

Online and Blended Learning

In-person learning is the traditional approach to the delivery of courses and provides candidates with in-person interaction with other candidates and the instructor.

Online learning – also referred to as e-learning – is a form of distance education over the internet with no requirement for learners to attend in-person classes. Knowledge, skills and assessment are all completed in the online environment.

Blended learning describes a combination of online learning and in-person sessions. Blended learning provides learners with the flexibility to learn via electronic and online multimedia as well as in-person interaction for skill performance and assessment.

Online learning with real-time live instruction is called *synchronous* because learners and the instructor log in for sessions at scheduled times. Online learning that is entirely self-directed with no live instructor is described as *asynchronous*. Learners access the material online at their convenience.

The following guidance is for those teaching a synchronous (instructor-led) online course or a blended course of instructor-led online sessions combined with in-person sessions.

Preparing to teach online

Online and blended learning courses may require more time for planning, delivery and candidate evaluation than in-person courses. Predictably, additional time is needed to ensure that candidates can access the platform and navigate its functionality. Ensure enough time is scheduled for makeup sessions or unexpected cancellation.

In planning blended learning courses, think about which items or topics can be taught effectively online and which are best delivered in-person.

Organization and planning are key. Review your current lesson plans and teaching materials and adjust as needed for the online environment. Plan how to allocate your time. Make provision for administration and evaluation tasks.

Learn about and become comfortable with the online delivery platform that you will be using. Understand how you will interact with participants, the use of breakout rooms, and how to load and display presentations, audio-visual materials, etc.

Have videos, worksheets, alternative screens, or activities already loaded and open in other tabs to allow for a smooth delivery of online teaching. Remember that videos, activities, or online work will need an introduction and a debrief or wrap-up.

Decide whether online sessions will be recorded to be viewed later. This can be used to reinforce the lesson taught or used to evaluate instruction.

Have a back-up plan in case things do not go as planned. Make sure you have options if the technology is not working as it should.

There is a wealth of resources to effectively teach, practice, and assess the specific learning outcomes of the courses taught online. A quick internet search should bring up a list of current educational, interactive presentation software or game-based learning platforms that can be used to enhance your teaching.

Prepare your teaching environment with the same care you would take in a classroom. The same level of professionalism applies to attire, language, what is shared, and overall behaviour.

👉 Camera angle: Good eye contact in online instruction enhances verbal and visual cues, tone and expression. Ensure your webcam or camera is positioned at eye level when you are sitting upright.

👉 Lighting and background: Pay attention to what your camera sees. Good lighting is an important element of an online “classroom.” Appropriate lighting allows students to see your expressions and body language, and gives your classroom a professional appearance. Ensure your face is well lit and take steps to eliminate or reduce visual distractions in the background. A virtual background (a high contrast, solid colour is recommended) may be desirable to hide clutter in your workspace. Avoid wearing clothing the same colour as your background as you will start to fade or disappear as you move.

Consult some of the many informative tutorials and tips about lighting for online teaching found on the internet.

Policy and procedure for online and blended courses

Consult the Lifesaving Society for a list of the courses approved for instructor-led online delivery and those which may be delivered in a blended learning format. Whatever the method of delivery, the instructor must cover the complete award curriculum in accordance with the relevant award guide, and ensure the course conforms to Lifesaving Society requirements including candidate prerequisites and resources, and the minimum time requirements for in-person courses outlined in the Lifesaving Society *Program Guide*.

Follow Lifesaving Society policy in confirming candidate identity and that candidates hold the required prerequisites.

To be successful in online or blended courses, candidates must complete the full course and demonstrate all Must Sees or Learning Outcomes before they may be certified.

Trainers, Examiners and Instructors must hold the relevant (and current) certifications in order to conduct online, blended learning, or in-person Lifesaving Society courses.

Administration

Follow standard procedures outlined in the *Program Guide* for submitting Master sheets or test sheets to the Society’s office at the conclusion of the course. Where more than one person is providing training and assessment:

- Designate a single individual to be responsible for completing the required paper work for submission to the Society and the host affiliate.
- Ensure that all instructors, examiners or Trainers who conducted the course, sign the Master sheet or test sheet. Keep detailed notes of who taught what. Keep copies of your lesson plans outlining this information.

👉 Teacher tech: Learning to teach online requires work. In addition to traditional classroom delivery preparation and planning, instructors need to learn and master the teaching/learning platform and its functionality.

It is important to get your tech set up and organized. Consider the following when organizing yourself to teach:

- » Number of screens you might need to keep you organized and able to access everything you need as you teach.
- » Location of your tools and documents. Consider creating a folder on your desktop with your files and links for easy access.
- » A backup plan if you have technology issues – computer issues, web access issues, etc.

Be prepared to guide and coach candidates to maximize their engagement in the platform and ability to access files and information.

👉 Learner tech: Learners' internet access, tech hardware/software, and skill levels will vary. Before the course begins, allow learners to practice logging into the online platform to work out any technical issues while they explore the functions you will be using (e.g., chat, breakout rooms, responding to quizzes, submitting assignments). Learners need a reliable device that with camera and microphone capabilities. They need to be able to contact the instructor or designate if technical issues arise.

👉 Schedule: Instructors may not be in control of the scheduling of online sessions determined by their employers. Nevertheless, in general, online learning blocks should not exceed 2 to 3 hours in length. Schedule timely breaks and vary the learning activities.

