# Managing Large-Enrollment Courses in Hybrid Instruction Mode

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**Abstract:** This essay addresses the hitches and glitches in the hybrid instruction system of teaching and learning for large-enrollment courses. This new instructional methodology asks facilitators to redesign their entire traditional teaching and learning practices. The nature of subject to be taught via the hybrid mode further affects the success rate of the modules from the time of inception to launch to actual delivery and completion of the course. The entire process involves undoing the old habits and methodologies and instructors picking up new skills, along with the right motivation to take up the task. The course planning and delivery require a substantial commitment in terms of hours from the instructors catering to large-enrollment courses, along with pursuing their routine roles at the campuses. From the pupil's perspective, the response varies, as hybrid learning seeks self-discipline and time management skills from the learner. After the initial roadblocks, students enjoy hybrid learning if the course structure and instructions are simple and the course content flexible and varied. We will study the problems and possible solutions to the success of the hybrid teaching–learning system at each stage where large number of students enrolled for a specific course.

**Keywords**: hybrid online teaching and learning, large-enrollment courses, modules, course inception, course structure, course design

## Introduction

*You have 248 messages in your mailbox,39 notifications on Ask the Instructor, and 147 messages on the discussion board and a good 31 in Class Café . . . Aghhhhhh, you are supposed to answer all of these in 5 hours, as you have two classes to take, along with tending to the visitors who are coming with their nervous queries. Welcome to the world of online hybrid teaching!*

A new mode of teaching and learning has piqued interests around the world: one in which direct feedback is coveted by students (how many, we do not know, as many students do not even check the response after submitting their assignments). But imagine where the literary world is complaining about deteriorating writing skills, and you are in a fix to check the students' grammar or the required assignment seeking a view or opinion.

No greetings, no salutations, texting language, technical fallouts, initial problems at the launch phase… All of this will drown you in the sea of frustration at the onset of your new hybrid course but, slowly, as you get the hang of it, you will start enjoying the medium. For example, on the launch of a hybrid online course in employment communication for 352 students, I received messages such as these:

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*"Mam I am . . . from Btech FSE 2nd year. I was unable to access my blackboard account because of incorrect password due to which I was not able to submit my Mind Map. May I request you to forgive me for and please consider my Mind Map which is attached here."*

*"I . . . of FSE 2nd year requests you to please accept my mind mapping assignment as I was not able to submit it on the blackboard due to some technical issues. I was not able to save my mind map from the mind map site. I am attaching the mind map file below please download the file in your local disk and open it on www.mindmap.com. Also there was a lot of confusion regarding the assignment as we missed the face to face session due to a holiday on 13/09/2016 so please consider my assignment."*

*"Respected Ma'am I submitted my mind map but I am not sure if it was submitted successfully due to some last minute internet errors."*

This is just a peek into the colossal number of messages received on the launch. This essay is an outcome of my real-time experiences as instructor.

### Hybrid Teaching and Learning

Hybrid instructional courses are the subjects where traditional classroom interaction between an instructor and pupils shift online considerably, limiting face-to-face interaction to only a few hours. Here, the pupil-teacher in-person interaction is reduced but not completely eliminated.



*Figure 1*. Hybrid teaching and learning model.

The objective of hybrid modules is to bring together the best of both the worlds. It aims to synergize the benefits of both face-to-face teaching and online teaching. It focuses on the idea of reducing the classroom time and induces self-learning. It encompasses varied instructional techniques like case studies, video tutorial, self-assessments, online collaborations, discussions, and opinion polls, among other to promote independent learning using computer based technology. The course design flows shown in Figure 2.
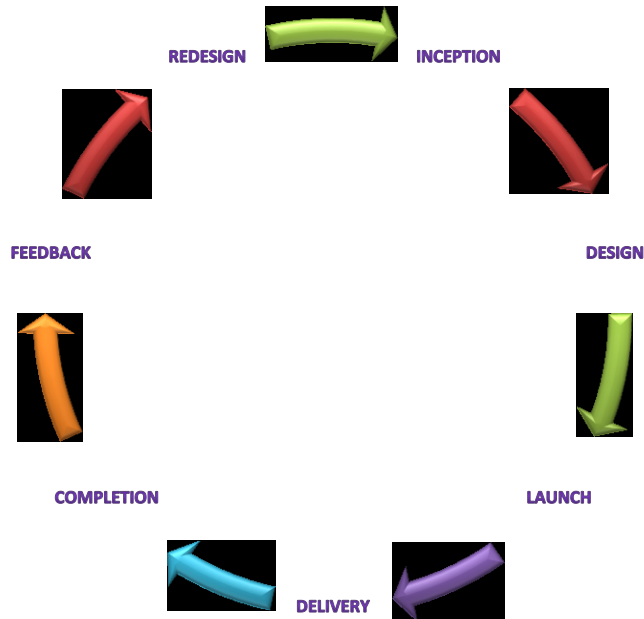
*Figure 2*. Hybrid course design.

