SO, YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE THE CLASS YOU'RE INSTRUCTING ONLINE, AND FAST!

If you've never taught online before or if you only have limited experience with it, you probably (understandably) have two big categories of concerns: the technological concerns and the pedagogical concerns. The technological concerns have to do with getting a handle on the technological applications that enable online teaching, and the pedagogical concerns have to do with the mechanics and logistics of teaching when you can't be in the same room with your students.

Contents

First, the Technology...

Figure out what tools and resources you already have at your disposal. Chances are that you already have access to a wealth of tools and resources for teaching online—even if you haven't had the need or desire to use them until now.

Software Resources

- Find out what platforms and applications your school has already adopted to enable online learning. Don't make it any harder than it needs to be. Use the tools that your institution has already selected. Which **learning management system (LMS)** does your school use, if any? Your school might use Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, or something comparable.
- Which **web conferencing tool(s)** does your school use, if any? These kinds of tools enable instructors and administrators to conduct classes and/or meet virtually on the internet. Common applications include Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet.

Note: In some cases, your school will have already integrated the two primary tools—the LMS and web conferencing—into a single tool.

Training Resources

- Find out what local training and support resources are available to you. Does your school have **trainers**, **instructional designers**, or a **teaching center**? These resources, if available, often help pedagogically by establishing and maintaining online instructional best practices—and they also can train instructors on how to use the technological tools themselves.
- Rely on any guidelines about online technology and pedagogy that they can offer you. Using locally supported technologies and instructional models is crucial. Confusion about online course design and organization, which can happen when different instructors at the same school adopt different online technology and design approaches, is frequently cited as a primary hindrance to student satisfaction and success in online courses.

The time you invest in learning new software platforms will pay huge dividends once your course is up and running. If you don't know how these applications work from a user perspective (say, which fields to fill out and which buttons to push to publish a discussion prompt in the LMS's discussion board), everything else that follows will remain more mystifying than it needs to be. But be confident: If you can set up and maintain your course in your school's LMS and you can run a web conferencing application, that's all you need to be able to do, technologically speaking, to thrive as an online instructor!

Second, the Pedagogy....

Online Teaching Modes

Online learning takes place in two different temporal modes: synchronous and asynchronous.

Synchronous online instruction denotes that an instructor and a class of learners will be meeting all at the same time.

Asynchronous online instruction takes place when an instructor makes assignments that learners will then complete on their own schedules (though you can still require that various assignments be submitted by a certain time).

Using Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Modes

An online course may include both synchronous and asynchronous elements. Unless your school has strict guidelines, it doesn't have to be an either/or proposition. Both types of online instruction have their advantages and disadvantages. And you should give serious consideration to both, depending on the intended learning outcomes of your course(s) and the kinds of instructional activities you have in mind for your learners.

Synchronous is most useful for
- When you need to provide students with complicated instructions—say, for a lab or research project; such instructions might prompt questions from students, the answers to which could benefit all students
- Establishing community in ways that more closely resemble traditional classroom settings
- Situations where it is most effective to hear one another in real time (e.g., world languages)
- Small group brainstorming sessions

Asynchronous is most useful for
- Situations in which students in multiple time zones are taking your class(es)
- Situations in which students are likely to access the course material at different times due to other responsibilities
- Providing students time to process and explore course content on their own time and at their own pace

With respect to the technology and to make it as simple as possible*: Web conferencing is for synchronous activities and the LMS is typically for asynchronous activities.*

Some lessons from the flipped classroom model

Over the last decade or so, one of the most popular internet-enabled instructional design models has been the "flipped classroom" model. Typically in this model, students initially encounter basic concepts and perform lower-level cognitive learning tasks (such as the viewing of lectures, videos, and/or PowerPoint presentations) before arriving for class. In-person class time is then reserved for higher level analytic, synthetic, and/or creative activities. Although the flipped model is generally assumed to be a model for the division of learning activities between at-home and in-person, you may find flipped classroom best practices helpful for considering the division of online learning between asynchronous and synchronous modes— especially if synchronous learning time will be at a premium.

