

Five questions to ask during course revision

It is finals week at the end of a long year and wrapping up your class this semester may feel especially momentous. Hopefully, the upcoming winter break will bring plenty of relaxation for you. You may also have plans to work on your course for the new year, and this is the perfect time to do some focused reflection on how things went this semester. Whether you are teaching synchronously or asynchronously, take a moment to critique yourself on class sessions. This can be a painful process, however, one that can also be enlightening. In your to-do list for revision, consider including what went well in addition to what you will change — it was a long year, so it's important to acknowledge the bright spots as we all do our best. Here are some questions to ask yourself and ideas to consider.

1. Were students actively engaged during synchronous sessions?

- Note some specific things you noticed that helped with engagement.
- Take a moment at the start of class to foster connection within the cohort. Do a quick icebreaker activity such as asking “ocean or mountains?” with everyone voting by raising their hand in the chat or randomly assigning people into pairs in breakout rooms and have them complete a task together in two minutes.
- Try breaking up your lecture and asking questions every five to 10 minutes. Consider calling on those who don't often speak up verbally by asking them to respond in chat.
- Check in periodically in other ways. You can use Zoom polls (tip: [set them up ahead of time](#)) or ask how everyone is doing with responses using the thumbs up/down icons.
- Use breakout rooms for collaboration or discussion prompts.
- Work collaboratively on a Google Doc during the synchronous session.

2. Are your class sessions and recordings inclusive?

- Consider how you have been successful in making students feel welcome.
- For equitable access across bandwidth situations, have students turn off their video when not talking and also allow students to connect via phone.
- Invite students to edit their name in Zoom to what they would like to be known as and encourage them to use preferred pronouns. Do this yourself to set an example.
- Let students know what you expect of them during a Zoom meeting. For instance, should they ask questions by raising their hand in chat or turn their microphone on and ask.
- Provide resources for students to engage with asynchronously.

For example, provide the slides from your lecture and recorded sessions in addition to a forum for questions.

- Ask for feedback from students frequently and be as flexible as possible about switching things up.
- Check the auto closed captions and consider editing them if necessary.

3. How is your video and audio quality?

- Ask yourself the following questions and then [refer to our Teaching Tip on making webcam videos look good](#).
- What set up worked best for you?
- Was your camera parallel to your face while recording video? Propping up your camera so that you look straight at the camera can be helpful.
- How was your lighting? The best lighting for video is from a lamp placed behind your video camera so that your face is well lit.
- Is your background distracting?
- Was the audio clear and without too many distractions? Consider using a headset or microphone if not.
- Are your slides readable? It is always a good idea to provide an accessible PDF of your slides for students to review or follow.

4. Did you provide a variety of modalities for learning?

What learning approaches did you try this semester that went well? If you're teaching synchronously but would like to try something new, consider flipping one class a week and pre-record your lecture. Students watch the video before class and work through problems or engage in discussion during the Zoom session. Or perhaps, instead of a Zoom session, discussion takes place in a forum or Google Doc at the scheduled class time.

If your course is already asynchronous, do you offer optional synchronous Zoom sessions each week for working through problem areas? Is there a discussion forum for each topic? How are you varying the learning activities each week?

5. Did you ask for regular feedback from students?

Consider polling your students at the start of class to find out what time works best for supplementary synchronous meetings. Find out what approaches and engagement techniques work best for them. Then ask throughout the semester to find out if your approach is working or falling flat. What else can you do to enhance their learning experience? Your students may have great ideas for you!