

# Frequently Asked Questions About Online Teaching

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Dr. Michael Goldman, professor at the University of San Francisco and Executive Board member of the North American Case Research Association, recently shared with *The Wine Business Case Research Journal* his insights into teaching case studies online.

## **What factors can make teaching cases online successful, and what additional issues need to be addressed in an online environment?**

The amount of preparation required of students and instructors for online synchronous case learning is similar to that for physical classroom sessions, although additionally having an appropriate device, connection, lighting, and desk space is important. Some students may perceive an online case session to be more passive, and that they can hide online more than they can hide in a physical room. Other students may try to connect to the case session on-the-go, without dedicating the time and space required to participate fully. When I called on a student in an online class recently, we found him working at a sports event, unable to connect via video or audio, and noticeably distracted by the activities around him!

Instructors also need to reconsider their environment when preparing to teach online. Whether the instructor wants to sit or stand during the case discussion, the video camera, microphone, screen, lighting, and background settings and layout need attention. An instructor doesn't need a dedicated home studio to be set-up for an effective session, as long the background is appropriate, you are facing more light in front of you than behind you, the video camera is around eye-level, the screen with the students' faces is near the video camera, and the audio is clear and consistent. Instructors need to set the expectations for a professional, focused, and fully prepared case discussion, no matter what the technology interface will be.

Instructors also need to prepare the structure and flow of the online case debate, which should take the unique online learning environment into account. For example, online synchronous case learning is best facilitated in short bursts, perhaps of around 30-40 minutes, interspersed by individual and small group application work. Students and faculty have reported how much more tiring a long online session can be, and so the class structure should include periods of being off video, perhaps on chat, discussion threads, or offline.

### **What factors make teaching cases online difficult, and how can they be managed successfully?**

Most online case teaching is happening via live video-conference sessions on laptops or personal devices. We are therefore relying mostly on verbal responses, or typed chat comments, and are missing out on the meaning that can be communicated via body language and movement in a physical classroom session. Great case teaching often sees the instructor moving around the room to create energy, create pressure, and reinforce some responses, which needs to be facilitated differently within an online environment. In a physical classroom setting, instructors can also easily call on students by quickly scanning the room and reading body language.

To facilitate these important interpersonal dynamics of rich case learning in an online environment, instructors need to be more directive in cold-calling students, based on planning and preparation before the class. I have also found it helpful to warn some students before the online case session that I planned to call on them, and encouraged them to prepare specific sections. This approach helps structure the conversation with key milestones, and ensures that a range of voices (especially some quieter ones) are heard during the class. Video-conference technology includes an opportunity for students to “raise a hand” via the application, which instructors can use when they are familiar with the multiple application boxes and tools on the screen.

It is important for instructors to manage audio access in an online case session. My solution is to keep all students on mute via my instructor dashboard, and manually control who gets the opportunity to speak. This approach avoids multiple students trying to speak at the same time, especially when there is a delay on the line. I try and keep track of who has spoken, and the quality of their contribution, through a printed class-list on my desk, which is almost impossible to do as one person in real-time in a physical classroom setting. I use both new questions as well as follow-up questions in an online case session, which challenges the students to pay attention to the flow of the entire conversation, as they are expected to do in a physical classroom. Although I can't use body language to facilitate a short one-on-one debate between two students, as I would do in a physical classroom, I can still facilitate this case teaching technique verbally and through my control of everyone's audio.

Instructors also need to think about how to use silence in an online case discussion. In a physical class setting, instructors often use silence to challenge students' thinking, encourage deeper reflection, and signal responses that may be incomplete. Online environments are often associated with constant conversation or content (almost

like TV), where silences may be interpreted by some students as a lack of preparation or a connectivity problem. Instructors should prepare students for this facilitation tool, and use facial expressions to communicate planned debate silences.

### **What are some best practice recommendations?**

1. Increase the time and scope of preparation for the class. It is much tougher to ad lib and “wing it” online.
2. Be careful about giving a “speech” or lecturing for too long online. Halve the amount of time you would typically give a mini-lecture within a case session, and allocate more time to structured conversation. Use whiteboard or note functionality in the video-conference tools to communicate content beyond voice and typical static slides.
3. Make much more use of asynchronous learning components, beyond typical student case preparation. Consider more small group syndicate-like discussions about some case questions, individual discussion thread contributions, collaborative co-creation of shared documents, and peer assessment of written or multi-media work.

### **Are there any considerations unique to teaching cases online, as opposed to teaching other material?**

If one uses cases to teach online in a Socratic, discussion-based way, then facilitating the kind of participant-centered conversation among students is very different to most one-way online delivery of content. Online learning, even when it is synchronous, is often a lean-back and passive experience, similar to many of the webinars we are used to “consuming” online. Teaching cases online requires a very different set-up to structure and facilitate student learning through synchronous and asynchronous discussions, where the learning happens through the debates, reflections, and applications.