## Inception

The time provided for planning a hybrid course is of utmost importance even if plans are partially based on a traditional course. The aims and objectives of hybrid courses are different from those of courses taught in the traditional classroom; therefore, a greater amount of training is required change the perspective of the teacher about to deliver a hybrid course. Hybrid course instructors need to unlearn traditional ways and pick up many new skills to use technology to their advantage.

Transforming a traditional course into a hybrid one is a daunting task; therefore, the motivation level needs to be high the entire time. Regular meetings and brainstorming sessions of faculty engaged in similar course construct can provide avenues for sharing ideas and provide scope for collaborative learning. Training in the use of new design software, along with technical assistance in lesson recording and editing, can go a long way in enhancing the skill inventory of the facilitators.

Faculty members need enough time to plan the course content and instruction mode for various topics before launching the course. They need to envision the entire semester at once, creating various methods of student engagement and assessment that will promote self-learning and active independent thought development on the part of the learner. It demands a huge time commitment.

Universities need to compensate for the extra hours, summer vacation time, and efforts engaged by the hybrid instructors in course design. Along with this, support from deans, department heads, and colleagues is perceptible, as the ideas and opinions shared can bring a fresh perspective and support can give a new lease of energy to the efforts of a course designer.

**Design**

The complete course design must be given at least 6 months for completion. Though the hybrid instructions include more front-end efforts, having a complete course package ready helps to regulate implementation.

As hybrid teaching and learning use the best of traditional teaching practices and online technologies, first-time instructors tend to add on to their traditional course work. This leads to an increase in the amount of content without realizing the time constraint and commitment from the pupil's side. This is known as *one-and-a-half course syndrome*.

Instructors must abstain from content overload, as many first-time students struggle with time commitment and need to upgrade their self-study skills. Moreover, technical issues eat up a lot of time in the initial phases of launch.

Important decisions during course designing include what to put online and what to keep for face-to-face teaching. Online content should be integrated with classroom teaching; students must not feel that they are taking two courses instead of one. A connection between face-to-face teaching and online learning is a must to ensure in-depth learning and thought provocation on part of the students.

It is very important not to go overboard while designing a hybrid course. Instructors should keep the course structure and technology simple and keep student expectations fairly low, especially if the students are also taking such courses for the first time.

Instructors tend to overestimate what they can accomplish the first time. In the process, they may overburden themselves and learners, too. They should use simple technologies and keep the course design flexible to accommodate adjustments when needed.

As the instructors are learning and becoming use to new skills, so are the learners. Although students enjoy working with technology, they struggle to work on their time management skills, leading initially to loss of productivity.

**Launch**

At the initial phase of the hybrid online course, it is essential to keep track of student activities. Regular updates and announcements are necessary. The first few face-to-face sessions may be designed and used to provide a technical orientation to the students. They should be encouraged to socialize with their colleagues to avoid isolation and to promote collaborative learning.

Hybrid online learning management platforms such as Blackboard have built-in social tools that can promote connectedness and cooperative learning. These tools aid students in helping each other and guiding the ways and means of accomplishing and updating assignments online in a timely manner. They can come together to produce creative collaborated projects. A technical help desk dedicated to handling issues such as forgotten passwords or malfunctioning software is necessary at the launch of the hybrid course.

