Guide to Online Synchronous Teaching

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This Module

This module will present a brief introduction to some considerations and techniques that can help teachers get started in planning and delivering online synchronous courses.

A. General Pedagogical Considerations

1. Similarities Between Online and In-Person Teaching

The basic goals, considerations, and techniques should be similar in most Cegep teaching.

Student attainment of competencies should be supported through:

- Well organized courses with clear learning objectives;
- Clear communication of course expectations and structure;
- Clear (and ideally multi-modal) delivery of content;
- Regular formative assessment and feedback.

2. Unique Challenges of Online Teaching

Teaching online presents some unique challenges:

- Students are at greater risk of feeling isolated in their learning;
- There is less control over the students' learning environment, which can be full of personally appealing distractions for the student;
- Communication can be more difficult;
- It can be more difficult to pivot spontaneously as needed in a class or through the course;
- Facilitating student peer collaboration requires more planning;
- It can be more difficult to foster discussion and student engagement;
- Some additional competence with digital tools is needed (for students and the instructor).

B. Elements to Consider in Preparing a Synchronous Online Course

1. Competencies and Learning Activities

As with any course, it is a good idea to think first about the outcomes of the course and the objectives.

What sorts of learning activities and support will students require to attain the course competencies?

Especially in an online context, students may have difficulty sustaining concentration unless they are given opportunities to be active. These opportunities can take the form of:

- Class discussion;
- Group work and collaboration;
- Project work or experiential learning opportunities;
- Independent work that requires their active intervention and cognitive work.

Given the prescribed contact hours, consider how you might structure class time to maximize these opportunities for students.

Students are more likely to be able to sustain concentration during active portions of class.

When students are expected to listen and take notes, anticipate them needing more frequent breaks.

The sorts of activities that you plan for your course will partially determine the software that you will need to use and have your students use.

2. Engage Students and Stay Informed About their Progress

Two principal difficulties of remote teaching already mentioned are:

i. **Keeping students engaged** and feeling invested in the course and its activities;

ii. **Judging how students are feeling**, thinking, and progressing in the course.

Start the course off right!

Help avoid student disengagement by creating a feeling of ‘proximity’.

Consider at the beginning of the session:

- Distributing a video presentation of yourself, the course objectives and expectations, how to access the course content, how to be in contact the teacher, etc.;
- Taking the time to ‘break the ice’ and have students become acquainted with one another at the beginning of the class;
- Setting up the expectation that presence is expected. Take attendance, and make it known throughout the course that absences are noted and will affect students’ progression.
- Set up expectations concerning cameras, the physical spaces that students should ideally be studying in. (If they do not have appropriate space at home, maybe their College or a library has private rooms they can use?)
- Etc.

Ensure that students are informed early on about how to access all of the necessary course content.

Some of this information will have to be communicated by email/message/video before the first meeting.

(You can ask students to practice connecting before the first meeting where possible/applicable, or to connect early on the first day.)

Ensuring that students attain proper access to the course and know how to proceed in it will be essential for ensuring their engagement throughout the course.

Note: Teachers do not have to be IT technicians. It is enough to tell/show students what software they need, what login credentials to use, where to find information, etc. For technical difficulties beyond this, you can refer them to IT.

Find *ways to regularly assess students' comprehension and general comfort with the material in the course*. This can take many forms:

- Roundtables in which each student makes a brief contribution;
- Regular written work (as brief as appropriate for the context), which can be shared in groups, all together, or just with the teacher;
- 'Check-ins' using Teams or Wooclap.

Consider trying a ‘flipped’ classroom model:

- Have students digest the basics of course content outside of class.
  (Your own filmed lecture videos can supplement their reading or other modes of accessing the content.)
- Following their independent homework, ask students to send you questions, reflections, or other responses in advance.
- Use those contributions to structure the active class time by responding to them in class.

⟶ This allows the instructor to have a regular update on how students are managing, and allows synchronous class time to be used for discussion and other activities that are more engaging for students (especially) in an online context.