- At-home (read: asynchronous) work should be essential to the specified learning outcomes for the class. Work perceived by students as optional or "nice to know" (as opposed to "need to know") will typically not attract the time and attention of students.
- If you intend to use in-person (read: synchronous) time to tackle more cognitively challenging learning activities, you should make sure that that students have successfully completed the intended preparatory material before they come to class. Students should not only be expected to familiarize themselves, say, with a pre-recorded lecture, but they should complete some formative assessment that demonstrates that indeed this familiarity has taken root. You may also want them

to have prepared tentative responses or outlines to the questions that will be guiding the in-class interactions. If students don't come to class prepared already with the basics, then you may end up having to rehash the basics in class—which ultimately defeats the purpose of the flipped model in the first place.

- The flipped model is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Some lessons and activities lend themselves better to this model than others. Lessons and subject matters that are difficult for students from the outset are better treated during in-person synchronous time. In any given course, you can use a mixture of flipped and traditional instruction; don't be afraid to experiment.

Transitioning Your Course

You may have heard that online teaching encourages or requires you to completely revamp the way you teach your courses, that you can't just put your on-ground course online and expect any success at all.

Initially, though, it's virtually impossible to avoid this question: "How do I take all the elements of my on-ground course that work so well for me and my students and replicate them in the online setting?" So, let's take some very common components of traditional on-ground courses—lectures, discussions, writing, reading, peer review, student presentations, group work, projects, quizzes/tests, labs—and describe how they can be transitioned to online contexts.

Lectures

- **Synchronous**: With a web conferencing tool like Zoom or Google Meet, you can project your classroom into many other rooms across the internet. Talking into a web camera may be awkward the first few times, but it will eventually feel as normal as getting up in front of a room of people. Just don't forget everything that you already know about "lecturing." Students are easily distracted and thus you should aim for as much interactivity in your online lectures as you would on-ground. If you like to use props in person, don't forget them when you go online. Encourage students to ask questions via the chat features in the web conferencing platform, or use online polling tools. Consider using these web conferencing tools to record your synchronous lectures as well. Students who can't make these live sessions will still be able to view them later.
- **Asynchronous:** Lectures can always be recorded ahead of time and posted in an LMS for students to view before, or in lieu of, synchronous class meetings. At all costs, avoid long-winded videos of talking heads lecturing about a topic for 45 minutes. Instead, try to limit individual lecture videos to no more than five minutes. It doesn't mean that you can't serve up multiple videos at the same time, but learners will simply lose interest if a video lecture is too long. Intersperse video lectures with interactive elements or activities that allow students to generate momentum and promote their course engagement. Also consider creating unique lectures based on questions raised by students upon completion of a reading or some other preparatory activity.

Discussions

- **Synchronous**: If you're using a standard web conferencing platform, then you can facilitate a discussion just as you would in a classroom. Students can virtually or physically raise their hands and you can call on them just as you always have. (*Note: Always remember to tell non-speakers to remain on mute unless they have the virtual floor.*) These platforms often enable you to break a large group into smaller groups. Just as they would in a traditional classroom setting, smaller groups

encourage more input from more students. As the meeting leader you can pop into each of the smaller groups as you wish.

- **Asynchronous:** A basic component of any leading LMS is the discussion board. As an instructor, you can post prompts to the board to which students will respond. Then they will have the opportunity to view and respond to their classmates' posts. As an instructor, you should participate and emulate the best practices of academic discussions. Consider providing students with guidelines for productive discussions—which you can find readily with an internet search. Also remember when thinking about the value of asynchronous discussions: Research indicates the cultivation of a social presence and community is vital to success and persistence in online courses. Students may appreciate the asynchronous elements of an online course, as it gives the learner some self-determination in creating a study schedule, but nagging feelings of "going it alone" could eventually prove counterproductive and could erode a student's momentum in an online course. Asynchronous discussions can prove to be quite valuable if there aren't opportunities for synchronous interactivity with classmates.