Preparation checklist for online sessions

- Test the suitability of internet connections and audio and visual functionality with friends and colleagues prior to the session.
- Ensure you know how to share your screen, mute candidate microphones as the facilitator, conduct polls/quizzes, and link into any other technology for your activities.
- Provide an orientation to familiarize candidates with the features and functionality of the platform or software used.
- Test the best and most secure way to play course videos while online.
- Ensure you provide candidates with an alternative way to contact you (phone or email) outside the live format. Alternatively, have another staff member online as backup to deal with “behind the scenes” issues.
- Make it fun and engaging. Take regular breaks (5–10 min. each hour recommended).

The learning environment

In person or online, the learning environment is equally important and has significant impact on learners and learning. Instructors must invest the time and effort needed to create a welcoming, positive online learning environment.

Physical environment (instructor)

Your physical environment should be safe, quiet and located where teaching, evaluating, and supervision of learners can occur.

Organize your workspace for effective online teaching: create enough space for a laptop/desktop, notes, manuals, along with paperwork such as attendance sheet, lesson plans, etc. A second screen or device may be needed. Best practices include having one screen or device for video feed and screen sharing, along with another screen or device for private messages, emails, and other methods to communicate with learners.

Classroom environment (learners)

Just as the instructor's space needs to be set up for success, the student's space needs to be set up in a way to maximize learning. Professionalism on the part of the learner is expected. This includes proper attire and a location conducive to learning and free of distractions. Learners should have no other responsibilities during the online session.

Safety in the instructional setting

Online safety is a priority. Instructors have a responsibility for a safe online learning environment including modelling appropriate behaviour.

Provide learners with the rules of appropriate online behaviour, privacy issues, and relevant affiliate rules pertaining to online learning. These may include: not posting pictures of the class, communicating privately only with the instructor, etc.

Make sure that the learning platform is secure and accessible only by the learners in the course.

Class management

Managing an online class is different than doing so in-person. Although some of the same strategies can be effective (establishing expectations and routines), their implementation varies. Learners may have had very different experiences online and setting the stage is important. Having confidence and the ability to adapt is imperative to effectively manage an online class.

-  Confirm and record candidate attendance at each session. Emphasize that candidates' need to be present for the full session and participate throughout.
-  Learners are expected to have their cameras on and be able to turn on their microphone to participate fully in the class.
-  Explain how communication between learners and the instructor will occur. Establish the norms and protocols for camera and microphone usage, messaging the instructor, asking questions, etc.
-  Review appropriate methods of communication including spelling, grammar, and appropriate word choice.

Build a collaborative learning environment

Learning management systems are increasingly user friendly with expanded capacity to create a collaborative learning environment. Teaching Lifesaving Society courses online requires active participation. Working together online can be rewarding and allow learners to make a social connection. Breakout rooms, chat room discussions, emails, and private video chats are all ways that learners can collaborate. Most learning management systems allow for these options to enhance the experience and allow learners to work together as a team.

Conflict and challenging behaviour

The same strategies and suggestions for in-person learning pertain to online learning. Being proactive in modelling appropriate behaviour and making sure learners understand expectations will reduce conflict.

Learners bring to their online class a range of experiences with past online learning. Negative experiences may give rise to challenging behaviours. Try to identify the cause of the behaviour and use the same strategies as in-person classes to prevent and manage issues.

Try general class reminders of appropriate behaviours at the beginning of every session. If that does not work, you may have to focus on one aspect or expectation (the most challenging) each class. For example, “In today's class, we are only going to speak or turn our microphone on when I ask you to do so. Next class, we may focus on having your camera on when speaking.”

Teaching online

All instructional approaches used in person can be used online. Course content may be delivered through a variety of options including virtual classrooms, videos, assignments, group work and activities, candidate presentations, demonstrations, PowerPoint slides, quizzes, workbooks, handouts, and interactive real-time virtual activities.

Use a variety of teaching methods appropriate for your audience.

Communication matters

Online learning includes verbal and non-verbal communication, but also written communication in the form of chat messages and emails. Proof your messages before sending to ensure the words in the message match the tone of what you are trying to convey.

Non-verbal communication may be difficult to interpret. Body language – the non-verbal cues visible in in-person classes – may not be visible online. The absence of these cues may create issues or cause confusion for the online instructor and learner.

Breakouts

When using a breakout room, assigning a specific task that will be taken up afterwards with the entire group is more effective than sending learners to have a "discussion". For example: discuss shared word document, input on a Jamboard slide, participate in a virtual escape room, complete an online form, or create a PowerPoint presentation

Assessment, feedback and evaluation

Throughout online training, include regular learning checks and assessments to ensure candidates are engaged, understand the content and able to apply their learning. Encourage self-assessment.

Use of quizzes, Q&A sessions, presentations, and peer- or self-evaluation worksheets may be useful. In addition, learning may be assessed in the conventional way on learning platforms through question and answer interaction between teacher and students.

Feedback is just as important in the online environment as it is in in-person instruction. Review the characteristics of effective feedback in Chapter 8.

For blended learning courses requiring demonstrations of practical skills on land or in the water, most of the instruction should be scheduled online with practical assessment taking up most of the in-person session(s). Where applicable, you might teach practical skills online and encourage learners to practice them prior to in-person sessions.

When planning in-person sessions, allocate time to recap key points from the online portion of the blended course to confirm that candidates have retained the information and that they are ready for assessment.

In-water sessions may not be evaluated online.

In online courses, both instruction and assessment occur online. This requires that the instructor employ strategies that provide opportunities for candidates to effectively demonstrate the evaluation criteria, i.e., Must Sees or Learning Outcomes depending on the course.

In selecting evaluation strategies or methods, carefully consider the time and technology requirements and have a contingency plan should technical issues (e.g., internet disruptions) arise.

