Adapting Team-Based Learning for Asynchronous Remote Learning

If you use Team Based Learning (TBL) in your teaching, you have designed a highly interactive class. Adapting that class for remote learning can seem daunting, but it can be done. In this short guide, you will find suggestions about the realities and challenges you should take into account as you make your initial decisions about moving to an asynchronous learning model; then you will find suggestions for adapting key aspects of a TBL classroom for asynchronous remote learning.

Contents

Realities that should inform our pedagogical decisions

The realities that our students face when they go home to learn remotely often provide us with important reasons for choosing to move to an asynchronous model. These realities include the following.

Struggles with connectivity. Our students will go home to cities, towns, and rural areas that may have limited access to high speed internet. It may be difficult initially to imagine that students today might not have instant access to our Blackboard sites or the internet. Consider for a moment one of the cities we would regard as being highly connected—New York City. It is surprising to learn that according to [a report published in 2018](#) by the Mayor's office in New York City, 31% of households in New York City do not have access to broadband internet. This may help you consider struggles that students in impoverished areas of the state or rural areas may face in securing high speed internet.

Struggles with scheduling. While studying at the University, our students worked their job and personal responsibilities around their school schedules. At home, new schedules will take precedence as students now have to take on added tasks: find employment with different schedules from the jobs they had at University, care for younger siblings, pitch in at home, run errands, and potentially care for themselves or family members if they become ill.

Struggles with a home learning environment. Our students will be living at home with family members who may not be able to maintain a quiet and ideal environment for learning. Our students may need to share devices with other family members. Our students may be interrupted at home in unpredictable ways. Our students may be ill. Our students may not have a welcoming home environment to come back to and may be staying in a temporary living situation or moving from one situation to another.

Adapting a TBL course for asynchronous remote learning

As you consider the potential struggles students face, you may become aware that asynchronous learning is preferable for your students so that they have the freedom to access your course when they can and balance their new schedules with their work in your course.

The components of a TBL course that are most concerning for instructors as they consider remote instruction are the Readiness Assessment Process (RAP), 4S tasks, peer evaluation, and the camaraderie of teams working together. Before we look at how these elements of your TBL course can be adapted, keep in mind that some elements of your existing face-to-face TBL course will not change: students will continue to read; students will continue to listen to your mini-lectures; and students will continue to do homework, write papers, and take exams. Below, you will find a range of options for adapting the other elements of your TBL course.

The RAP in an asynchronous remote learning environment

Least complex option

1. Use the Test function in Blackboard to put your RAT items into a multiple choice test. Use the option Blackboard gives you to provide instant feedback to students about what answers are correct. Have students take the test individually. Give students a specific time to take the RAT (for example, Wednesday at 11:59 pm). Do not require a tRAT.

This option allows you to see how students are thinking about big concepts or processes needed to do the work of the upcoming sequence.

Less complex option

1. Use the Test function in Blackboard to put your RAT items into a multiple choice test. Use the option Blackboard gives you to provide instant feedback to students about what answers are correct. Have students take the test individually. Give students a specific time to take the RAT (for example, Wednesday at 11:59 pm). Do not require a tRAT.
2. Allow students to return to items they got wrong and use the readings to explain in an email or short assignment how they are now thinking differently after seeing correct answer. Give a point or a part of a point for these revisions to their thinking.

This option allows you to see how students are thinking about big concepts or processes needed to do the work of the upcoming sequence.

Most complex option

1. Use the Test function in Blackboard to put your RAT items into a multiple choice test. Have students take the test individually as the iRAT. Give students a specific time by which they have to finish the iRAT (for example, Wednesday at 11:59 pm).
2. Create a Group for each team in Blackboard and a Discussion Board for each team where they can discuss their answers to the tRAT. Create this space for them, but allow teams to discuss their answer using other technology if they choose (texting, talking on the phone, facetime, etc.).
3. Copy the iRAT and post it as the tRAT. (f you don't know how to do this in Blackboard, we can show you!) Use the option Blackboard gives you to provide instant feedback to students about what answers are correct and why. Have students retake the test. Give students a specific time to have the tRAT completed (for example, Friday at 11:59 pm).