**Delivery**

Setting the right student expectations along with student-centric material is necessary at the beginning of the course. As the instructor is learning new skills, the same is true for the learner. Students may assume that fewer interactions mean less work. Ensure that they understand that the workload of a hybrid course is similar to that of a traditional classroom course.

Sometimes, students do not check weekly sessions online and assume that by simply completing assessments they will receive the credit. Instructors should routinely remind them of the course structure to avoid any misconceptions. Instructors should clarify the assignment and evaluation process at the onset. Using rubrics facilitates objective assessment of their work and helps to maintain records for large-enrollment courses. Help sheets containing instructional flow diagrams to log in or upload assignments can be prepared and distributed in the initial face-to-face classes.

It is also very important to make students aware that they cannot complete all of their online work at the last minute; ongoing self-study and independent learning are expected to achieve good grades, as one of the major aims of hybrid teaching and learning courses is to promote independent study. Therefore, coaching students in time management and self-discipline through sharing self-management tips and web resources is helpful.

**Completion and Feedback**

First-time delivery will likely take longer than expected. The first few semesters may be more complicated than when teaching a traditional course, but then things should fall into place. Therefore, instructional design needs to be incremental in nature.

It is essential to request student feedback and respond to it seriously. Technology is not a problem for students after the initial problems. As the pace of course set in they are happy to work on their computer skills which help them in other courses too.

Recordkeeping is one of the most daunting tasks in larger hybrid courses. Use of self-assessments and micro-assessments are key strategies to avoid overtaxing the instructor. Providing premade software templates and rubrics for assessments also ensures objective assessing and feedback delivery. Course management systems like Blackboard, if used properly, can greatly assist in maintaining these records. Because of this, we need to focus more on training to use the course management system to the fullest.

The peer-review-driven assessments can be especially effective in large-enrollment courses. Continuous assessments with phased assignment at regular intervals can help to avoid technical issues in the event of a large number of students taking the mid- or end-semester examinations online.

**Institutional Support**

Institutions must focus heavily on training and instructional support to succeed in implementing a hybrid instructional mode. This mode of instruction takes away load from classroom sitting time and provides enough infrastructure to accommodate more courses in less of space. However, it is important to give equal weight to face-to-face classroom time, as it becomes difficult to bring a large amount of students together for a course.

The face-to-face classroom size should be moderate—not exceeding 40 students—to ensure effective interaction and content delivery. Face-to-face classes (offline) should take into consideration the times when students better absorb content. If the students are too tired after a long day, they will not be able to focus on what is being delivered in the classroom. It even becomes taxing for the instructor to maintain energy and to hold the attention of the group in the late hours.

Technical and instructional support are mandatory for successful implementation of a hybrid instructional mode. Institutions need to work on their technical infrastructure as more courses go online. The server load and speed are affected as more and more students log in to their course management dashboards. Institutional readiness is more important than instructor readiness in successful implementation of hybrid learning.

## Conclusion

The purpose of hybrid instruction is to engage students in intellectual activity to promote self-learning. As participation is less daunting, the quality and quantity of student-teacher interaction can be increased using a hybrid mode of instruction for mass-enrollment courses. It facilitates an instructor to help and support a large number of students, which is not possible with traditional teaching. A shy student can easily take part in ongoing discussion without having a fear of being overpowered or intimidated. An increased number of students can get detailed feedback online as compared to a traditional classroom setup.

Creating a balance between face-to-face instruction and online activities can be an overwhelming task that requires creativity and enthusiasm to simultaneously learn new and unlearn old skills. Classroom interactions may be used for high-order learning activities where students are required to go through the online content before coming to class so that every student has an equal amount of awareness about the topic to be discussed in the face-to-face session.

The results of online quizzes and self-assessments can be used to discuss and elaborate on the difficult concepts face to face. Discussion forums should be used to explore a concept collaboratively, and questions can be addressed both online and offline. The online interactions can be used to enhance learning, especially in more reserved students.

Blended instruction provides a means of professional development for faculty members, as it enhances their skills and involves them in more creative and challenging pursuits. Thus, engaging students online as well as offline, along with enabling a community feeling among students by providing a platform for student–student and student–teacher interactions, has a far-reaching impact if used positively.

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