Tip: When a flipped classroom format is used, avoid summarizing the content that students were expected to introduce themselves to independently.

Summarizing the content can be rewarding for students who did not do the work and boring for students who did the work.

Instead, ask questions to challenge their understanding, have students contribute to a shared conversation, or divide them into groups to do some work related to the content.

More elaborate regular work—allowing for students to stay engaged and for teachers to note their progress—can take the form of:

- Learning journals that the teacher monitors *(consider Teams notebooks);*
- Contributions to a shared course lexicon/glossary *(try Moodle's glossary feature)*;
- Shared text annotations (not currently possible with available software);
- Having each student regularly be responsible for explaining or developing some part of a reading or other content to be processed as a group or class;
- Voluntary or required discussion forum contributions (Teams, Moodle, etc).

Other basic ways of judging and ensuring student engagement include:

- Seeing whether/how often they have accessed class materials (Omnivox, Teams, Moodle);
- Ensuring a regular, predictable rhythm to the course;
- Offering regular feedback and allowing students to have a sense of their progression (which can be facilitated by course ‘Road Maps’);
- Giving students opportunities to relate the course content to their own circumstances, interests, academic aspirations, etc.

To the extent permitted by the course content:

Have conversations take the place of lecture.

Have students create tools rather than receive tools (informative diagrams, templates, etc).

3. Acquaint Students with the Course and its Organization

Part of ensuring student engagement and success simply requires making clear what the expectations are for the course and how students ought to ‘proceed’ through it.

With a clear course outline (and, if you choose, a course presentation video), set up clear expectations from the beginning of the course.

Make explicit the basic methodologies pertaining to the discipline and how you expect students to study.

Consider:

- Should students print documents, or does it matter how/when they read them?
- How should students annotate their work or take notes during class?
- Roughly how many hours of work should students be doing outside of class every day/week, or how might they consider budgeting their time for success in the course?
- How can students regularly verify their own understanding of material? *(Are practice quizzes or formative reading questions available?)*
- Besides the content, what are the basic *skills* that students should see themselves practicing? *(This is especially important with the availability of generative AI.)*
- How can students contact the instructor and where should they go for help? How long should they expect to wait for a response?

During a regular lecture, how should their digital workspace be set up?

- Should students log in using their phone or computer?
- What applications should they keep open on their screens throughout the class?
- Consider including a few FAQ and responses in the course outline, or at the top of your preferred LMS (Lea, Teams, or Moodle).
- Are there useful keyboard shortcuts that they should know about that could save a lot of time?

*Consider creating a "**roadmap**," a short document that includes a calendar of content, a list of important learning activities pertaining to each module, evaluations, due dates, or as much information as you can reasonably provide to allow students to easily keep track of their progress in the course.*

This can be kept prominently on the landing page of the primary platform being used.

(Note: Teams and Moodle allow for layouts that naturally accommodate this. A one-page document could also be created.)

C. Proximity Through Remote Interaction

1. Setting the Tone for Your Course

Some pedagogical advantages of online courses are that:

- Students have the opportunity to be more autonomous in important ways;
- Technologies can allow the teacher to have small amounts of feedback about all of the students in a way that is difficult through purely in-person interactions;
- It facilitates multi-modal communication.

However, additional planning is perhaps required to take advantage of these elements of online learning.

The instructor must set specific expectations for all in-class discussions and other group activities.

During the course in general, or for a specific activity, specific:

- Whether (and to what extent) a basic level of participation is expected for all students;
- Whether students be asked to have prepared questions or other sorts of contributions in advance of classes and group activities.
- The basic logistical rules in place, e.g.: whether they must wait for permission to speak; turn their microphones off after speaking; etc.

Leverage some online tools for alternative ways of sharing.

For example:

- Use Wooclap to pose questions in class about the material or to poll students on their comfort level with a specific task or concept;
- Ask students to share text responses in the chat;
- Ask students to share their screen in Teams to show a presentation, video, or other document that they have been working on.

