

# BUILDING COMMUNITY IN ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Below are some asynchronous and synchronous strategies for breaking the ice on the first day of class and maintaining a healthy sense of community this semester.

## Strategy

## Asynchronous

## Synchronous



### Quick check-in

Start an informal discussion board and ask students to post on a consistent basis (e.g., 1x class day, once a week). They can use words or images to express feelings about the class, homework, concepts, or even daily life. Use Canvas or a website like Padlet.

At the top of your class session, ask students to share how they are feeling, what's on their mind, or what they've been reading or watching. Send out an anonymous poll (through Instapoll, Slido, etc.) and ask them to write a word or phrase about their responses.



### Highs & Lows

Ask students to causally share a high and a low at the top of a submitted assignment. It will help give you a sense of how they are feeling when you can't pick up on non-verbal cues.

Go around the class and ask students to share their best moment and then their most frustrating moment of the day or week. This can be as concise or as involved as you permit.



### Journaling

Create an anonymous wellness check-in survey (e.g., through Google forms, Padlet, Slido) and ask students to check in whenever they might need to. Encourage students to track their own thoughts, emotions, and stressors personally.

Give students time at the top of class to free write about the material they prepared for class, a relevant contemporary event, or how they are feeling today. Be clear that this is a space for them to reflect and that sharing with the class is optional.



### Storytelling

Create an informal discussion board and ask students to post short, appropriate anecdotes intended to make each other laugh. These can be from real life, a friend, or the internet.

Storytelling can help break the ice at the top of class (i.e. "Did anyone catch the UT game on Saturday?"; "Did anyone do something fun this weekend?" etc.)



### Sensory

Create a discussion board and ask students to post photos, works of art, gifs, etc. that signify a positive sensory experience. Add prompts to generate feedback (e.g., "What's the most delicious ice cream flavor?")

Ask students to share a memory or current experience (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch) they are enjoying during this time during a check in or check out.

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## Strategy



### Movement

## Asynchronous

Remind students to step away from their screens to practice self care. Recommend a great place to walk or hike, a nice place to grab a coffee, a set of stretches or movements, or yoga poses.

## Synchronous

Consider using a brief moment of class time to allow students to stretch, jump up and down, or move around their room to help maintain focus.



### Mindfulness

Ask students to share a moment of peace from their week. This could be an image, a movie or song recommendation, or a suggestion for an activity they do to relieve stress. Share links to relaxing music, breathing exercises. Remind students of CHMC often.

Take a moment at some point in class to incorporate a communal breathing exercise, short guided meditation, chair yoga, or relaxing musical interlude.- Remind students of CHMC often. Consider walking them through the website through screen sharing during class early on in the semester.

## Tips for Developing a Sense of Community Without In-Person Sessions:

- Implement a course agreement/contract and revisit as needed.
- Post and repost direct links to campus resources (i.e. SSD, CMHC, Health Care Services, BCAL) and remind students that you are happy to connect them with these resources at any time. Remind them that you care about their wellbeing.
- Encourage students to alter their Zoom name to include their pronouns and preferred name or nickname so others will know how to address them.
- Establish and maintain clear boundaries related to behavior and language on Zoom/discussion boards while still leaving room for humor (i.e. "Office Hours with a beach backdrop and sunglasses" or "Bring your pet to class day")
- Begin and end classes with a check-in and a check out (consider using "an appreciation, an apology, or an ah-ha moment technique at the end of class).
- Check in often over email, Canvas announcement, or whichever platform works best for you. Try to send a weekly reminder or review that students can expect at a certain time. Hold synchronous office hours and remind students often about your accessibility during these times and, if possible, at other times by appointment.