Some best practices for designing asynchronous online discussion activities

- Don't assume that, if you simply tell students to "discuss" something, they will in fact know what that means. Be sure to clarify what the goals and requirements of a discussion should be.
- Make sure that discussions prompts can't be answered with a simple yes or no.
- At the same time, discussion prompts shouldn't be too broad; they should require students to focus on subject matter that is relevant to everyone taking the class.
- If discussions are a component of class participation grades (as they often are in online courses), be sure to specify exactly what's required of students to fulfill participation expectations. How many words or paragraphs is an acceptable initial post? A follow-up response? How many contributions to a discussion are required?
- If students are required to post initial answers and then to respond to their classmates, you should require that initial answers are posted with ample time for the subsequent responses.
- Be as clear as possible in describing what evidence and/or reference materials students are supposed to bring to bear in a discussion post. Should they just provide their own opinions? Should they be referring to particular readings or other course content? Should they be crafting well-formed arguments (with premises and conclusions)?
- Consider participating in the online discussion yourself. This allows you to monitor student progress and to model desired discussion practices.

Writing

Presume that extended writing activities are largely asynchronous tasks. Via the LMS, you can post writing assignments and students can submit them back to you. You can then review the work and assign a grade through the LMS.

Reading

Extended reading assignments are typically asynchronous activities. Hyperlink, whenever possible, directly to readings in e-textbooks or online library resources to which your school is subscribed.

Peer Review

- **Synchronous:** Think of peer review as a small group discussion. Use the web conferencing tools' breakout room capabilities to facilitate one-on-one meetings between review partners. In this setting, learners can also share their screens with one another, offering the opportunity (if desired) to collaborate in real-time revisioning.
- **Asynchronous:** Some LMSs are better at facilitating peer review than others; nevertheless, there's nothing in the online environment that prohibits you from assigning review partners among a cohort of learners. They can distribute their work via email or shared doc, provide feedback to their peers in marginal comments, track changes, and/or in individual web chats that the partners initiate. Finally, learners can post various iterations with and/or without peer comments to the LMS drop box. As with any peer review assignment, it's important to clarify expectations and good feedback etiquette with your learners. (See the best practices outlined next.)

Some best practices to share with your students for peer review

- Be respectful and constructive: Offer suggestions, not commands.
- Don't focus your comments exclusively on the weaker parts of your peer's work: Identify both the good and less-than-good components of your peers' work and offer concrete solutions for improving the less-than-good parts.
- Be judicious in the amount of feedback you're offering to your peers: Focus on the most essential things or the components of your peer's work that you think could make the most improvements most efficiently
- Be clear: Aim for clarity and precision in your feedback. Quickly asserting that something is "too vague" itself is too vague. What specifically is hard to understand? Share with your peers the different ways you could construe what your peer is trying to present.
- Ask questions: Feedback doesn't always have to be so assertive. If something isn't clear, ask the creator for more elaboration or context.
- Your peer put a lot of time and energy into creating the work that you're reviewing: You should aim to respect that time and energy by committing the same time and energy providing thoughtful feedback.

Student Presentations

This applies to student presentations, but is also applicable to activities when students need to perform physical tasks or deliver public speaking:

- **Synchronous:** Just as you might regularly turn over your place at the head of the classroom to a student, you can do so virtually as well. Web conferencing platforms allow you to transfer control of the virtual room to any given student, at which point a student may walk classmates through a PowerPoint deck or some other output of student research and creativity.
- **Asynchronous:** Students can record themselves giving a presentation via their computer or smart phones, either aurally or on video, depending on resources and the learning outcomes of the assignment. Students can then post their audio and video files on the LMS for subsequent review by other members of a class. Or they can often post directly to a discussion board. As with peer review assignments, it helps to provide students with guidelines for constructive feedback to presentations.

Group Work

- **Synchronous:** Web conferencing platforms make it easy to assign students to smaller groups.
- **Asynchronous:** Once groups have been assigned for a particular learning activity you can also encourage small groups to devise their own schedules of meetings or virtual collaboration outside

of any synchronous class times via communication platforms of their own choosing. Don't forget that online group work—synchronous or asynchronous—is subject to all the same interpersonal group dynamics operative in face-to-face groups. Students should clearly define roles and responsibilities for each group member.

