

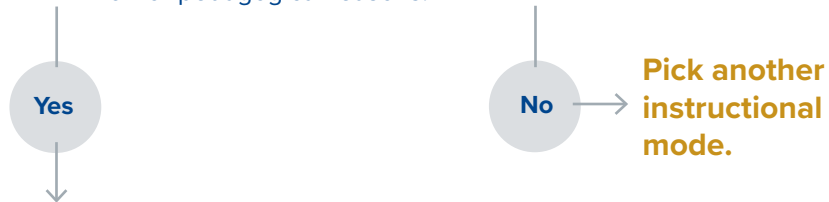


# Flowchart and Guidelines for Academic Administrators and Faculty for Remote Synchronous Instructional Mode

Academic administrators and faculty can use this flowchart to help determine if Remote Synchronous (RS) is the right instructional mode for a particular course. For more information on course modes, visit [registrar.psu.edu](http://registrar.psu.edu).

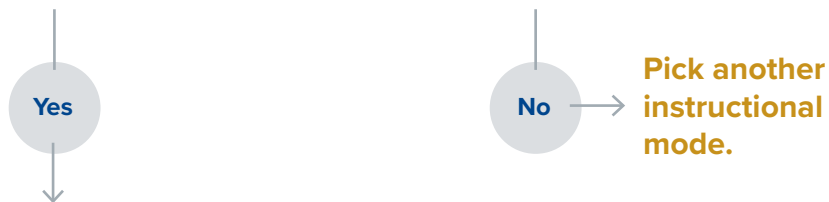
### 1. Does the class meet the definition of remote synchronous delivery (RS)?

**Definition:** Class meets remotely at days/times listed. 100% of the class will be taught remote synchronously. Instructors can offer up to less than 25 percent of a remote synchronous class asynchronously, a flexibility to manage their own absences, whether due to illness or other unavoidable circumstances, during travel, or for pedagogical reasons.



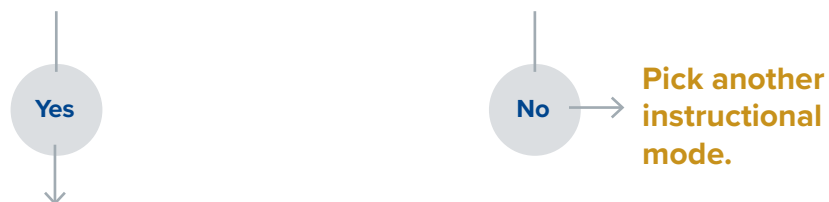
### 2. Will the class meet course learning objectives if it is taught in RS mode?

See guidelines on page 2 for information about meeting course learning objectives and using effective pedagogy in RS mode.

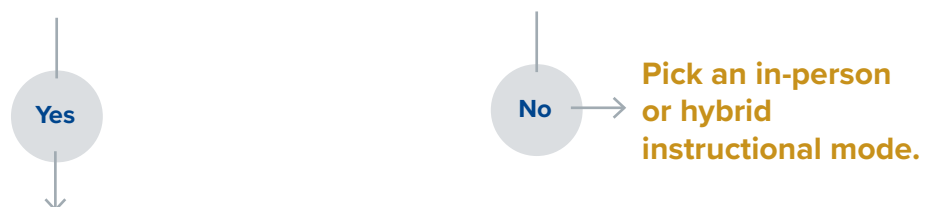


### 3. Will the class have scheduled "regular and substantive" interaction if taught in RS mode?

See guidelines on page 2 for definition of "regular and substantive."



4. Is the unit offering the appropriate balance of courses that 1) meets the expectations of on-campus students, 2) allows all students to make satisfactory progress towards degree, and 3) takes into account the needs of international students to have a full-time course load with a maximum of one remote course per semester? See Appendix A on page 3 for international students and other considerations.



**Remote Synchronous is appropriate.**

## **ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATOR GUIDELINES FOR REMOTE SYNCHRONOUS INSTRUCTIONAL MODE**

A decision to offer a course in a remote synchronous (RS) instructional mode is made jointly by the instructor and appropriate academic administrator, i.e., Department Head, Division or School Head, Director of Academic Affairs, and/or Associate Dean, in the context of the balance of course offerings across the unit. The dean or chancellor of the college or campus is responsible for determining the appropriate academic administrator to work with instructors in the unit to determine the appropriate instructional mode of a course.

**The instructor and appropriate academic administrator must consider each of the four factors listed below:**

- 1. Definition of an RS instructional mode:** Current definitions of RS and other instructional modes can be found on the website of the University Registrar. For a course to be offered RS it must meet the University definition: “Class meets remotely at days/times listed. 100% of the class will be taught online synchronously. Instructors can offer up to less than 25 percent of a remote synchronous class asynchronously, a flexibility to manage their own absences, whether due to illness or other unavoidable circumstances, during travel, or for pedagogical reasons.”