2. Facilitating Online Group Work

For more involved group activities in an online environment:

- Teach students about positive collaborative 'culture';
- In the case of independent group work, specify *how* they should be present for one another online (through email? through voice calling? through video conference? Etc.)
- Show them the proper tools for discussing and collaborating (forums, Teams channels, shared OneDrive documents, etc.);
- Propose ways in which they could distribute tasks and assign responsibilities among themselves;
- Discuss challenges that they might anticipate and how they might deal with them;
- Considering using 'Group Work Contracts', through which students commit to accepting responsibility for regulating shared activities, the group's learning, and the group production as required for the assignment.

See « Accompagner : Conseils sur la collaboration à distance » by TÉLUQ (5:52; *Fr*)

After a period of group work, students could be asked to:

- Share work they have produced;
- Summarize for the class how they approached a task (or part of a task); contribute to a shared class forum, lexicon, or bank of resources;
- Evaluate (for the teacher rather than for the whole class) the performance of their peers, or write a report on their activities;
- Exchange their work with another group and offer peer evaluation;
- Comment on forum posts by other students or other groups;
- Etc.

3. Structuring Class Time for Online Courses

For a synchronous session of 3 or 4 hours, it is essential to have frequent breaks and to offer students chances to be active. Otherwise, students will quickly lose their ability to concentrate.

An example of how a 3-hour online class could be organized might be something like this:

5 minutes — Attendance, introductions, and informal greetings;
10 minutes — Recap of where the class left off, reminder of where the class is with respect to scheduled content and assignments, soliciting of student feedback to gauge their mood;
25 minutes — Delivery of content mostly by the teacher;
30 minutes — Group or individual work on a well-defined task;
15 minutes — Break;
30 minutes — Sharing of results of independent or group work and facilitated discussion;
20 minutes — Delivery of content mostly by the teacher;
15 minutes — Break;
20 minutes — Independent or group work on well-defined task;
5 minutes — Check in, clear homework instructions, and summary of plan for next class.

The appropriate way to structure class time will depend on the discipline and how far along students are in the course.

Earlier in a course, students will perhaps need more regular check-ins, and the teacher may have to present more often.

Later in the course, the students may be able to benefit from longer periods of structured independent work.

To keep class dynamic, try to solicit student participation in the dialogue and development of the class.

Consider:

- Daily forum posts or post-reading questions that students should submit. The teacher can begin each class by responding to these questions or raising them for class discussion.
- To the extent possible, see whether your students can reason to the next step in an explanation, or parts of the content to be introduced, before you explain it yourself.
- Use Wooclap or other means to survey students in class.
  (Occasional questions such as, “Have you understood the material?” are alright. The most engaging questions will be those that invite students to think slightly beyond what has already been presented, or which challenge them to actively engage with the content.)

For low-stakes, formative assessments that you would normally correct yourself, try correcting them with the class, either by going through the answers together and having students evaluate their own work, or by guiding them in offering peer feedback on one another's work.

This is a helpful exercise for students…
limits grading time out of class for the instructor…
and allows students to be active during contact hours.

4. Other Tips for Teaching Online

To the extent possible:

- Try out particular features yourself in advance as you are able.
  (E.g., add a colleague to your Teams class as a 'student' so that you can verify that things will appear as you wish them to for students.)
- Familiarize yourself with the appropriate settings and technical aspects of the software you use, and as much as possible practice using it in advance.
- If you encounter some technical difficulty during the course or during a class, don't panic. Students are unlikely to judge negatively if the tone remains calm.
- To the extent possible, have a straight-forward Plan B in place.
  (E.g., keep a supplementary reading that might be used at any point in the course, which you can have on hand for students to do for 20 minutes while you sort out a technical difficulty.)
- Make sure students have IT contact info and redirect them to IT for technical support as required.

