/feedback from experienced hybrid course instructors.
- Discuss your problems and progress with colleagues, whether they are using the hybrid or not.
- Get feedback and support from the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT and faculty or staff who have taught hybrid courses.

Tip 5: Manage your students' expectations

- Explain and justify the hybrid course format and assignments clearly and repeatedly.
- Make sure that students understand the equivalence between the amount of work in the traditional class and a hybrid class.
- Draw your students' attention to special technical needs or assignments that may require additional resources: do not expect students to complete all online work at home.
- Make all assignments and other course expectations as explicit as possible right from the start. In particular, make sure that the schedule of in-class and online work is clear to the students, and state due dates explicitly and repeatedly.
- Be flexible to accommodate students' needs. Recognize that not all students may have the resources necessary to complete all online work. Identify and develop plans, materials, and activities to help students with technology and time management challenges many encounters.

Tip 6: Prepare for anticipated problems

- Use simpler technologies to reduce risk and complications.
- Break down and phase in longer assignments.
- Provide tips to students about time management.
- Be very clear about your expectations on assignments and projects, and how you will grade them.
- Share technology support necessary for students to be successful.
- Identify a place to go for live technology help.
- Develop a plan for conducting course activities when technology fails. For example, keep a backup copy of files on a home computer to email important information to students.

Tip 7: The little things count!

- Things will occasionally go wrong; plan carefully and be flexible about making adjustments where needed.
- Ask for feedback from your students often and take their responses seriously.
- Don't organize your course too tightly. There's always some "slippage," and you need to leave room for any adjustments that you think necessary.
- During the course, falling behind or sloppy record-keeping can be fatal: stay current and keep copies of everything. Set aside time to focus on the online components, including reading student postings and assignments.
- Use the tools in the course management system to get organized and stay organized.

VII. How to Fail in Hybrid Teaching

Course-and-a-Half Syndrome

A common mistake of many first-time hybrid instructors is to take the syllabus from a familiar face-to-face class and simply add some online assignments. This mistake produces a "course-and-a-half" syndrome, where students wind up overwhelmed with the amount of material and work assigned to them. Much of it does not necessarily add to the educational effectiveness of the course.

Parallel Universes

Another problem with merely tacking online activities onto a preexisting face-to-face course is a lack of integration between the two formats. In such cases, topic relating assignments and events do not flow into one other, instead of serving as shorter, disjointed pieces of some vague whole rather than successive markers along one cohesive journey.

Limited Interaction

It might seem natural to think of hybrid courses (consciously or not) in terms of online and face-to-face sessions dichotomously, with the former dedicated to independent work and the latter to collaboration and group interaction. But this need not be the case. You can have a great deal of student-student, and student-instructor interaction takes place online with discussion forums, synchronous chat/video sessions, and using collaborative online tools.

Underutilized Assessment

Even instructors who take great advantage of the flexibility of hybrid teaching may yet remain doggedly committed to an assessment plan of "two exams, one term paper, one final." This method often fails to capture student learning and growth, but it also fails to capitalize on the opportunities inherent to the hybrid format. Frequent low-stakes assessments, rapid learning checks, online discussions, collaborative projects, and summative e-portfolios can replace the old model, and better allow students to demonstrate their learning.

VIII. Sources

[1] Specifically, the combination of online and face-to-face teaching. Other forms of hybrid teaching have been used for more than 40 years.

[2] Note that Miller uses the term “blended” to describe what would more often be called “hybrid.”

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