Blended learning

> **Blended learning is an umbrella term that most commonly refers to some combination of in-class or face-to-face learning and online learning.**

Learners increasingly expect to be able to fit learning English into their own busy lives and working schedules. This is particularly true of university students, and adults who are busy professionals, and as we have seen in previous chapters, there is a wealth of informal online learning options that learners can engage in, if they so choose. For those learners who expect some degree of choice and flexibility over where, how and when they learn, but want this to form part of a formal or structured course of study, blended learning makes sense. Blended learning options are also increasingly common with learners under the age of 18. Like hybrid teaching (see **13**), blended learning options were brought into the educational mainstream on a large scale due to the COVID-19 pandemic; in some institutions, blended learning options came to stay.

There is no one right blend. The amount of face-to-face instruction versus online instruction can vary widely, and will depend on your teaching context, the needs and expectations of your learners, the resources you have available, and the content and design of your course, to name just a few factors. Let's look at a number of possible blended learning scenarios.

1   A business English teacher offers her learners three hours of classes a week. Because her learners are busy professionals, they cannot come to more than one hour per week of physical class time. So she offers her learners an additional two hours per week of online work. One of those hours takes place via a live video-conferencing session; the other hour requires her learners to complete asynchronous tasks, individually, in pairs, and/or in small groups via a **VLE**.
2   A language school in the UK offers intensive 25-hour-per-week summer courses to international students of all ages. After they leave the UK, they complete an additional ten hours of online work over several weeks.

3   A secondary school teacher has her learners for two hours of class a week in school. She runs a synchronous WhatsApp lesson once a week for 45 minutes, with her learners completing short tasks via text and audio in real time.

4   A primary school teacher meets her learners for three hours a week of face-to-face EFL classes. For homework, she regularly sets tasks using a range online tools, such as creating online slides, creating mobile phone video or audio clips in English, and posting to the class **blog** or **wiki**.

Scenario 4 is often where teachers start experimenting with blended learning, if they have a choice.

The best way to start introducing a blend of face-to-face and online into your teaching, is to start small, preferably with one class, and offering as little as ten percent of classroom work online, possibly simply as an extra like in scenario 4 above. Once you and your learners gain confidence with the tools and online work, you can build more online components into your course.

Blended learning is most effective when it is carefully planned, with the face-to-face and online components complementing and extending each other. Start with an overview of your syllabus or coursebook, and decide which elements to offer online, and which to offer in the physical classroom. Mapping your coursebook syllabus for blended delivery over an entire month or term can help ensure continuity and the effective integration of the various parts.

Using a blended model does not necessarily require expensive technologies, or for you to work in a high resource context. For example, email or group messaging apps like Telegram or WhatsApp are possible low tech alternatives. However, in a fully blended course, it makes sense to try and keep your learners' tasks and work in one place online, such as in a class wiki, a blog or in a VLE. Whatever tool you use for the blended part of your course, start small, try it out, get feedback from your learners, and then adjust your task types and online delivery tools in the light of this.