D. Choosing and Using Teaching and Learning Tools

1. Preliminary Technical Considerations

Having clarified for yourself the course objectives (the competencies that you want to teach and how you will assess students' attainment of them)…

And having chosen the sorts of class activities that will allow you and the students to attain the course objectives…

You can choose which software and tools to use.

To the extent possible:

- Minimize the number of platforms that will be used and which students will have to learn;
- Minimize number of logins, passwords, or codes that students will have to remember and which might impede their work;
- Minimize how quickly or how often students have to switch between platforms (perhaps they only need always keep two browser windows open with two different programs);
- Envision realistically (for yourself) what the workflow is going to look like for your students, and ensure that you are able to guide them in their use of the platforms being used.

  (Again, this does not mean that you have to provide IT support; but you should try to develop a basic idea of how students need to work in order to successfully complete the course.)

2. Software Available at the College – Which Should You Use?

i. Learning Management Systems

The College supports the following Learning Management Systems (LMSs): Lea, Teams, and Moodle.

While each of these has some unique features, there is also redundancy between them, and it can take some time to learn how to use a new platform.

	Lea	Teams	Moodle
Required for	*Attendance;* *Submitting final grades.*	*Video conferencing / Synchronous Meetings*	
Strengths	Simple	Video conferencing; Chat features; Group collaboration; Course layout Integration with OneDrive and other Microsoft applications; Potentially interesting assignments; Analytics.	Dynamic quizzes; Course layout and “Road Mapping”; Various kinds of online assignments and content.
Weaknesses	Limited features	Very different options from Moodle; Can feel a bit convoluted and busy.	No video conferencing; More difficult to master than other platforms.

Be wary of redundancy!

Lea classes are created by **default**. This is where attendance is recorded and grades are submitted.

Teams classes will also have to be created by **default**, because Teams is necessary for video conferencing.

However, both Lea and Teams allow for messaging (through chat or MIO), for assignments to be distributed and submitted, for grading and gradebooks, and so on.

It is imperative that the instructor choose which platform will be used for assignments, for content, for messaging and updates, etc., and that a clear plan is communicated to students at the beginning of the course.

(a) Lea

Lea is the basic platform that is to be used to record absences and for submitting final grades.

A guide to Lea is available here.

In Lea, the instructor can post documents and links; and Lea has a basic platform for forum discussions ("Class Forum"). It also contains a student class list with photos of registered students.

However, while **attendance data and final grades should be recorded in Lea**, its resources for distance learning are somewhat limited.

(b) Teams “Class”

Teams is available for video conferencing. This should be used for communicating with students during synchronous contact hours.

Summer Distance Education Project, 2025

For the moment, online courses must be synchronous.

This does not prohibit students from doing independent work during synchronous class hours. However, both students and teacher should, in principle, be available throughout contact hours.

Teachers should meet students online at the beginning of every class period to take attendance.

Even if some independent activities are planned for the session, a virtual face-to-face check-in is essential for ensuring that students know what is expected of them and have the resources they require.

