



50 Alternatives to Lecture

Almost any learning activity can be designed to be carried out in some way or another in an online course. Most important is that the instructor must set up the activity with all the supporting and explanatory documentation necessary for the students to understand fully what they are to do, when, where in the course they are to do it, what is expected specifically, and how they will be evaluated. Areas in the course must be designed and set up in advance by the instructor to account for and accommodate, explain, model, and evaluate each activity. Below are some ideas to get you thinking about what is possible and how. For help implementing any of these ideas in your course, contact your assigned instructional design partner.

1. **Conduct an interview:** A formal interview consists of a series of well-chosen questions (and often a set of tasks or problems) that are designed to elicit a portrait of a student's understanding about a concept or set of related concepts. The interview may be conducted as an offline activity and videotaped or audio taped for later analysis, or online asynchronously. Online course assignments and activities can be designed to prepare interview questions either as individual or small group activities.
2. **Guest speaker:** Instructors can bring additional expertise into the "classroom" in the form of virtual guest speakers. The instructor sets up a module or section in the course for the interaction, sets up the activity, introduces the guest speaker, provides access to the guest speaker, and creates the kick off document for the guest speaker to use to start the discussion, or presentation. The Guest then interacts in the course .
3. **Student-led discussion:** Often associated with 'idea circles.' These are peer-led, small group, or whole class discussions of concepts fueled by single, or multiple text sources. Students work together with a student leader to build abstract understandings from the facts, data, and details provided by a variety of resources. Variations include students assuming the role of the professor, asking guiding questions, and facilitating the discussion.
4. **Student summaries:** single sentence or paragraph. This simple technique challenges students to answer the questions "Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?" (represented by the letters WDWWWHW) about a given topic, and then to synthesize those answers into a simple informative, grammatical, and long summary sentence. Can be used as a **pop quiz**. *See below.*
5. **Pop a quiz:** These quizzes can be used as "curve busters," opportunities for students to earn extra points and improve their grades by answering questions correctly. Pop

quizzes are unannounced and can be inserted at any time into any course module. A pop quiz section to each module with an explanatory document can alert students that a pop quiz might occur at any time. Information on the pop quiz aspect of the course should be clearly detailed in the course information documents of the course and in the module at a glance areas of module in which they are likely to occur.

6. **Direct an observation:** observations may include written field notes with detailed accounts of an event, objects or people observed. They run the gamut of disciplines from artistic to scientific observations. The observation is conducted as an offline activity (See related, *Field Trip*). Online course assignments and activities can be designed to prepare observation instruments either as individual or small group activities.
7. **Brainstorming:** This is a technique for generating new, useful ideas, and promoting creative thinking. It can be a very useful to help generate ideas for projects, encourage shy or reluctant students or solve problems. This can be conducted online as a small group discussion activity or with the class as a whole.
8. **Build consensus:** Students are expected to look for key themes of a given topic and post their position. Next students read others messages, look for an ideal framework and post a message supporting more than one position. In the following stage, students also post a message supporting more than one position. Finally, there is a debriefing, discussion and final evaluation. A specific example is the Jigsaw method. It is a useful for encouraging cooperation. In this technique students are arranged in "expert" groups, responsible for developing an approach to solving part of the problem. Students are then rearranged in "home" groups with one person from each of the expert groups and are expected to find an overall solution. This is then brought together by the instructor by having each group report their overall solution. This can be organized as an online activity using small groups. Careful planning, explanation, and course document set up is necessary to have this flow well and in a timely way. *Tip:* As an online activity, the best results are when the instructor assigns members to groups and assigns roles within the groups in advance, rather than letting student self select into groups, and workout roles.
9. **Buzz groups:** A group is divided into sub-groups of from 3 to 6 persons each for a brief period of time, to discuss an assigned topic or to solve a problem. A representative is sometimes selected from each sub-group to report the findings to the entire group. It allows for total participation by group members through small clusters of participants, followed by discussion of the entire group. It is used as a technique to get participation from every individual in the group. This activity is implemented online via small group discussion activities.
10. **Case Histories:** Case teaching presents authentic, concrete teaching problems for students to analyze. Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional training in schools of business, law, and medicine. It provides models of how to think professionally about problems. Online case studies or histories can be set up as

activities for individual or small group work.