Some best practices to share with your students for working in groups

- Group dynamics should be a focus of any group work: Group assignments shouldn't take team dynamics for granted; groups should collectively discuss and evaluate their functioning as a group throughout their time working together.
- Group members should be deliberate in establishing group guidelines around goal setting, communication (what, where, when, how...), time management, and equity of each member's efforts.
- Group members should aim for a culture of mutual respect and constructive candidness: Group members owe it to one another to take everyone's contributions seriously, but if members have reason to question another member's efforts, they should first seek understanding and, if then required, be respectful in criticisms of other group members' efforts and participation.
- Group members should clearly define their roles and expectations: Different group members will naturally gravitate to differing levels of leadership in the group. Sometimes negotiation will be required, but once roles and responsibilities have been established, group members should respect these expectations, unless there is evidence the group needs to revisit these decisions.

Projects

Projects are likely to be an amalgam of other activity types and are typically asynchronous. They may also culminate with a presentation. (See Student Presentations above.)

Quizzes/Tests

- **Synchronous:** Proctoring quizzes, tests, and/or exams synchronously online is unavoidably a challenge. Even if there are various software tools that can disable learners' abilities to interact with other web browsers and social media, it's still very difficult to control what other "resources" students may have placed conveniently out of the webcam's frame. Your school may have contracted with distributed proctoring services to oversee student testing, but these tend to be pricey and logistically more of a challenge for you and your students.
- **Asynchronous:** LMS-facilitated asynchronous quizzing is a much more readily achievable proposition. Every leading LMS has a quizzing engine that can serve up and automatically grade original quiz questions and/or those supplied by publishers. Questions and the ordering of potential answers (distractors) can be set to automatically randomize themselves to hinder cheating, but don't set yourself up for disappointment. Setting the right (read: low) stakes for these kinds of assessments and assuming that they will be "open book" assessments is generally a better approach. Quizzing via the LMS thus may be best for formative assessment. In the online environment, your highest stakes summative assessments would be better conceived as projects or other outputs that aren't as susceptible to cheating.

Labs

- **Web conferencing:** Depending on the access to equipment and materials that you or your students have, you could conduct labs or components of labs collaboratively via a web conferencing platform.

- **Virtual labs:** Consider what virtual labs or simulations you may already have access to via course material publishers, libraries, and/or open resources. Typically, your colleagues and/or local teaching development resources will be good sources of information here. Students can work through these labs synchronously or asynchronously.
- **Data for analysis:** If a lab is primarily focused on the analysis of data, instead of requiring students to collect data first in a laboratory and then analyze it, you could present students with pre-collected datasets.

Office Hours

If possible, use an Outlook or Google calendar to manage your virtual office hours. Encourage students to request appointments through these tools. You can then conduct office hours either via a phone call or web conferencing.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

It's vitally important when it comes to online instruction to think intentionally about your communication patterns. As mentioned previously, students struggle in an online learning environment if they don't feel connected to a community of other learners. Online education is often painted with broad strokes describing the broad autonomy students gain from purely online, asynchronous courses. But these pictures just aren't accurate or desirable. Open, free-flowing communication between you and your students and between the students themselves is vital for successful online learning experiences.

Communication Channels

Consistency is key. If your local resources haven't already prescribed the basic platforms for communicating with your online students, then it's worth your time to think it through. The LMS should likely be your primary means of communicating with students. Through an LMS you can communicate to the entire class as well as with individual students. Although it might be tempting to use email or texts to communicate, your messages via these other media can more readily end up lost or overlooked. Likewise, encourage your students to communicate class-related messages with their classmates via the LMS. Students may seek the freedom to engage each other via other means, but prescribing preferred channels may alleviate the unnecessary creation and proliferation of alternate platform-based communication. (At the same time, consider designating a backup communication channel if the LMS experiences any downtime during the course.)