Summer Distance Education Project, 2025

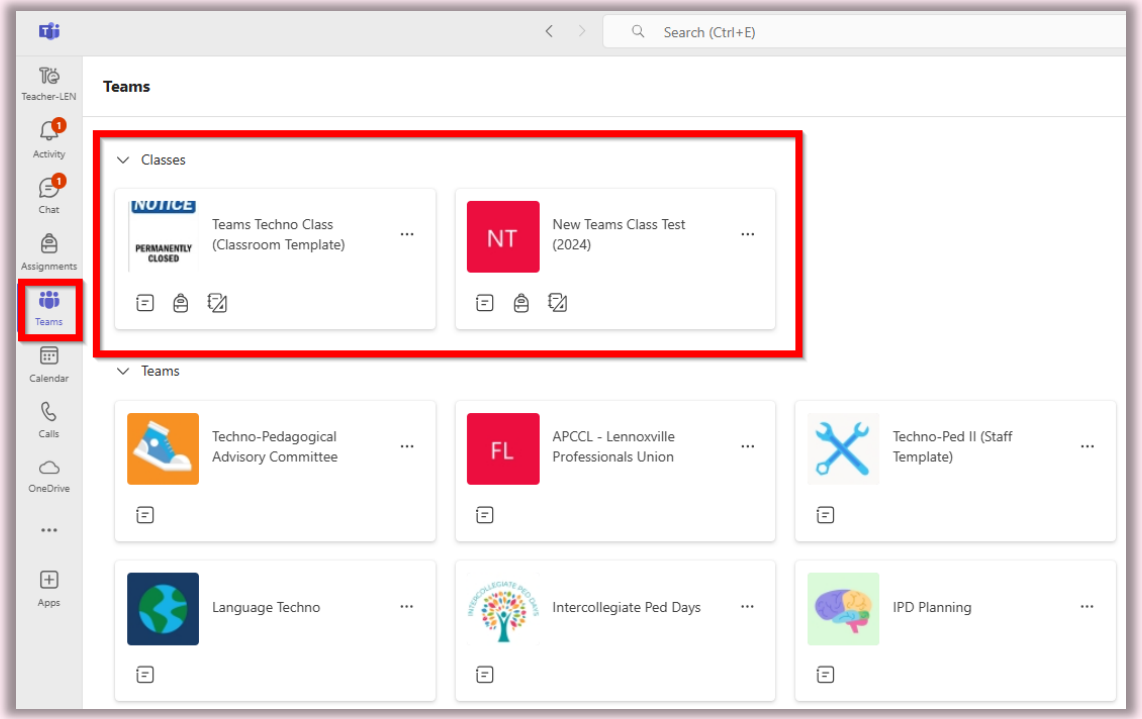
At the College, classes are always created in Lea, which takes enrollment data directly from the Registrar's Office.

For classes that are scheduled to be taught online, *IT will launch a Teams class for each course*.

This will create a Teams "Class" with your students automatically enrolled. In the case that some students drop or register for the course, the enrollment in Teams will be automatically updated.

Teams classes and video meetings are accessible from Teams (desktop or browser version), not directly through Lea or other applications.

A Teams “class” is similar to other Teams groups. You can find a list of your classes (and other Teams groups to which you belong) using the tiles on the left, or using the Teameo icon, also on the left.



Basic Features

As with any Teams group, “**Channels**” allow for continuous text, image, and media posts.

Each channel also has a corresponding “**Files**” tab where documents and materials can be posted.

The General channel will contain, by default, a “**Class Materials**” folder where documents and other items can be shared. (Students can read or access these files, but not edit anything inside the folder.)

Individual folders with student names also allow students to easily share documents with the instructor. (*If used for student submissions, these are likely to cause disputes about made or missed deadlines*.)

From the “General” channel, you can also access the “**Class Space**” tab.

Among other features, from here teachers can set up virtual office hours to which students can sign up.

In the left-hand menu:

Home page – Contains basic “dashboard-style” information about the class. (The Calendar is buggy and can be deleted to avoid confusion.)

Class Notebook – A class “notebook” can be set up.

Three digital spaces allow:

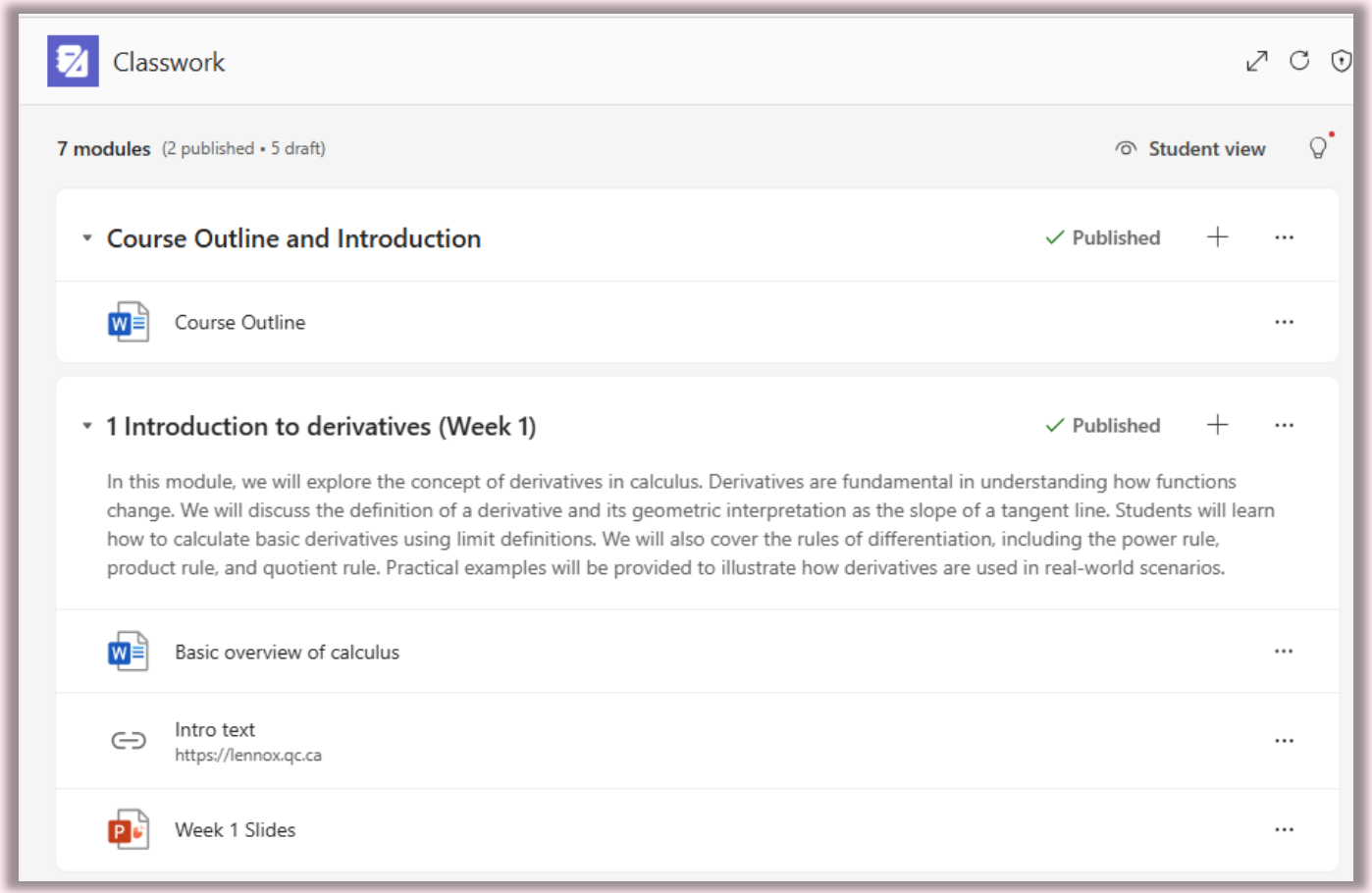
- Student Notebooks — A private space shared between the teacher and each individual student. Teachers can access every student notebook, while students can only see their own.
- Content Library — A read-only space where teachers can share handouts with students.
- Collaboration Space — A space where everyone in your class can share, organize, and collaborate.

After creating the Notebook, click the books icon to get started.

…

Classwork – Allows the instructor to set out map of class modules, ordered by units or chronologically, and containing documents, links, and other modules.

This is a helpful way to offer a course overview and indicate which documents and materials are pertinent for which lesson.



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Assignments – Can be added in either the Assignments tab or the Classwork tab (if you want to associate the assignment with a particular module).

Grading rubrics and other elements can be created and included.

Students will see the rubric and be able to attach multiple files of any type in their submission.