11. **Chain story, poem, or article:** The teacher begins e.g., 'One morning Ben got up & went to work.' A student is invited to continue with another sentence & so on round the class. You provide the linkers - 'and then', 'so', 'next',' finally'; good for conditionals. Each person adds to what the previous person told, ending on a cliff-hanger phrase such as, "but suddenly..." or "but when he opened the door he saw..." and so on -- the trick being to work the word in so that it fits the story. This works for poems, articles, and dialogue, too. This can be set up as an online activity either as a discussion with the class as a whole or in small groups. Every time a new person logs in to the course they add to the story...
12. **Chain math or science problem:** The teacher or a student poses a multi-staged problem where one student after another offers one step in its solution. This is done in small groups. Variation: students are given a list of solutions, and asked to create the corresponding problems. The instructor gives guidance on what type of problem the solution is to. This can be set up as an online activity either as a written assignment with the "save for class" option and including the class as a whole or in small groups. Every time a new person logs in to the course they add a step to the solution or problem. The first person to save their response gets the credit for that level. Duplicate or concurrent respondents have to redo their response at a different level.
13. **Charts:** They can be used in a variety of ways in all disciplines, sometimes teacher-, other times student-generated to cover a vast array of topics. Closely related is the Categorizing Grid. Charts can be created using various software programs and attached to assignment documents for the instructor, for the class, or in small groups; both as stand alone documents or as supportive materials to a presentation or paper.
14. **Chalkboards/Whiteboards:** Teachers or students use these to outline, summarize, and highlight concepts and information. Online these can be created in PowerPoint or other graphics programs and attached as files to assignment documents. There are also tools that can be used synchronously online specifically for this purpose that may include capture and playback options as a feature.
15. **Class created annotated bibliography:** A glossary of various types of resources for any discipline. Using the Shared References Area and form students can be directed to regularly contribute a certain number of shared references to the class. As a directed learning activity the instructor can evaluate the student on the quantity of submissions, and require that the student include a summary of the resource as well as an evaluation of the resource. There are fields on the shared references form for summary and evaluation notes and to document the type of resource.
16. **Conduct a survey:** The teacher or students devise a survey instrument to use in or outside class. One example of a teacher-created survey is an *attitude survey* of students that provides valuable information on student perceptions of their online course experience, or as a mechanism to poll students on a particular course-related

topic. Students can also work in small groups to design instruments that they then implement offline and return to the group or class to report on.

17. **Debate:** Informal debates encourage students to think critically about an issue or issues presented in class and allow for interactive class discussion. It is implemented by dividing students into two groups and assigning each a point of view to debate based on controversial material that had been presented in class. It is a pro-and-con discussion of a controversial issue. The objective is to convince the class (audience), rather than display skill in attacking the opponent. This can be done using the small group for preparation of the strategy of each side, and discussion areas for the actual presentation of the debate in the online course.
18. **Demonstration:** Teacher or students demonstrate a concept, procedure, or technique. This can be an online or offline activity. Online, it might be presented as a discussion with supporting documents or graphics. Offline, it might be video or audio taped to be turned into the instructor, with a section in the online course for reflections on the process. Or, a video or audiotape sent to the students by the instructor, with a section in the online course for reflections on the process.
19. **Discussion:** Lively online discussion fosters democratic participation and enhances learning. It emphasizes participation, dialogue, and two-way communication. The discussion method is one in which the instructor and a group of students consider a topic, issue, theory, or problem and exchange information, experiences, ideas, opinions, reactions, and conclusions with one another. Teaching by online discussion can be an extremely effective means of helping students apply abstract ideas and think critically about what they are learning and how to use and evaluate online and other resources to support their positions. Variation: student - led online discussions. Online discussion questions work best that are open ended and provocative. Instructors need to make sure students understand what is expected and how they will be evaluated. Students must be clear on how to take a position and support it. See related, *Questions and Answers*.
20. **Field trips:** This strategy increases motivation and highlights the application of classroom material to the real world. It is an excellent opportunity to facilitate learning outside of the online classroom in an interesting and purposeful way. Field notes, reports, inventories, and treasure hunt lists, can be developed in the online course individually or in small groups and then used in the field trip. Students can then return to the course to report on their experiences to the class or in small groups. Variation: Students can also videotape the field trip and turn it into the instructor. See related, *Direct an Observation*.
21. **Film/Video:** As an offline activity for an online course, these visual tools help build background for particular topics or motivate student reaction and analysis. They encourage the use and development of communication skills and can be used to establish a social context for English as a second language, or to provide visual "texts" for deaf students. Film/Video/Audio etc. can be developed by the instructor

and sent out to students, or in some cases students can be directed to find a particular resource at the local library or video rental store.

