Challenges and affordances of asynchronous aspects of virtual courses

Asynchronous affordances	Asynchronous challenges	Asynchronous strategies
Flexibility to optimize Learning: The asynchronous format for content delivery, activities, and assessments provides learners with the freedom to choose where and when they learn. Participant learning may be enhanced when they can choose to engage with materials, activities, and/or assignments when they are most awake and able to focus. **Time to process and reflect:** Learners have freedom to set the pace of their learning (pause, review, reflect) as they engage with learning materials and activities, which can lead to more thoughtful and informed interactions (e.g., asynchronous discussions) and help learners feel more confident in their ability to participate and contribute (i.e., not feeling put on the spot). **Higher order thinking**: Related to the above, asynchronous approaches can provide greater opportunities for higher order thinking skills such as the analysis and synthesis of arguments, resulting in deeper learning.	**Procrastination**: When learners (especially novice learners) are given a lot of freedom over their learning they may not always make the best choices and may struggle with time management and metacognition around their learning. **Can feel lonely**: Asynchronous courses where there are few opportunities for interaction between learners and with instructors can feel quite lonely and isolating for both instructors and learners. Opportunities for interaction and connection need to be designed into the course and a focus of facilitation in term. **Technology support**: Working asynchronously gives learners the freedom to learn on their own schedule, which means that many of your learners may be working through content or activities outside regular working hours, when you, TAs, and/or learning technology	**Support learning to learn and time management:** Who doesn't struggle with time management from time-to-time? Learners can struggle more often with managing their time in virtual courses because they are novices, so they lack the experience to know how long learning and assessments take or lack the metacognitive skills to self-assess their own learning; they may be young and struggling to organize and juggle all their classes and commitments or returning to academics from many years in the workforce, which may have different expectations. You can scaffold learning how to learn online: • from the beginning of the course, by setting clear expectations in due dates and deadlines for ALL the tasks that learners are expected to complete in the course and encourage learners to note these dates in your first communications with them. • by providing weekly reminders by email or announcements, indicating what they should be working on and what learning outcomes and assessments they should be completing. • by providing guidance that supports the development of good learning skills (see Going deeper resources below). • by reducing the barriers of technology by providing a list of resources (e.g., 'how to' articles or videos) for technologies used in the course so learners can easily find high quality answers to common challenges, particularly if the technology is used for class engagement (e.g., everyone contributes to a WordCloud generator)

Inclusivity, equity: Every learner can interact, no matter how many people are in the class. Even the most timid of learners can be involved. Learners with accommodations can engage with the course and their peers with greater equity of opportunity because asynchronous conversations cannot be interrupted.	support may not be available to help them.	or to create a product for assessment (e.g., how to record a narration for a PowerPoint presentation). **Design more opportunities for human interaction:** To help bring your asynchronous course, content, and or assessments to life and help learners feel connected, consider building opportunities for learners to engage in dialogue, debate, problem-solving and/or to give and receive feedback. There are many ways to do this synchronously or asynchronously. For example: • add a peer-feedback step into your assessments. • break a large assessment up into smaller pieces (scaffolding) that students can submit for feedback from you or a TA early in the assessment/term. • schedule virtual drop-in sessions structured around a bottle-neck (challenging) concept, current events relevant to course topics, up-coming assessments, or create a sense of community by hosting a virtual (content relevant) game, such as Jeopardy. • consider group-work if you have an assessment that is large enough and complex enough that it warrants a team-based approach. Get learner buy-in by helping learners understand why the work is best done in a group. **Let students know when you will be available to help:** Set clear expectations for students about how long they can expect to wait for a response to an email or question (24-hrs is common practice). Set regular office hours or times when you (and/or TAs) will be online and responding to questions or discussion posts. Some learners may choose to structure their learning around those times when they know they'll be able to get support quickly if needed.