Assignments can be graded within Teams, either using the rubric, a comment box, or by editing the document directly (in the case of a Word document, for example).

Grades – Allows the teacher to set up a grade book. For Teams assignments to be calculated numerically, a gradebook must first be set up.

(c) Moodle

Different from Lea and Teams, Moodle allows for a wider range of class layout options. It also allows for the integration of flexible online quiz formats and other kinds of dynamic, independent student activities.

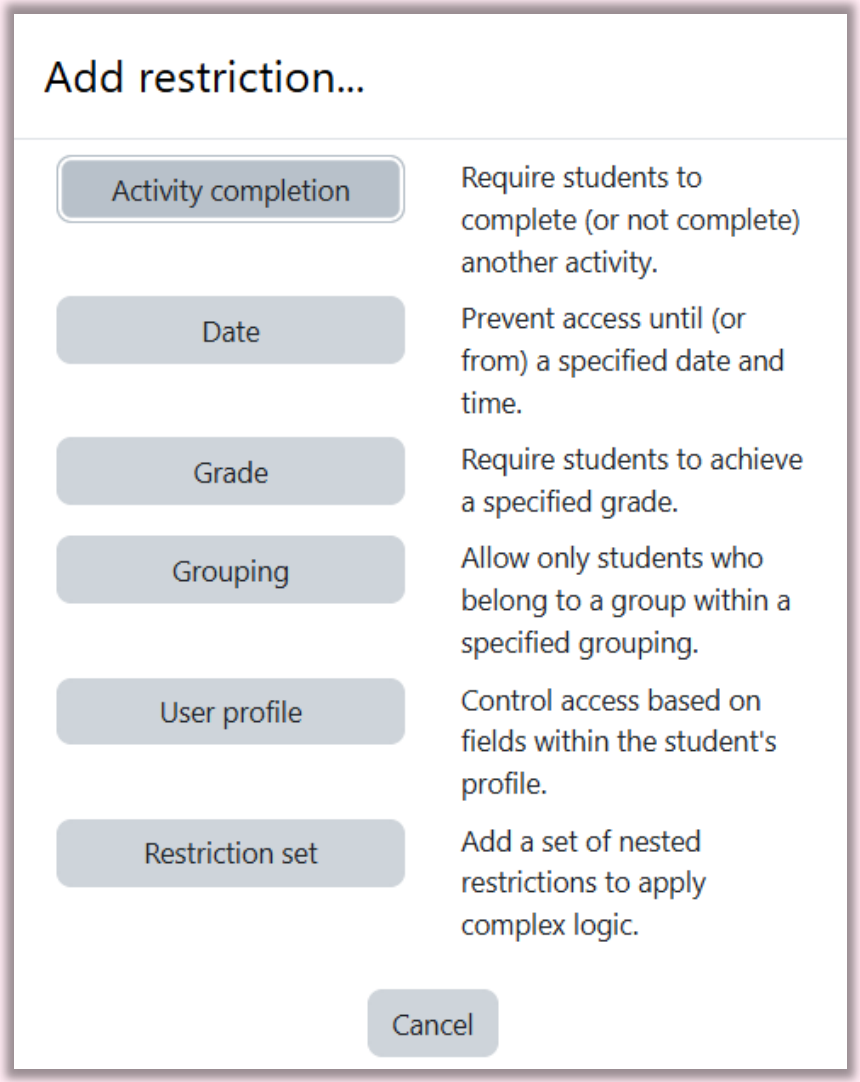
For example, Moodle has tools to create:

- Interactive glossaries of class terms to which students can contribute;
- “Drag and drop” exercises for studying technical vocabulary and other content;
- Listening and speaking “dictée” exercises;
- Interactive videos that automatically pause and allow students to respond to questions before progressing.

“Restrictions” allows the instructor to set up resources and activities to only be accessible under certain conditions, or in a certain order.

For example, a student may only be able to access slides or an activity after consulting a document and achieving a certain grade on a quiz.