22. **Group activity:** There is a nearly endless list of group and collaborative activities you can do in the online classroom. The group discussion, for example, provides an opportunity for pooling of ideas, experience, and knowledge.
23. **Keep a journal:** Journal entries provide students an opportunity to make observations and reflect on their learning or development of a skill. This can be saved privately by the student and then periodically turned in to the instructor or submitted to the instructor on more regular intervals. Journaling activities can also be done in pairs or small groups with peer review intervals.
24. **Games:** They can be used to teach everything from art to zoology and are only limited by the imagination. Online or offline games can be used. Students can work individually or in small groups.
25. **Laboratory:** This is where students apply what they have learned. Labs can be set up as online experiments using simulation web sites, or software, or off line as actual experiments that the students conduct and then return to the class to report their findings. Lab packets can be sent to students including anything from seeds to sprout to a dead cat for dissection... Set up for this activity is rigorous and essential.
26. **Learning teams:** This group method encourages full participation from students in the learning process, provides shared support among students and promotes individual preparation prior to class. This can be accomplished online using the small group areas. See variation, *Study Groups*.
27. **Maps:** Concept and diagram maps are used to explain concepts. They can be student-, or teacher-generated. They can be created in spreadsheets or other graphics software programs and attached as files to assignment documents or imported into the course for display.
28. **Memorization:** There are a variety of memory techniques that students can devise, learn about, and practice as online and off line activities. In an online course that requires memorization, the self-test is a useful study tool to help students self assess.
29. **Models:** Teaching and learning models add dimension to the learning environment even when they are abstract. In an online classroom, models can be used as examples to clarify what is expected from the student in terms of behavior, responses, quality of work, etc.
30. **News Articles:** Topical news stories are a great source of teaching material. They can raise the level of involvement and participation that the students have in the lesson. In an online class, topical news stories can be used to bring in current events or to target learning to the individual interests of students, or to target learning to timely topics. To do this in an online course where everything must be created prior to the first day

of class, the structure of the course is designed in advance to explain, and accommodate timely topical new, e.g., place holder documents are created in the course in a Module called "the news room" where topical news based activities will appear as they happen in the news. Variation: Students pick a news story, item, trend, issue and follow it and post assignments related to their topic designed build expertise in the student on that topic, e.g., student becomes an expert related to the economics of South Africa, by reviewing an assigned list of periodicals for a certain period of time and completing a series of assignments designed to probe the topic, leading a small group discussion, and writing a paper to synthesize a report on the topic.

31. **Object/Object Lessons:** Activities specifically developed to target the nature of science concepts serve as object lessons that can enhance online discussions.
32. **Panels:** An online discussion among a selected group of students with an assigned leader, in front of the class that joins in later. It is used as a technique to stimulate interest and thinking, and to provoke better discussion. With setup and explanation this can be done online using online discussion. Students are broken into groups/panels, given a topic, and a leader is assigned. The discussion in each group is restricted to group members but members from other groups are assigned to pick other panels to follow and then at a specific time are invited to pose questions to the panel and participate in the discussion.
33. **Paradox:** It helps students move beyond either/or toward both/and thinking. A paradox presented online to a student, a small group, or to the class can be a very effective discussion starter, written assignment, or small group activity -to problem-solve. See related, *Puzzles*.
34. **Peer Review:** Student peer review is often used to increase the amount of feedback students receive on their writing and speaking assignments, but it can be applied to a variety of activities. Variation: Peer observations are different from the peer review. You aren't asked to review, rank, or evaluate your peers, but provide formative information, to help a person improve, change, and grow as a writer. Online this can be done in assigned pairs or in small groups.
35. **Picture Studies:** Use of pictures & diagrams in the classroom. Graphics files can be imported or attached to documents in an online course by the instructor of the student to illustrate, support, document, or demonstrate.
36. **Problem Solving:** Online, students solve given or self-generated problems individually or in groups.
37. **Projects:** These can be done individually, in pairs or groups, student- or teacher designed. They can be online or offline activities. They can be posted online, to the instructor, to the class, to a small group, for evaluation, review or discussion. Or sent in to the instructor for evaluation, e.g., a sculpture, a video demonstrating a skill, an

audiotape of a conversation in a foreign language, etc.

