
Version 1.0

Blended Learning The Basics

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What is Blended Learning?

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Blended learning can mean different things in different places. At the University of Brighton blended learning is defined as the combination of online and mobile technologies with face-to-face teaching to enhance student learning and engagement.

Developing blended learning should not be about considering a new device or digital tool and deciding how it can fit in the curriculum. Instead, when a lecturer considers how to address a learning outcome or create an engaging activity they should make an informed choice from all the techniques and tools available to them. A digital solution may or may not be the best one, because the aim is to make pedagogically informed choices, rather than to use technology for the sake of it.

The 6 Key Steps To Blended Learning

The University of Brighton has developed a toolkit to help in planning blended learning, called the 6 Key Steps to Blended Learning. The 6 Steps are:

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1. Identify the learning objectives
2. Look at the curriculum to decide what is best face-to-face and what is best online
3. Consider the integration and relationship between face-to-face and eLearning
4. Develop the most appropriate eLearning activities to achieve the learning objectives
5. Decide how you will assess these activities
6. Choose the most appropriate technology

Resources to help you develop your blended learning can be found on the [Six Steps to Blended Learning page](#).

[Take a look at the Lynda.com video on blended learning.](#)

University Of Brighton Blended Learning Policies

The University recommends the appropriate use of blended learning as part of the student learning experience within modules and courses, and it is expected that blended learning will be an integral part of student learning. While choosing the right

technology is at the heart of a blended approach, there are also some institutional policies and guidelines around technology use.

These include:

- Minimum use of studentcentral
- Electronic Management of Assessment - e-only submission for all text based assignments, e-only feedback is encouraged, and use of the Grade Centre
- The Switch it On policy to support the use of mobile devices in face-to-face teaching
- All members of staff encouraged to have a core level of digital literacy through engaging with the Digital Literacies Framework

Further information on these can be found in these [CLT pages on blended learning policy](#).

Available Resources

To create a good blended activity, it helps to consider what resources are available to you. Books such as Phil Race's *Making Learning Happen* and *The Lecturer's Toolkit* and chapter 6 of this resource: Exley, K. & R. Dennick (2004) [Giving a lecture: from presenting to teaching](#) give some great examples of

some (often non-digital) tools, many of which you'll be familiar with.

Digital tools can be added to your 'toolbox' of ways to engage students. These are continually being used and tested across the University, so refer to the [Information Services Learning and Teaching pages](#).

Think broadly about where blended learning could take place for example:

- All face-to-face teaching sessions from large lectures, through seminars and small groups, and in fieldwork, practicals, and tutorials
- Communication, co-operation and collaboration across the whole curriculum between students, staff and externals
- All stages of the assessment cycle from sharing assessment briefs, formative assessments, engaging students with feedback, finding ways of getting students to refer back to their feedback

Some opportunities to introduce blends include:

- Making sessions more interactive using Nearpod presentations
- Exploring new styles of writing and presenting information using Edublogs

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- Creating flips for students to access before face-to-face sessions using online resources such as Lynda.com
 - Capturing and communicating key points such as generic feedback, session highlights, assessment briefs through creating short videos
 - Curating all digital media resources through Talis Aspire

Implementing Blended Learning

After using the 6 Key Steps to Blended Learning planning tool, the next steps are to prepare staff and students for blended learning and to organise your blended learning activities.

Implementing Blended Learning

Preparation

Once you have decided on your blended learning activities the next step is some preparation before they are implemented.

- The best way to approach blended learning is to think of it as about teamwork - between you, Learning Technologies Advisor (LTAs), administrative staff, and students. Different people will have different or more formalised roles in various blended learning activities, and it is important to familiarise yourself with these and the support they can give.
- [Information Services Learning and Teaching webpages](#), [your LTA](#), and [Lynda.com](#) all have resources to support the use of particular technologies for staff and students.
- There is extra guidance for organising flipped learning and using mobile technologies in the classroom on the [CLT's Blended Learning pages](#).

- Implementing blended learning can be done in small steps, perhaps starting with activities that students have struggled with, then increasingly used across topics.

The best way to introduce students to the blended learning they will experience is through using induction sessions at the beginning of the year or module, as part of discussions about expectations around learning, teaching and assessment, for example:

- Discussions about respectful face-to-face and online behaviour to create a safe, inclusive learning environment.
- Introductions to assessment topics and procedures including demonstrations of how to access eSubmission points, eFeedback and MyGrades.
- Debates around employability including on digital footprints.
- Reminders about preparation for face-to-face sessions e.g. doing readings, working through flips, bringing devices to sessions, signing up to particular apps.

