

# Hybrid Learning Support for Educators

## Connected Learning Environment

### WHO IS THIS FOR?

Education Leaders  
Teachers/Kaiako

### WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

This guide defines synchronous and asynchronous learning and explains why these are very important concepts in hybrid learning.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Synchronous and asynchronous learning are both valuable and necessary but have quite different purposes and benefits for hybrid learning. Leaders and teachers need to understand how they are different so that they can make deliberate decisions to use them in ways that support learning goals, pedagogies and principles such as equity and inclusion. If synchronous and asynchronous learning are not used well, then this misuse can exacerbate inequity and negatively impact students' learning experiences.

## The importance of asynchronous and synchronous learning

### Understanding the difference between synchronous and asynchronous learning and when they should be used

The question that comes up the most when you Google asynchronous and synchronous learning is: Is this synchronous or asynchronous learning more effective for the remote learner? However, that is the wrong question. The answer is not a binary one, where one is better than the other. The question should not be which one is best, but rather, what is each type of learning approach best for and when should they be used? Hybrid and distance learning programmes should include a strategic mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning content because both types of learning have their place in ensuring quality learning in a hybrid learning environment. In fact, the most effective type of learning is one that combines the agency and empowerment of asynchronous learning with the camaraderie and social

### Defining asynchronous and synchronous learning

» **Synchronous learning** happens in real time – at the same time. Here are some examples.

- › Remote students being live streamed an onsite learning session is synchronous learning. You have to be present at the same time to access the learning.
- › A class of students having a science lab session with a teacher onsite is synchronous learning.
- › A class Zoom meeting when all students attend at the same time (whether students are onsite or remote) is synchronous learning.



» **Asynchronous learning** is when the same learning happens at different times for the same students whether onsite or remote. For example:

- › when the classroom or lab sessions mentioned above are recorded and made available online to be accessed independently by students who couldn't attend at a time that suits them.
- › when tasks and associated resources are put online for students to access whenever, wherever, and as many times as they like. Videos for example can be rewind and watched as many times as each student needs.



**Note:** Asynchronous and synchronous relates to when learning happens – at the same time or at different times. It doesn't have anything to do with where or why – just when. They refer solely to time.

**Table 1. Synchronous and asynchronous learning**

Synchronous Learning	Asynchronous Learning
Occurs in real-time, with participants doing something together or “in sync” with others	Occurs on one's own time and space, with no requirement to be in lock-step with others
Can include online and in-person learners	Allows students to work independently, or potentially with others, at a flexible pace that meets their individual needs
May include Zoom/Teams meetings, virtual classrooms or live streamed instruction	May include experiences, assessments, or collaboration to be completed within a window of time, but not in real time with others
May include scheduled learning experiences, assessment or collaboration to be completed at the same time with others	
Recorded lessons can be used synchronously or asynchronously, depending on when students are expected to view them and whether teachers are actively engaged when the videos are being watched	

**Table 2. Benefits of synchronous and asynchronous learning**

Synchronous Learning	Asynchronous Learning
Social interactions are easier.	Flexibility of anywhere, anytime learning.
Students can ask questions in real-time.	Students can progress through the learning when they want, where they want, at the pace they want, in the order they want.
Students feel a greater sense of community and connection to their peers when they all learn together.	Students have more time to reflect on what they learned.
Students may become more engaged in their learning.	Shy students may feel more comfortable interacting with their teachers or peers when they have time to compose thought-out emails rather than feeling pressured to speak up in a live conference.
Students feel a stronger sense of community.	Students can participate in the same activities regardless of timezone.

**Benefits of synchronous and asynchronous learning for students**

Table 2 gives a clear indication of the main benefits for students of each type of learning:

- » Synchronous learning supports students' wellbeing, their sense of belonging and, in particular, their sense of belonging to a learning community. It supports inclusion and engagement. It provides teachers opportunities to check in with students or to observe how they are coping.
- » Asynchronous learning allows for the flexibility of anywhere, anytime learning. Students can organise their learning around their contexts, their rhythms, and their family and whānau needs. It grows students' agency and self-directedness as they have to take responsibility for accessing their learning at times that work for them. It can also empower them as learners because they can make decisions to stop and reflect when they feel the need to, or they can carry out a search (Google search, for example) to develop their understanding further or widen it. If they are accessing their learning from a video, they can choose to rewind it as many times as they like to ensure understanding.