This can be helpful for encouraging students to proceed methodically through a set of online materials.



More detailed Moodle tutorials are available:

Moodle: Basic Setup and Use

Moodle: Basic Introduction Quizzes and the Question Bank

ii. Additional Teaching and Learning Tools

(a) Wooclap

The College offers institutional licenses for Wooclap.

Wooclap is a tool that teachers can use for in-class questions and polls. The questions are shown on screen and students can respond individually on their phones.

In particular, teachers can create:

- Word cloud prompts to which your students can respond in real time;
- Multiple choice questions;
- Polls;
- Open questions (for text responses);
- Label-an-Image prompts;
- Matching questions;
- Fill in the blank questions;
- Likert-type scale/rating prompts;
- Situational judgement and Script Concordance tests to compare student opinions with expert opinions.
- Etc.

Why use a tool like Wooclap?

Many students will be too shy to be the first to speak in class; and many students will never speak up in class no matter what you do.
Giving a few moments to every student to submit a text response can allow you (and other students) to get a sense of what all students think without putting individual students on the spot.
They can be a good way to get the ball rolling on a more spontaneous, organic discussion between students.

To get started with Wooclap:

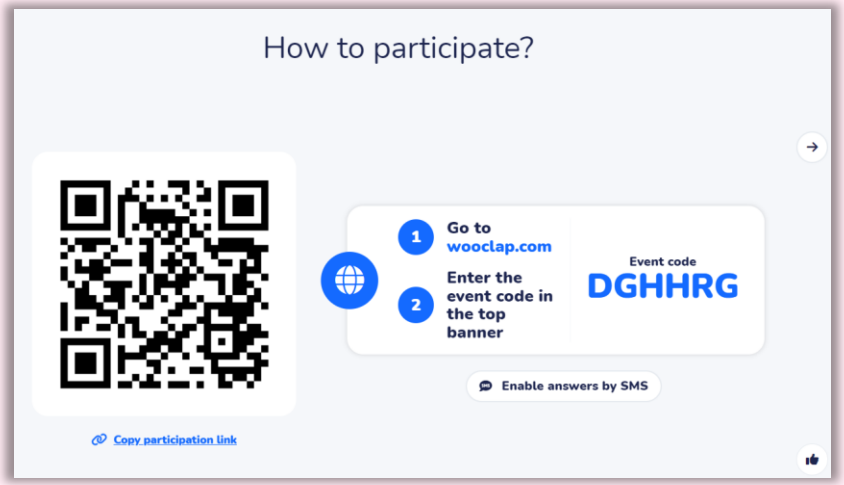
Create an account with your Champlain email.

Create a Wooclap “event” and add questions. (An event is essentially a set of questions that you would plan to use in one session or class.)

When you launch your event in class, a QR code will be shown, allowing students to participate on their phones (as shown).

Students respond to different questions as they appear.

The instructor can review responses live and move on to subsequent questions at the teacher’s desired pace.



Find out more: Wooclap tutorial.

(b) PowerPoint for Video Lecture

If you wish to share lecture videos with your students, PowerPoint offers an easy way to get started.

Why use videos?

- Videos are a great way to offer information asynchronously and in multiple modes (visual, textual, auditory).
- A video can be a good way to introduce students to the course before you meet them in person for the first time.
- If you use a flipped classroom method, then students can watch the lecture materials on their own time and do more active work with you in class.

- PowerPoint allows you to record short videos of yourself presenting material.
- A separate, short video can be recorded for each slide. You can edit or retake the video until you are happy with it.
- In the end, the PowerPoint lecture can be exported as a video file. The video file will automatically play each video/slide before moving on to the next students. Students can pause and rewind the video as required during playback.
- Annotations, highlights, and a “laser pointer” can be used while you present the material; and these will be captured in the final video.

For more information and instructions on how to get started, consult the tutorial:

Quick PowerPoint for Video Lecture Tutorial