This option allows students time to interact and process their thinking about the RAT with their team before taking it a second time.

Completely acceptable option

Don't do the RAP. It may not be worth using this tool for you or the students. When we move to asynchronous temporary remote learning, students will often be doing fewer cycles of practice. As we focus on what pieces of practice they will do and how to give them feedback, the RAP may not be necessary. *This is perfectly acceptable and may be best for you and your students*.

4S tasks in an asynchronous remote learning environment

<u>Best option</u>

Require teams to tackle one 4S task a week.

1. Create a Group for each team in Blackboard and a Discussion Board for each team. This will create a sense of community that is similar to what they experience in your face-to-face classroom.
2. Select your most challenging 4S task from the 4S tasks you had planned to do that week. The possibilities are as varied as the kinds of 4S tasks you give students in your face-to-face class. You might, for example, give students a challenging multiple choice question, or you might require students to view a short video case and evaluate how well a theory they've studied was put into practice in that case.
    Note: If you have sorting or ranking tasks, limit the number of items to 5—keep it simple!
3. Require students to post their answer individually in the Discussion Board along with a brief (one- or two-paragraph) justification of that choice, decision, scoring etc. Use the "Participants must create a thread in order to view other threads in this forum" feature in Blackboard to ensure that students can't see their teammates' ideas until they've posted their own. Give students a specific time to post their answer and justification (for example, Wednesday at 11:59 pm).
4. A day or two later, require students to return to their team's discussion, carefully read their teammates' ideas, and post a comment to develop their own thinking. Give students a specific time to post this response (for example, Friday at 11:59 pm). This is where team interaction takes place. You might require students to:
    *   Respond to a post that extends or completes their answer. Students should reply to that post by pointing out the ways in which their group mate's answer better represents course principles by being more accurate or more complete.
    *   Respond to a post that contradicts their thinking. Students should use course principles to either defend their position in relation to this post or to change their position in relation to his post.
    *   Respond to two posts that seem to present different perspectives and use course principles to try and reconcile these perspectives.

This option allows students to use their teams to share and extend their thinking. You might want students to reach consensus, but in an asynchronous temporary remote learning environment, that becomes cumbersome and it is also unnecessary. It is acceptable to let that part of team interaction go and opt for something that is more manageable for you and for them.

<u>Completely acceptable option</u>

1. Select your most challenging 4S task from the 4S tasks you had planned to do that week. The possibilities are as varied as the kinds of 4S tasks you give students in your face-to-face class. You might, for example, give students a challenging multiple choice question, or you might require students to view a short video case and evaluate how well a theory they've studied was put into practice in that case.
    Note: If you have sorting or ranking tasks, limit the number of items to 5—keep it simple!
2. Require students to individually respond to this task and to justify their answers in a carefully constructed two paragraph essay.

This option requires students to apply course concepts in meaningful, disciplinary ways, which is a key to a significant 4S activity. This option also preserves the valuable specific choice format of a 4S activity.

Strategies to make the most of 4S tasks in an asynchronous remote learning environment

