

A Guide for Blended Learning

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### **Introduction**

Digital advancement has created new opportunities to support life-long learners. The introduction of digital e-books, virtual learning tools, online learning management systems has created new opportunities for learners to enhance their knowledge, content, and skills. Blended learning is one of the new learning environment which integrates the digital tools for a combination of face-to-face and online learning experience (Horn & Staker, 2015). There are four forms of the blended learning model to consider where the instructor and school administrator have to decide the right model fit that provides an overall representation for the student body. Most importantly, both Technological, Pedagogical, Content, & Knowledge framework (TPACK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) framework developed by Dr. Ruben Puentedura (2013) guide to incorporate the technology component into instructions to ensure a successful rollout, from concept to implementation to evaluation. This guide will provide an overview and walkthrough on how to design a blended learning course.

### **Definition of Blended Learning**

Blended learning is an educational approach style with a focus on the integration of digital tools that combines both face-to-face and online learning experiences. The highlighted quality of blended learning is where the student learns a part of the lesson through online in which student has control over the location, time, the pace of content deliverance (Horn & Staker, 2015). For instance, Blackboard is an online learning management system where students can easily access the course content and complete their assignments at the student's own time and pace (Blackboard, 2019). The student meets in a traditional brick and mortar location setting.

The instructor guides and supervises a part of the learning experience. Blended learning can be viewed as a gateway to bridge the gap between traditional brick-and-mortar classroom and the growing acceptance of the connected digital learning realm. Besides, this learning approach provides both student and instructor a unique integrated learning experience through various social interaction opportunities and the development of one's communication skills.

### **Why go for blended?**

There are many reasons why an instructor and learner will prefer blended learning over alternative options. Elements identified making blended the recommended choice: availability and accessibility to content, flexibility for revision, the cost-effectiveness, and social interaction (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). The highlighted reasons give the instructor the flexibility to design a course that is cost-effective while providing learners new learning medium to learn, interact, and communicate.

### **Blended Learning Models**

Blended learning models can have many styles and approaches. The four typical blended learning environments are flex, rotation, a la carte, and enriched virtual (Horn & Staker, 2015). The following is a review of each blended learning model.

**Flex:** The flex model allows students to manage and learn the content on fluid schedules and to allocate as much needed time on specific learning content. Online learning is part of this learning model. Instructors guide on a required basis while students navigate through course content and curriculum. This model can give students control over their learning.

**Rotation:** The rotation model allows students to learn from one modality to the next one. This model has four different variations: individual rotation, station rotation, flipped classroom, and lab rotation. The individual rotates through stations, but on assigned schedules set by an

instructor. Students do not need to participate in every station; just the ones assigned to them. The station rotation model enables students to have one online learning station and to exchange stations on a fixed schedule. The flipped classroom model flips the traditional course deliverance between class time and homework. Students learn the course content at home via online coursework, and teachers use class time focused on projects. The lab rotation model involves online learning that incorporates the use of a computer lab, allowing for flexible arrangements to use an existing computer school facility.

**A La Carte:** The A La Carte model has students take an online course when a course content or learning opportunity not offered through the face to face classroom. It has become a popular option for students who are interested in taking advanced placement courses, which is not provided by their schools.

**Enriched virtual:** The Enriched Virtual model has students complete the majority of coursework online outside of school, but have a required face-to-face learning session with a teacher at school. This learning environment will enable students to learn and in the process of holding a part-time job to support their way through college.

Not one of this blended learning model is better than others. The decision to go with a particular model lies between the instructor and learner. School district has to evaluate, assess, and decide which methods fit best for their student population and offers the maximum learning opportunity for their students. The implementation should address the following factors: student's objectives, goals, budget, and learning.

### **Elements of a well-designed instructional design for blended learning course.**

A well-designed instructional design involves a planned course of action. The enhanced design improves the success rate of the course and the engagement. The design approach

involves five parameters: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation, gauges the effectiveness of the blended course.

At the analysis phase, blended learning relies on technology for a portion of the course. An analysis of the current digital environment; what tools are out there, and is it sufficient to support the course load? For instance, learners need access to a personal computer, internet connection, video camera, and microphone for the online web conference. The design of the blended course is essential to establish the learning objectives to align with the digital tools that will support the online learning environment. Besides, the instructor can use the SAMR model as guidance for moving through technology adoption to find more meaningful and useful ways of having technology in teaching (Portnoy, 2018).

Before developing the course components, the instructor must decide on which one of the four blended models to focus on: flex, rotation, a la carte, and enriched virtual (Horn & Staker, 2015). After selecting the blended model, the instructor needs to incorporate the digital component into the blended learning environment. A great instructor requires an understanding of how technology relates to the pedagogy and the content (Mishra & Kohler, 2006), an essential element of the TPACK framework. From the implementation stage, before launching the blended course, the teacher should have the proper training in the digital tools to ensure that the instructor is capable of handling situations when arise.

The evaluation stage is an ongoing process to ensure the design and the integration of the digital tool into the blended learning environment. To ensure working for all stakeholders requires to get feedback and inputs from learners on the satisfaction with the system and learning outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Blended learning is an emerging trend that learners and instructor will embrace the new online learning digital format. It is imperative to have the execution planned out accordingly to ensure a successful rollout; the instructor can use the well-known TPACK and SAMR frameworks as the guide for technology integration into the learning content.

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