

Resource Guide

Attendance in Asynchronous Online Formats

Attendance looks different in asynchronous, self-paced formats. Students often demonstrate their attendance through submitting assignments, participating in discussions, or completing assessments (see U.S. Department of Education, 2019). You can, of course, track student log-in dates and “clicks” to manage attendance much like you would in an on-ground course, but how can you “build” attendance into online formats to ensure that students are regularly and frequently engaging with course activities? The following are suggested tips and strategies for designing and facilitating your online course with attendance in mind:

- **Have a clear, concise attendance policy.** Create a dedicated attendance policy that specifies participation requirements and how you will track student attendance in your course. Will you check to see whether students are logging in daily, or is attendance “marked” by students successfully completing all learning activities in a weekly learning module? In addition, will you grant students unexcused absences, and what should students know if they encounter technical problems that prevent them from completing required course tasks on time?
- **Frame “time” for your students by setting completion targets and staggering due dates.** Consider providing a suggested timeline for completing different tasks and learning activities. For example, you can include a table or other graphic organizer that has suggested target dates for completing weekly readings or lectures and participating in discussion forums or group activities (see Miller, 2016, p. 215). Further, avoid a format where due dates are concentrated at the end of a weekly unit, since doing so encourages students to wait until the last minute to complete these required course tasks. Stagger out your assignments by chunking your activities into different parts that build toward larger goals or projects. For example, you could require initial discussion posts to be completed by Wednesday or Thursday and their peer responses by the following Sunday or Monday, depending on the length and format of your learning units.
- **Nudge selected learners.** Reach out to students early and often if you notice they are not logging-in frequently or fully participating. Your outreach might entail a brief reminder of your attendance policy and why being an active participant is important in the learning process. You can refer to the People tool in Canvas to retrieve “last access” data for individual students or rely on statistics tracking, such as the “stats” option in Panopto, which documents minutes watched for recorded videos. Reaching out, especially early in a course, can have a significant impact on students who require extra attention and encouragement (Darby and Lang, 2019, pp. 137-139).

- **Check-in frequently.** Consider your own activity levels and participation. If you are not logging-in frequently and participating regularly, this conditions your students to do the same. You can model proper attendance and participation for students by engaging in the behavior that you are expecting of them. Regular comments in discussion boards, timely feedback in submitted assignments, or regular announcements are excellent ways to show your student you are visible and available to them.

Resources

Darby, F and Lang, J. (2019). *Small teaching online: Applying learning science in online classes*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, M. (2014). *Minds online: Teaching effectively with technology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: University of Harvard Press.

U.S. Department of Education. (2019). *Federal Student Aid Handbook*. Retrieved from: <https://ifap.ed.gov/ilibrary/document-types/federal-student-aid-handbook>.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).