RS courses not offered on the Digital Learning Cooperative (DLC) are only open to the students enrolled at the campus offering the course.

- 2. Alignment of course learning objectives with instructional mode:** Course learning objectives and effective pedagogy should drive the choice of instructional mode. The offering of a course in remote synchronous mode is to be limited to instances where remote synchronous instruction provides clear opportunities for student success. In all cases, the instructor must be able to meet all the course learning objectives in the chosen instructional mode.

As with all courses, RS instruction should be of the highest quality. It is strongly recommended that faculty planning to use remote synchronous delivery as an instructional mode utilize instructional design resources and work with instructional designers. Likewise, units are encouraged to make instructional design resources available to faculty who are interested in exploring the possibility of remote synchronous instruction. Syllabi for remote synchronous courses should include a statement on the availability of technology and learning support resources for students in the course.

- 3. Regular and substantive interaction:** The course and syllabus must demonstrate regular and substantive interaction to ensure high quality as well as to meet Middle States Commission on Higher Education’s (MSCHE) accreditation standards for Distance Education. RS falls under the definition of Distance Education as courses that “deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and support regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor either synchronously or asynchronously” (34 Code of Federal Regulations § 600.2).

**34 Code of Federal Regulations § 600.2 defines regular and substantive interaction as follows:**

### **Regular interaction**

An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors, prior to the student’s completion of a course or competency -

- providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency;
- monitoring the student’s academic engagement and success, and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

### **Substantive interaction**

For purposes of this definition [of distance education], substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:

- providing direct instruction;
- assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework;
- providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
- facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or

- other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

Remote synchronous instruction, especially when students have their cameras on, provides robust opportunities for substantive engagement between the instructor and the students. Examples of course activities that support regular and substantive interaction between the instructor and students are below:

1. Instructor-initiated discussions
2. A synchronous presentation by the instructor with student participation
3. Graded assignments with feedback from the instructor
4. Office hours

Examples of course activities that do NOT satisfy one or more of the criteria for regular and substantive interaction are below:

1. Auto-graded quizzes, 2. Video lectures

- 4. Balance of course offerings across the unit:** The academic administrator ensures that the unit offers the appropriate balance of courses in different instructional modes and at different times of the day and week. In doing so, the academic administrator must pay special attention to the following (see Appendix A for details):
- Expectations of students enrolled at residential colleges and campuses
  - Needs of international students
  - Needs of veterans and military personnel
  - Accreditation and reporting requirements

AAPPM Policy C-1 provides principles for developing the unit's undergraduate course offerings to ensure that students can make normal academic progress toward completion of their degree.

#### **Appendix A: Considerations for Balance of Course Offerings**

**Student expectations:** Residential students expect a rich, vibrant, in-person learning experience. In general, the balance of courses in different instructional modes should be such that students attending residential campuses and colleges can easily build a schedule that consists of all, or almost all, in-person courses if they so desire. Students desiring a fully remote schedule may enroll in Penn State World Campus.

**International students** on F-1 and J-1 visas who are required to maintain enrollment in a full-time course load (12 credits for undergraduate students, 9 credits for graduate students) but may enroll in at most one course or 3 credits each semester that is offered via online or distance education. Graduate programs in particular must be mindful of this limitation given that 1) graduate students, in contrast to undergraduate students, typically take all or most of their courses in their graduate major (e.g., there are no general education requirements in graduate programs that might otherwise provide scheduling flexibility), 2) graduate programs of study are frequently structured in a sequential fashion, particularly core courses (thereby limiting the flexibility when a graduate student takes a particular graduate course), and 3) total course offerings in some graduate programs may be limited (again, thereby limiting the flexibility when a graduate student schedules courses).

**Veterans and military personnel** receive a higher housing stipend as students taking in-person courses versus remote synchronous or asynchronous courses and could therefore be adversely impacted if they are unable to build a schedule that includes in-person courses. Veterans may take a mix of in-person and remote courses and still receive a stipend at the higher rate. Veterans and military personnel with questions about the housing stipend or other benefits should consult with Penn State's resources for veterans and military personnel.

#### **Accreditation and Reporting Requirements:**

See Department of Education Guidance on Accreditation and Eligibility Requirements for Distance Education ([fsapartners.ed.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/2021-01/DistanceEducationAccreditationAttachment.pdf](https://fsapartners.ed.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/2021-01/DistanceEducationAccreditationAttachment.pdf)). Especially note that "The Department also reminds accrediting agencies that, notwithstanding the flexibilities provided in response to the national pandemic, their policies must require approval of a substantive change whenever an accredited institution increases distance education to exceed more than 50 percent of a program or of the institution's overall delivery of education."