### **Do you have any suggestions for creating and maintaining student engagement?**

In addition to some of the comments above on this topic, I find that relevance, energy, and interaction are helpful. Students are more engaged when they understand the relevance of any content or conversation to them. For example, how does this session relate to their current or future work roles? How does this session fit into the syllabus or assessments? How can they use what they are learning from this case to be more effective in other situations?

Building and managing energy is different in an online environment, but still useful. Instead of relying on my whole body to communicate energy, my focus has to be on my face, eyes, hands, and voice. Although I often speed up my speech to communicate energy, this is more dangerous online due to connectivity issues, and so try to vary

my pace and use emphases more. I try to remember to smile more and keep eye contact with the tiny laptop camera at the top of my screen, rather than spending most of my time looking at the students' faces spread across the screen.

In the same way that it matters with physical classroom sessions, ongoing interactions through conversation, that involve as many students as possible, is useful in an online case session. Some video-conference platforms have integrated polling software that can be used in the same way as a physical classroom vote. Instructors should keep moving the conversation around the room, and also use small online break-out sessions in the same way as buzz groups are used in a physical classroom setting.

### **Do you have any suggestions for promoting discussion and collaboration online?**

In addition to some of the previous comments, I find that a class participation grade is a helpful tool to encourage active participation by most students. As mentioned before, I find it easier to track this in an online case teaching session, because I am seated at my desk with the class list, and can review the chat records and audio transcript afterwards. I remind students during each online case session about the grade and the opportunity to contribute, and also reach out individually to those few students who are not scoring well a few times during a course or semester.

For online collaborations, such as shared slides or documents, it is helpful to use peer contribution feedback. I have asked students in a group to provide feedback to each other about the amount and quality of each other's contribution, and have also created a survey that allows me to adjust the group grade based on peer input. The informal peer pressure that follows when one student is not contributing or appearing often on the list of document edits also helps.

### **Would you have any further resources to recommend?**

[Emerald Publishing Cases Hub \(https://caseshub.emeraldgroupublishing.com\)](https://caseshub.emeraldgroupublishing.com)

This site includes a range of resources to help instructors write and teach cases. Additional guidance on teaching cases online will be added shortly.

[Harvard Business Publishing Education \(https://hbsp.harvard.edu/teaching-online-resources\)](https://hbsp.harvard.edu/teaching-online-resources)

This site includes recordings of recent webinars on teaching online and teaching cases online, as well as a number of articles to help instructors make this transition.

[Ivey Publishing \(https://www.iveycases.com/News/watch-our-webinar-series\)](https://www.iveycases.com/News/watch-our-webinar-series)

This site includes recordings of recent webinars on teaching online and teaching cases online.

[Case Centre \(https://www.thecasecentre.org/educators/casemethod/resources/movingOnline\)](https://www.thecasecentre.org/educators/casemethod/resources/movingOnline)

This site includes links to a number of recent webinars on teaching online and teaching cases online, as well as to a number of articles to help instructors make this transition.

### **About Dr. Michael M. Goldman**

Dr. Michael M. Goldman is an award-winning marketing & sales teacher, researcher and advisor to organizations in a number of countries. From investigating how to retain baseball season ticket holders of the San Francisco Giants, to advising the MTN Group on leveraging their FIFA World Cup sponsorship, to developing sales skills workshops with the Los Angeles Clippers, Michael has worked with students, managers and clients to enhance their abilities to acquire, grow and retain profitable customers.

Michael is based in California as a tenured Associate Professor in the University of San Francisco's Sport Management Master's Program. He also holds an Adjunct Faculty role with the Gordon Institute of Business Science in Johannesburg, facilitates the BrandQuad series of workshops in Kenya, is the Editor-in-Chief of Emerald Publishing's Emerging Markets Case Studies, and is on the Executive Board of the North American Case Research Association. As a management scholar, he has published a range of academic research articles, case studies, and book chapters internationally. His peer-reviewed research has been published in, among others, the California Management Review, Management Decision, European Sport Management Quarterly, and International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship. He has also published a number of case studies with the Case Research Journal, Ivey Publishing and Emerald Publishing.

Through these roles, Michael has assisted organizations as diverse as PepsiCo, SABMiller, Safaricom, World Rugby, Sasol, Cricket South Africa, Business & Arts South Africa, and the United Nations Development Program. He has addressed audiences around the world, as well as been a regular commentator on business issues in the popular press and media.

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