Office of Information Technology **OIT**

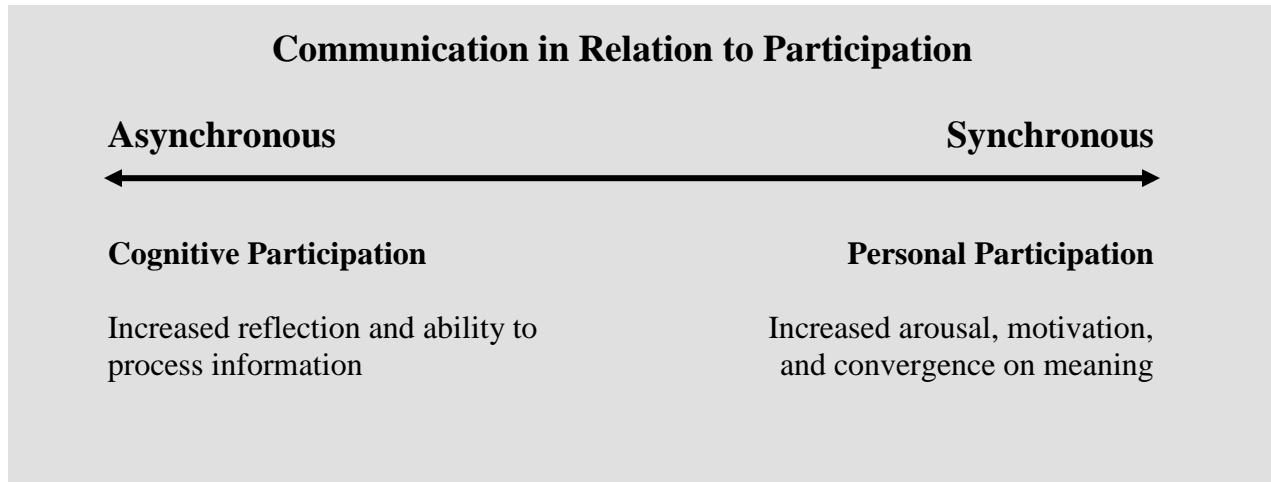# When, Why, and How to Use Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Communication

Online distance education ≠ Asynchronous
Online distance education = Asynchronous (benefits) + Synchronous (benefits)
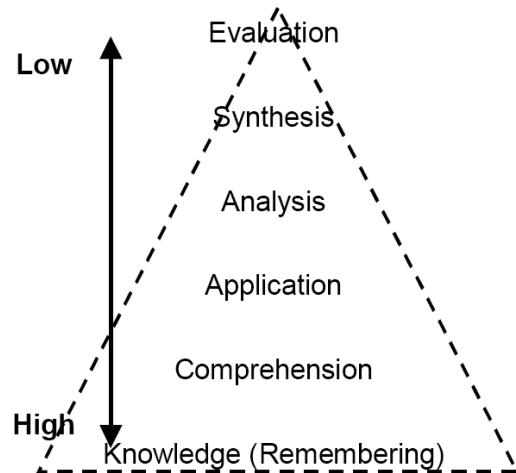
Preserve the *flexibility and convenience of asynchronous communication* while enhancing *efficiency* and *quality of feedback and interaction* through *synchronous communication*.

	Synchronous Communication	**Asynchronous Communication**
When?	Use as a complementary learning/teaching component to: • Discuss less complex, more immediate issues • Get students acquainted • Plan tasks • Hold task-oriented sessions (e.g., office hours and exam review sessions) • Conduct brainstorming sessions.	Use as a learning/teaching platform to: • Reflect on complex issues • Communicate when synchronous meetings cannot be scheduled because of work, family, or other commitments.
Why?	• Motivation - increased student commitment and motivation because a quick response is expected • Tele-presence - real time interaction builds a sense of social presence and involvement • Immediate feedback - encouraging quick feedback on ideas, and support consensus and decision making • Pacing - encouraging students to keep up-to-date and provide a discipline to learning • Spontaneity - making it easy to add new ideas to the conversation, brainstorming or decision making • Familiarity - simulating a more traditional F2F environment • Focus on listening and speaking.	• Convenience and flexibility • Reflection - more time for reflection because an immediate response is not expected • Easier access to and incorporation of course materials • Focus on reading and writing.

	Synchronous Communication	**Asynchronous Communication**
How?	Use synchronous means such as LiveOnline@UT/Zoom and other web conferencing tools, instant messaging, and chat.	Use asynchronous means such as Canvas Discussions, Assignments, Pages, and Inbox (Conversations).
Tips	- Decide what your objectives are for using communication - Inform learners of your expectations for how communication tools will be used as part of the course - Facilitate and monitor both synchronous and asynchronous dialogue to keep it on topic - Be aware of those who do not to participate - Be organized - Be flexible - Ensure time for learning how to use communication tools - Ensure time for interaction - Outline the rules for participation in your syllabus - Use audiovisuals when appropriate - Summarize the major points at the end of each session - Prepare a contingency plan.	
Examples	- Students expected to work in groups may be advised to use instant messaging as support for getting to know each other, exchanging ideas, and planning tasks - An instructor who wants to present concepts from the literature in a simplified way might give an online lecture in LiveOnline@UT/Zoom - Students expected to participate in group seminar-type discussions may do so in LiveOnline@UT/Zoom breakout rooms.	- Students expected to reflect individually on course topics may be asked to maintain a blog - Students expected to share reflections regarding course topics and critically assess their peers' ideas may be asked to participate in online discussions on a discussion board.

Communication in Relation to Participation

Asynchronous   **Synchronous**

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Cognitive Participation   **Personal Participation**

Increased reflection and ability to   Increased arousal, motivation,
process information   and convergence on meaning

The Degree of Synchronous Communication in Relation to Bloom's Levels of Learning

References:

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Lowenthal, P. R., Dunlap, J. C., & Snelson, C. (2017). Live synchronous web meetings in asynchronous online courses: Reconceptualizing virtual office hours. *Online Learning, 21*(4), 177-194. doi:10.24059/olj.v21i4.1285