- **Make instructions to students clear**. Take the time upfront to describe the structure and length of the answer justification you want and remind students to use course principles in that justification. We often give these kinds of instructions verbally in a face-to-face class, but when we teach online we need to provide them in writing. For example, "For this task, you will view the video case twice. The first time watch the video to get an overall sense of the interaction. The second time, make notes about the details you are seeing that relate to theories A, B, and C from our course readings. Now that you've carefully viewed the video, choose which theory best explains the interaction of the two discussants in the video. In a two paragraph response, share the theory you chose, explain the theory in your own words, and then show how at least two details from the video are explained using tenets from the theory you chose. You must also provide one reason that you are questioning your choice." The detail you provide in the prompt will ensure that students do the kind of work you expect.
- **Provide structure for team responses**. If you choose to have teammates respond to one another, be sure to tell students precisely how you want them to respond in the online discussion. Without this direction, students will often revert to friendly but unproductive feedback. Focus students' feedback on particular perspectives (require them to find something they disagree about) or particular elements (require them to evaluate one part of another students work according to a particular framework) of a team mate's work. Again, give them a sense of how long this feedback should be and what structure it should have (for example, one paragraph with two specific examples).
- **Require students to reflect on how their thinking is changing**. Whether students are doing group activities or doing individual activities, their learning increases when we require them to look back over an activity or a series of activities and analyze their own learning. After an activity or a series of smaller activities, you can require students to articulate how their thinking has changed in a short analytic reflection that can be shared with you.
- **Respond to students' thinking**. Feedback is necessary for students to make the most of their work, so this aspect of our teaching needs an analogous process online. Read through students' work and post a written, auditory, or video summary response that captures the areas where students made some important progress and where students struggled. You don't need to refer to individual students here, but rather point out what the tendencies were in the class. Then provide focused feedback where you saw students struggling. It can be helpful to highlight the strong ideas or interesting attempts that individual students have made as this can help students feel that you are reading their work carefully and invested in their learning personally. This can help recreate the face-to-face classroom feeling.
- **Pace student work**. Unlike a face-to-face TBL classroom, you can't ask students to do all of a 4S task at one sitting in an asynchronous online setting. Have students post responses to an 4S task prompt one day and then come back to that prompt and respond to a team mate's post a day or two later. On a third day, they may sum up their ideas and how they've developed. For students who are working individually, you may pace them so that they are doing parts of a task across a week and reflecting on their progress toward the end of that cycle.

<u>Challenges you may face—and how to respond</u>
- **You may be faced with more student writing than you're used to seeing**. Students need to feel that you are reading their work, so be sure to look over student interactions and respond with feedback that shows you have read and analyzed their thinking. You don't need to respond on discussion boards: it's more important that you demonstrate to students that you have read and diagnosed their thinking. Share with them what the trends were across discussion boards. And highlight a few really insightful posts or responses.
- **You may worry that you need to grade in order to motivate participation in online 4S tasks.** It is helpful to provide a simple point system that communicates to students that the 4S tasks are valuable to their learning but are also a place to experiment and take risks. If the stakes are too high, students will work for right answers and not explore their thinking or the thinking of their peers (which is the whole point of 4S tasks). If the prompts you've created have two or three parts, simply look for those parts and assign points if the components are there. When your prompt is specific enough, it will require the complexity of thinking that you want students to aim for.

Peer evaluation in an asynchronous remote learning environment

Peer evaluation makes the most sense when peers are interacting intensely in a TBL course. Because asynchronous learning as outlined above will limit team interactions, it is not a good idea to do peer evaluation. In place of peer evaluation, ask students to reflect toward the end of their semester on how they've learned from their team mates during the semester and how they have developed as a member of a team. Require students to give one or two concrete examples of how being part of a team during this challenging semester will help them in their future careers, coursework, or life. This option allows students to reflect on their team performance and their teams' work.

Camaraderie in an asynchronous remote learning environment

Even if you are not meeting your students during your regularly scheduled class time on Zoom, you can still have live meetings. Holding drop-in office hours using Zoom means that students can gather with you to talk, ask questions, check in, or share concerns. If your schedule permits, hold two office hour sessions on different days and at different times to be available to more students.

Communicate frequently with students each week, reminding them about upcoming work and due dates. Post and email a guide for each week so students feel connected and clear about the rhythm of each week. Provide feedback to students about their work, both individually and as a class. Posting a video response to students about trends in students work and thinking helps students feel that you are working along with them and following their progress, even in an asynchronous environment.