

Online Formats

Different Ways to Teach Online

At UC Irvine Extension, we have three main ways of delivering lessons online:

- Text-based (asynchronous)
- Voice-over-PowerPoint (asynchronous)
- WebEx (synchronous)

Regardless of the mode you choose to deliver your lessons, the goal is to create a rewarding learning experience for your students. This includes interacting with them regularly using the discussion forums, providing prompt feedback on class assignments, and encouraging them to interact with each other online as they travel down the learning pathway. The content you provide online should be equivalent to the content you would provide in the classroom during your lectures and the questions you pose for the discussion forums should be the same kinds of questions you would pose in the classroom to foster live interactions. The main difference, of course, is that online “discussions” may stretch out over several days as students go online, read your forum prompts and each other’s comments, and post their own comments.

Text-Based

A text-based lesson contains written material accompanied by charts, graphs, photographs, and other visual elements that you prepare. Instead of listening to your lecture in a classroom, students read your content online. One of the benefits of an online format is that you can embed hyperlinks into your text so that students can instantly view supplemental information on the Web. Text-based lessons are asynchronous, which means that students can view the lessons at any time - they don’t have to be logged in simultaneously. (Of course, they do have to submit assignments before your due-dates!)

Voice-Over-PowerPoint

If you don’t like to write, voice-over-PowerPoint (VOPP) may be your preferred delivery format. Voice-over-PowerPoint refers to a PowerPoint presentation to which you record a narration. (PowerPoint is probably the most common presentation currently in use, but other presentation applications, such as Keynote for the Macintosh, also feature the ability to record narrations.) Since most instructors are familiar with the use of PowerPoint for delivering in-class lectures, it seems natural to use PowerPoint for creating recorded lectures. Instead of reading material you write (as in a text-based course), students can listen to your voice as you present the material aurally.

For a three-hour classroom lecture, you would probably spend about 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours actually speaking and the rest of the time getting organized, answering questions, taking restroom breaks, participating in small-group discussions, or completing laboratory assignments. So, we recommend recording no more than one hour of VOPP for each three-hour lesson. Remember, the full lesson includes self-check exercises or assignments that you would normally have students complete in the classroom. (If you are exclusively an online instructor, let us know... we’ll work with

you to evaluate how much content you need to develop.) In fact, many VOIP recordings are between 30 and 45 minutes in length but still have the same content that would be covered in a three-hour class meeting. This suggests that much of the classroom activity involves activities other than listening to a lecture!

WebEx

WebEx is a web-based application that allows you to make presentations and show PowerPoints (or virtually any other kind of electronic document or application) over the Internet in real time. Hence, a WebEx lesson is “synchronous.” During your live WebEx session, you can show a PowerPoint presentation, take students on a web tour, and engage in interactive brainstorming sessions - all from your computer. You and your students can interact aurally by dialing a toll-free telephone number and entering a teleconference "room," and WebEx also supports voice-over-IP (VOIP), in which everyone uses speakers and microphones (or headsets) connected to their computers. Of course, WebEx features real-time chat capabilities for yet another way to interact and collaborate during sessions.

Many instructors use WebEx to enhance their *asynchronous* courses by adding periodic discussion sessions or opportunities to hear (and interact with) guest speakers. In most cases, WebEx sessions should be no longer than one hour to 1 ½ hours.

“Which format should I choose?”

Why not try all three! While it’s true that most instructors currently use only one modality to teach their entire course, there is no reason why you can’t combine all three! Doing so would make your course more interesting for students and allow you to match the modality to the content for a more effective learning experience. For example, a mathematical topic such as electrical engineering might benefit from written lessons that give students time to study and absorb mathematical equations while a visual topic such as architecture might benefit from voice-over-PowerPoint where you narrate a series of photographs of architectural features.

Having said that, we realize that not all instructors are equally comfortable with each modality. The basic rule is to use what you’re most comfortable using. Don’t try something complicated until you feel comfortable with more fundamental approaches. If you do wish to combine modalities, here is a guide for choosing the medium that is most appropriate for the contents of your lesson (or group of lessons). Of course, it may be entirely appropriate to use just one modality for your entire course! However, if you can use more than one modality your course probably would be better.

Modality	Examples of Content
Text and Static Graphics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature: Passages from literary works • Mathematics, physics, engineering, or other science where many mathematical formulas are used and students need to spend time reviewing and contemplating those formulas • Descriptions of abstract concepts • Stories and case studies • Content where the instructor is more comfortable writing about it than talking about it
Voice-Over-PowerPoint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive passages accompanied by “bullet points” (not complete sentences - the bulk of the content should be in what is said rather than in what is read!) • Visual items - charts, graphs, diagrams, photographs, etc. with accompanying aural explanations. • Mathematics, physics, engineering, or other discipline where mathematical formulas are presented and the instructor provides aural explanations • Content where the instructor is more comfortable talking about it than writing about it
WebEx	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material where real-time, instant interaction with students is needed to increase a sense of cohesion among students and instructor • Especially complex or abstract content where there is a benefit to allowing students to hear a presentation and pose questions “on-the-fly”