

Hybrid Course Recommendations: Tips and Lessons Learned for Improving the Hybrid Experience

The goal of these recommendations is to help ensure that both in-person and virtual students have a positive experience in a hybrid class. Good preparation, clear roles for the two Class Aides, and regular attention to the virtual audience can make a significant difference. These tips and recommendations are compiled from previous hybrid class aides.

CLASS AIDE ROLES

Dividing responsibilities between the two aides allows one aide to focus on the in-person students while the other focuses on the virtual students. Aides can alternate by class session or agree who will cover which set of duties for the duration of the course depending on strengths and preferences. Note that both aides attend in-person.

IN-PERSON CLASS AIDE

- Welcome and introduce the in-person students.
- Handle in-person attendance and sign-ins.
- Assist with in-person questions - distribute the classroom microphones as needed.
- Help the instructor with classroom logistics.

VIRTUAL CLASS AIDE

- Welcome and introduce the Zoom participants.
- Monitor the Zoom meeting using the designated laptop and headphones.
- Monitor Zoom audio and video.
- Watch for questions and comments from virtual participants.
- Alert staff to any Zoom-related problems.
- Answer simple questions from virtual participants when appropriate.
- Help ensure that virtual students are included in the class discussion.

TECHNOLOGY

- There may be differences depending on whether the instructor uses a laptop, the classroom computer. Test the equipment and presentation setup in advance.
- Zoom Meetings and Webinars have different settings and features. Confirm which format is being used and ask staff if you are unsure.
- If the virtual class aide needs an Encore Learning laptop, notify staff in advance. Otherwise, bring your device to the tech rehearsal to ensure you are connected to Wi-Fi and test out the hybrid experience.
- Test screen sharing, audio, video, and any videos or other media the instructor plans to use.

INSTRUCTOR POSITION AND CAMERA

- In most classrooms, the camera is located at the back of the room and can be adjusted using the desktop console.
- Discuss with the instructor how much they plan to move around while teaching. Make sure they remain visible to the camera.
- If necessary, use a visual cue - such as a chair or other marker - to show the instructor how far they can move while remaining on camera.
- During class, the VCA should monitor the instructor's video and let them know if they move off camera.

CLASSROOM LOGISTICS

- Discuss the instructor's preferred method for questions ahead of time. Determine whether the instructor prefers students to use Raise Hand, so they can ask their question verbally, or Chat, so the VCA can relay the question. When feasible, encourage the use of Raise Hand, since hearing students' voices can make the virtual experience more engaging.

ZOOM SETUP SUGGESTIONS

Staff will help get Zoom set up appropriately. The following settings should be checked before class:

- Before screen sharing a presentation on both Zoom and the classroom screens, adjust the computer settings so that messages about closed captioning, recordings, etc do not appear on the classroom screens.
- Set the instructor's computer to Speaker View so that the video tiles of the VCA or other panelists are not displayed unnecessarily. Spotlight does not solve this issue.
- Hide floating meeting controls when appropriate. Settings may vary if the instructor uses a laptop instead of the classroom computer, so practice beforehand.
- Open Zoom early. Let Zoom participants enter about 10 minutes before class so they can check their connection, introduce themselves and chat before class begins. The VCA and/or staff can help participants resolve basic Zoom problems before class begins and refer more complex issues to info@encorelearning.net. If the classroom is noisy, the VCA may need to step outside the room or move to the back of the classroom to communicate effectively with virtual students.

CLASS INTRODUCTIONS

- Use separate introductions. The in-person Class Aide should introduce themselves and cover information specific to the classroom. The VCA should then introduce themselves to the Zoom participants while sitting at the instructor's desk. Doing the introductions separately helps prevent microphone feedback from the VCA's laptop. The two groups may need slightly different information—for example, in-person students may be reminded to turn off cell phones, while Zoom participants may be reminded how to use Chat or Raise Hand.

ENCOURAGING QUESTIONS AND PARTICIPATION

- Ask the instructor to pause periodically for Zoom questions. At the beginning of each class, the instructor should let students know that they will periodically pause specifically to ask for questions or comments from Zoom participants.
- If the instructor has established specific pauses for questions, the VCA should wait until the next pause rather than interrupting the instructor. Remind virtual participants of this practice at the beginning of each class.
- When the VCA relays a question from a virtual participant, the VCA should read the question aloud using the room microphone so that in-person students can hear it as well.
- When multiple questions pertain to the same topic, the VCA may use their judgement to group and compile questions together.
- Take breaks. Encourage the instructor to take one or two brief, approximately five-minute breaks during a longer class. Breaks give virtual students a natural opportunity to post questions or comments. During breaks, the Class Aide may want to mute the classroom computer's audio. Classroom conversations can be distracting to students at home. Be sure to turn the microphone back on when the break is over.
- Use classroom microphones when available. All first-floor classrooms have a lavalier mic for the instructor and one or more handheld microphones for classroom participants. When two roving microphones are available, the Class Aide can bring a microphone to students who have

questions; one microphone can be left with a student to pass around the room; and a microphone can be left with the VCA if needed.

- Encourage the instructor to repeat or summarize questions asked by in-person students before answering them. This ensures that virtual students can hear the question.
- It is acceptable for the VCA to answer virtual student questions via chat when the answer has already been covered or the question is straightforward.

ZOOM MONITORING

- Periodically check the Zoom audio. Ask the instructor to check with virtual students from time to time to make sure they can hear clearly.
- When the VCA is on camera, do not turn your back to the camera. Stay centered on the screen and make sure your full face is visible—not just the top of your head or your mouth.
- In general, turn off your video and audio when you are not speaking.
- Encore Learning staff will ensure that the Waiting Room is deactivated so that late participants can enter immediately.
- For Zoom Meetings, check the Participants panel to make sure participants are muted and have their video turned off, as appropriate for the class. These controls do not apply in the same way to Webinars.
- You can mute a participant's audio or turn off their video through the Participants panel. You can also remove an unruly or unauthorized participant, although this should rarely be necessary.
- Monitor sound and video problems throughout the class and ask the instructor to make adjustments when necessary. Shared videos can be particularly challenging because consistent audio may be difficult to maintain.
- Monitor questions from Zoom participants and answer simple questions without interrupting the instructor. For questions that require the instructor's response, relay them during the designated question periods.

WEBINAR-SPECIFIC NOTES

- In Webinars, participants will not have access to the Chat function. The VCA can still send messages through Chat, but participant questions should generally be handled through the Q&A function.
- Set Q&A to “Everyone can see questions and answers.”
- Questions can be answered live or answered directly by typing a response.
- A question that has already been answered, or a repeated comment such as “no sound,” can be dismissed so it is no longer visible to other participants.

OTHER TIPS

- Get instructor feedback. Periodically ask instructors how they feel about the hybrid experience and whether they have suggestions for improvement.