Blending Mobile Devices Into Face-to-Face Sessions

There are some easy ways to make the most of face-to-face sessions which integrate mobile technology use.

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- When introducing any new classroom activity, whether digital or not, choose a low stakes environment such as a seminar group or small lecture where you don't have the extra pressure of managing a large number of students expecting a very polished delivery.
 - Remind students before sessions to bring along devices and any logins for apps that you might be using. This could be done at the same time as flipped resources or session plans are released to students
 - Having a plan B is always a good strategy, whether you are planning a group work session to which only 4 people turn up, or getting students to do a web search activity when the wifi drops out.
 - It is useful to have a 'teaching toolkit' containing contact details for Support Desk and your LTA, whiteboard markers, and Post-it notes.
 - Remember that it's not just technology that can fail - a flagging group work session can be invigorated by someone being tasked to find the missing information online that you thought everyone knew.

Blending Online And Face-to-Face

Online digital spaces such as studentcentral, Edublogs, studentfolio, and social media allow digital materials to be stored, accessed, shared and modified. Using these may involve some further discussions on ground rules about online behaviours such as deleting other people's work, contributing to discussions, and using of digital data such as photos.

Here are some ideas for combining these with face-to-face activities. Each module automatically has an online space in studentcentral, and there are requirements about using these spaces for e.g. communication, eSubmission and sharing learning materials such as PowerPoints. They can easily be linked to and from other online spaces.

- Find opportunities to get students to collect and curate materials that are created in face-to-face sessions and share them online. These then become a student-led learning resource, and could showcase the course externally, or become part of the teaching materials for next year's students.
- Incorporate the flipped classroom - move some of the content teaching out of face-to-face time for students to access before sessions to allow more time for active learning in the sessions

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- Be creative with your flips - move group work discussions out of the classroom time onto discussion boards which you can view asynchronously. You can give feedback online, but also use class time to discuss key points and issues.
 - Scaffold and embed the development of digital skills alongside course content, for example the first half of the module is about accessing online resources, while the second half focuses on creating and curating online resources
 - The increasing availability of Apps for online spaces means that they can be accessed easily inside and outside sessions. These quickly change (for better or worse) so it is worth keeping up to date with what your favorite tools can do.

Blending Assessment And Feedback

Assessment and feedback practices can be enhanced through using technology using similar principles - creating quick communications, taking out content from face-to-face session to allow more discussion, increasing accessibility, and encouraging engagement.

- Use face-to-face sessions to explain assessment processes such as eSubmission, moderation, and the way feedback and marks are returned, so students have a clear idea of how they should submit and how to access marks and feedback, and understand the processes that take place between.

- Create video or audio assessment briefs where you e.g. discuss expectations around the assessment, the practical aspects of completing it, and expand on the assessment criteria. This will free up time in the face-to-face session to e.g. do some exercises using exemplars.
- Use formative assessments to trial out using new technologies for assessment in a low stakes environment.
- Make the most of digital feedback tools that capture or enhance something of the face-to-face experience - for instance, video and audio feedback are more personal, while creating a screencast when marking an essay can give your students a valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of their work.
- Take a device such as an iPad along to tutorials so that you can quickly access marks and feedback for students as you talk. This can be an opportunity to identify recurrent issues and themes across several assignments.

10 Ideas to Support Blended Learning



Here 10 starting points of skills and knowledge to prepare and get going with blended learning in teaching, learning and assessment

10 Ideas to Support Blended Learning

Encourage active learning and make face-to-face sessions more engaging by making the most of the mobile devices that students have with them

Use a Flipped Classroom approach

Reflect on your blended learning practice as part of your continuing professional development

Explore the Digital Literacies Framework to find out expectations around technology use

Create a learning environment that encourages experimentation, sharing and innovation

Embed the development of student digital skills into the curriculum

Become familiar with University of Brighton blended learning policies

Use styles and templates in Word and PowerPoints to make them as accessible as possible

Keep up to date with the digital technologies available to you

Use the 6 Key Steps to Blended Learning to plan blended learning at course and activities levels

Next steps

What next? Feeling confident? Need some extra support? This section will help.

Next steps

Got it!

Feeling confident? Ready for something more complex? See these resources on [getting your lectures videoed](#) or [creating screencasts of your presentations](#) and learning analytics.

Need more help?

Contact your [LTA](#).

Further resources

Find out more about Blended Learning on the [CLT resources website](#).

Garrison and Vaughn 2008 *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles and Guidelines* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Bergmann and Sams 2012 [Flip Your Classroom: Reach every student in every class every day](#) Arlington, VA: ISTE

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