**Benefits for teachers**

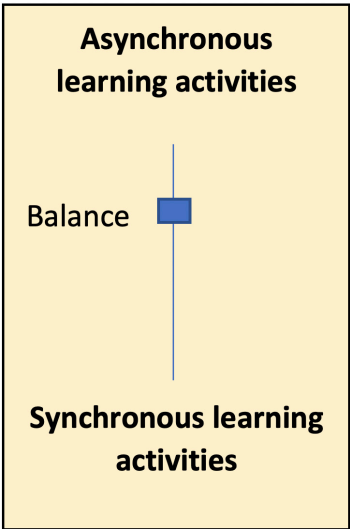
Creating and delivering content in asynchronous and synchronous formats can be additional upfront work for teachers. However, there are several benefits in the short and long term to consider:

- » Providing content asynchronously for both onsite and remote learners can free up teachers' time to work with students (onsite and remote) to engage in more active learning, discussions to take the learning deeper, practice, problem solving, and collaborative work. This is most effective when the asynchronous work prepares students for the synchronous sessions with teachers by providing them upfront with the content they will need. This is known as a flipped learning approach. Follow this link to learn more from the [Five pedagogies at the heart of hybrid learning](#).
- » The videos, screencasts, podcasts, recordings and resources that are created and curated for asynchronous learning can be stored and used again and again while they remain relevant. By moving some of the content to asynchronous delivery, the teacher will have more time during synchronous sessions to adjust the pace of the session, respond to student questions, and offer real-time support and immediate feedback.
- » Compared to synchronous learning sessions, with asynchronous learning, students can pause, rewind, rewatch, or reread asynchronous content. As a result,

teachers may receive fewer requests from students for support with content because they can learn more flexibly and at their own pace.

**Coherence and connectedness**

Balance: The appropriate balance of synchronous and asynchronous strategies will be specific to the context and content of the course being delivered, the specific learning needs and capabilities of students, as well as to the support remote learners receive from their families/whānau. The balance will need be adjusted continuously. Continuous feedback from students and their families/whānau as well as teachers' observations, assessments and monitoring of student work will inform the balance required at any one time, for any one student or group of students.



**Important note:** International research suggests that high levels of synchronous learning in hybrid learning (such as an expectation that students will spend large portions of the day in live streamed classrooms) can exacerbate inequity. Firstly, it reduces the flexibility needed for some households to ensure all children have access to learning resources (if they are having to share devices, spaces for learning or limited internet). Secondly, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that this approach is stressful for teachers who struggle to do it well and some students (usually the remote students) can be forgotten and marginalised by the experience.

**We recommend setting up hybrid learning approaches that use asynchronous learning more than synchronous learning.** This enables greater flexibility for remote households with limited learning resources to organise their days to support the learning of all their children and it allows remote learning to work around the needs of families/whānau. It also provides the flexibility for teachers/kaiako to meet the needs of remote and onsite students as part of the normal learning programme.

### Where might you start?

Follow these links to find out more about what some people say about balancing synchronous and asynchronous learning activities in a hybrid learning approach:

[Balancing Synchronous and Asynchronous Teaching: Effective Strategies for Enhancing Flexibility without Losing Student Engagement](#) University of Guelph

[Balancing Synchronous and Asynchronous Teaching: Effective Strategies for Enhancing Flexibility without Losing Student Engagement](#) University of Guelph

[Bichronous Online Learning: Blending Asynchronous and Synchronous Online Learning](#) Educause Review

**Note:** much of the writing about asynchronous and synchronous learning is from the tertiary sector rather than the schooling sector. You will need to consider what these articles say in the light of your own hybrid learning context.