Expectations and Directions

Above all, your goal in your communications with learners should be to demonstrate clarity about your expectations and the clearest possible directions for achieving the intended learning experience. In a classroom, you usually have the chance to immediately clarify expectations and instructions, but it's often more of a challenge in the online setting. Thus, be as deliberate as possible and try to anticipate all the questions and confusions a student might experience. When designing your course for online delivery, remember that students might be doing this work at all hours, and they won't have ready access to you when first learning about an assignment. Make sure instructions for assignments or activities are very clear. Try to predict student questions and address them in the assignment instructions.

Accessibility

Online instruction should include constant vigilance to an institution's accessibility policies. Seek out your institution's accessibility policies and guidelines from your local Disability Support Services office. Frequently the guidelines they provide will prove advantageous not only to your students who have special needs or learning differences, but to the effectiveness of your course design in general.

Communication Overload?

Many first-time online instructors find the uptick in their communication with students to be a bit surprising. All that informal communication and clarification that typically happens in a classroom now must happen online.

- Course information pages: Be as generous as possible in clarifying your goals and expectations for your course on the course information page in the LMS. Think of it as a Welcome page. You may discover that learners ask you the same questions over and over in their individual communications with you, so consider the creation and ongoing maintenance of an FAQ section on your course information page.
- Setting your limits: Clarify to your students when and how you want to receive queries from them. Communication is a two-way street and just as you should be concerned about not confusing or overwhelming your learners with your communications, you should make sure your learners don't overwhelm you.

Some best practices for supporting your online students

- If teaching online feels like a challenge to you, learning online also poses challenges to your students. In the recent rapid migration to online education, many instructors have voiced concerns over how best to support their students. To be sure, online students still need all the supports you typically provide your students in the classroom. Student support begins essentially with showing your students that you care about them individually. That doesn't change when you're teaching them online. They truly benefit from knowing that you are thinking about them.
- Be deliberate in keeping an "open door." Do maintain office hours; be generous with feedback and instructions; challenge yourself to return all student queries within a certain period of time (say, 24 hours), and finally, if possible, don't wait for them to reach out to you. Try proactively to contact each student individually to assess their circumstances and state of mind
- Balance flexibility with accountability. Students all have unique circumstances—particularly in the recent rapid migration to online education. Some students will benefit from continuing demands for high standards and accountability; in uncertain times, these kinds of expectations and structure will be exactly what they need. Other students will be facing extenuating circumstances and will need every bit of flexibility you have to offer them. Do your best to know and manage the individual needs of your students.
- As you know, on-ground students need academic support, tech support, physical and emotional health support, and a sense of community. Online students need all of the same support but probably even more. Don't forget about all the other functions of your institution that have also had to go online; it's not just the teaching. Coordinate your efforts with the other student support services your institution offers. Keep the contact information and service descriptions of these support services handy; embrace the opportunity to be a critical lifeline to your online students well beyond the academic subject matter you're trying to teach them.

Some Final Comments

First things, first: Find those local training resources. They just might become your best friends. Gaining some familiarity with the technology available to you and the people there to support your online teaching

endeavors will go a long way in easing any anxieties you may be feeling. Also, find out what your colleagues at your own institution and others are doing in these uncertain times. The resources for assisting you in thriving in this new environment have exploded online. You are not alone in facing these new challenges; you are not alone in having to find solutions.

Try to maintain a spirit of experimentation. Always be on the lookout for ways to iterate and improve your courses each time you teach them online. Remember too that your students aren't expecting perfection.

May the online teaching world now be your oyster!

Paralegal-specific Considerations and Solutions

In a Paralegal course, there are some additional considerations when taking your course online.

In these courses, there are certain tried and true learning activities, such as:

1. Recalling and Explaining Key Concepts of Law and Paralegalism
2. Completing Authentic Case Studies
3. Reflecting on Ethical Scenarios in the Law Environment
4. Applying Skills to a Real-World Scenario

How do you either replicate or reconfigure these learning activities in an online setting?