38. **Puzzles:** These cover all disciplines and may be verbal (written), mathematical, conceptual or concrete. A puzzle presented online to a student, a small group, or to the class can be a very effective discussion starter, written assignment, or small group activity -to problem-solve. See related, *Paradox*.
39. **Quiz or self-test:** Questions may be short essay, multipart, matching, multiple choice, short answer, true/false, etc.
40. **Questions and Answers:** A variation on the ancient Socratic method. This as an online activity can be done with the entire class or in pairs or groups. Student and teacher may reverse roles. See related, *Discussion*.
41. **Report:** An online report may occur in a variety of formats and may be delivered individually or as a group effort, to the entire class or to small groups, or to the instructor. The instructor must set up the location in the course for reports and clearly document, how, when, and where reports are expected.
42. **Review:** An online review may have various resources as its object such as a book, article, a performance, etc. Variation: Students can peer review each other's work.
43. **Role Playing:** The spontaneous acting out of a situation or an incident by selected members of the group. It may be used as the basis of developing clearer insights into the feelings of people and the forces in a situation that facilitate or block good human relations. Online a role-play has documented and assigned roles, scenarios that set up the situation or incident and can be carried out in small groups. The instructor must provide very clear definition of roles, role assignment, activity set up, explanations, etc. A role-play must be carefully planned and executed in an online course for it to work. See related, *Simulation*.
44. **Skits:** Skit writing can easily be incorporated into an online classroom including science and math to make concepts and ideas come alive. A skit can also be carried out in an online classroom as an offline activity that is video taped and turned into the instructor for review and evaluation. A report /description of the skit can be submitted by the student online to the class to incorporate it as part of the online course.
45. **Simulations:** (1) Provide a way of creating a rich communicative environment (a representation of reality) where students actively become a part of some real-world system and function according to predetermined roles as members of that group. Some examples include the Analytic Memo, In Basket (Manager's Box); Committee Hearing; management lab (corporate business); treasure hunt; web quest; Sam's Café (philosophical perspectives); Point Counter Point; U.N Council Meeting; Let's Do Business!, etc. Rigorous set up for this type of activity is required on the part of the instructor. Definition of roles, role assignment, and activity set up, explanations, etc., must be carefully planned and executed in an online course for this to work. See

related, Role Play. (2) Multimedia simulations can be added to an online course to illustrate, explain, deconstruct a process, function, system, etc. Simulations can be distributed to students on CDs as accompanying materials to the course, added as objects or links to a course as presentation material, be incorporated into a course as a component of test or quiz, etc.

46. **Storytelling:** This is a powerful teaching strategy that can be used online not only in English, but also in history and any disciplines with an historical background, which includes all.
47. **Study Groups:** Students can be assigned to pairs or small groups to help each other out in the course for the entire duration of the course, or to rotate with time or change in topic. See variation, *Learning Teams*.
48. **Symposium:** An ancient Greek instructional technique. It is a discussion in which the topic is broken into its various phases; each part is presented by an expert or person well informed on that particular phase, in a brief, concise speech. Online, students can perfect their phase individually or in small groups with discussion and assignments designed by the instructor or the students to perfect their brief concise "speech," and then be directed to present it to the entire class.
49. **Take a poll:** This is a quick technique that can be used to take the pulse of the class, highlight differences of opinion or interpretation, and surface assumptions. Instructors can use the test/self-test or multipart written assignment forms to create their online polls.
50. **Testimonies:** Personal testimonies bring life to any learning environment. Online self-disclosure can be easier for some with an aspect or illusion of anonymity because of the lack of face-to-face presence. Ground rules need to be set up to establish expectations for confidentiality, online courteous behavior, and respect for each other.

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