Recalling and Explaining Key Concepts of Law and Paralegalism Understanding basic concepts and fundamental objectives related to law and Paralegalism is the necessary first step in this course's learning process.	**Synchronous** Using web conferencing tools you can broadcast your computer screen in real time to your learners. You can show PowerPoints, lecture notes, authentic examples/artifacts/images, to your entire class. Simultaneously, you field student questions as you proceed.
	Asynchronous You can use web conferencing tools to record concept explanations and/or lectures that you can then post on the LMS for learner consumption at a later time. Learners can also read assigned text passages and authentic case examples. Quizzes submitted online via the LMS platform can serve as self-assessment practice opportunities or for you, the instructor, to assess learner knowledge of these concepts.
	Cengage Solutions Cengage's MindTap offers Chapter outlines via PowerPoints and customizable Flashcards for individualized practice opportunities. Auto-gradable Chapter Quizzes within MindTap and Cognero testbanks via the Instructor Companion Website (which can be input into your own LMS for auto-grading) help assessment student knowledge of important concepts.

Completing Authentic Case Studies Applying fundamental skills and knowledge to real-world cases is a critical part of a future paralegal's education. These activities will activate and help build critical thinking skills and reinforce chapter objectives.	**Synchronous** Web conferencing tools allow you as the instructor to host live discussions on how to apply chapter objectives to hypothetical and historical case examples. Learners can participate in these conversations by participating in live polls, jotting down thought and questions in the chat

	field, or voicing their ideas and answers to the whole group.
	Asynchronous You can assign learners to read news articles or watch news clips or movies that portray various hypothetical and historical cases. Learners can then be asked to complete research activities based on these cases. Short answer or multiple-choice assessments can be submitted via LMS platforms.
	Cengage Solutions Cengage's MindTap contains one Case Study Quiz per chapter. These quizzes present 1-2 case scenarios accompanied by several auto-gradable multiple choice and true/false. Some chapters also contain Essay Assignments that ask the learner to analyze a case and provide a written, manually graded, reflection answer. Within the eBook, there are many example cases integrated throughout the text, accompanied by critical thinking prompts. In all activities, learners are asked to analyze authentic cases and answer chapter-related questions.

Reflecting on Ethical Scenarios in the Law Environment Learners need to be prepared to be faced ethical dilemmas to be made in the workplace. It is important that they understand how to apply their knowledge of Paralegalism and law to real world decisions they will inevitably have to make.	**Synchronous** Learners can meet via web conferencing tools in small or large groups to present and debate over various ethical scenarios that you as the instructor provide. These discussions can be recorded and sent to you for grading, you can participate in/observe them in real time, or a note taker may be assigned to record important dialogue and a summary.
	Asynchronous LMS discussion boards can be used as a platform for learners to partake in debates regarding various ethical scenarios (these scenarios may come from fictional movies or real-world news clips and articles, textbook readings, etc.). Using prompts established by you, the instructor, learners can also submit their ethical reflections as essays/short answer assignments via file share technologies within LMS, DropBox, or email.
	Cengage Solutions eBook End of Chapter activities, as well as in-line feature activities, offer learners many opportunities to read about authentic scenarios that may occur in the law office setting, and then reflect about the ethical dilemma that the situation presents. Learners are prompted to activate knowledge acquired in previous courses,

	chapters, and the current chapter via question prompts.

Applying Skills to a Real-World Scenario/Setting These skills may include writing emails, answering phone calls, interviewing clients, drafting memorandums, etc. Developing these skills, in accordance to learned content, is crucial to becoming a successful paralegal in the law-office environment.	**Synchronous** : Learners can practice client interviewing, phone skills, and other communication skills with fellow learners using web-conferencing tools.
	Asynchronous Learners can individually record themselves conducting mock interviews and conversing in mock phone calls on their webcams or via voice recording tools while following along with a script or prompt that you as the instructor provides. They can then post these videos to the LMS for grading and/or review by other students. Learners can also be assigned practical tasks to be reviewed/graded, such as drafting an email and sending it to a peer as if that peer were a client or lawyer within their office, taking notes and drafting memorandums after viewing clips of law office and/or court room scenarios found online.
	Cengage Solutions Activities throughout the core eBook provide opportunities for learners to practice using paralegal-specific softskills. Each Paralegal MindTap course contains an SP2 Soft-Skills module. These short courses train learners on various job-readiness skillsets, such as communication skills, telephone skills, teamwork, and meeting management.