

## Interview Style Guest Presentations that Enhance Learning

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100% face-to-face (F2F) learning and delivery in higher-education is becoming more of a past memory than a continued reality. Online learning and delivery has existed for quite some time and has now become essential during the 2020/2021 COVID-19 crisis, especially here in Australia. Once the crisis subsides, these two forms of delivery will merge into what has been tagged 'hybrid' delivery - providing learning choices that the student will make to best suit their lifestyle.

As Shannon Flynn notes<sup>1</sup>: 'Hybrid learning is a reliable method of teaching for higher education. It combines online and in-person learning as some students watch virtually and others go to the classroom. Hybrid learning can improve the flexibility and customization of classes, the accessibility of learning and the use of tools during courses. This experience facilitates an all-around better teaching and learning environment for educators and students in higher education. Though it has been an option for several years, the (COVID-19) pandemic has emphasized its importance and functionality. It's more essential than ever that educators find a way to connect students while keeping everyone physically safe'.

Hybrid teaching may involve synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. Synchronous learning is interactive, two-way online or distance education that happens in real time with a teacher, whereas asynchronous learning occurs virtually online and through prepared resources, without real-time teacher-led interaction.

The greatest task in all forms of education, is how to best engage the student to increase learning absorption, and for myself, I much prefer synchronous teaching, as learning outcomes are much stronger.

The University of Colorado Denver website<sup>2</sup> notes: **'The Advantages of Synchronous Teaching:**

1. Immediate personal engagement between students and instructors, which may create greater feelings of community and lessen feelings of isolation;
2. More responsive exchanges between students and instructors, which may prevent miscommunication or misunderstanding'.

As we know from life experiences, we learn best when we are drawn to something that provides strong relatability. It is therefore essential for the lecturer to know how to read their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cybintsolutions.com/3-benefits-of-hybrid-learning/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://clas.ucdenver.edu/working-remotely/faculty/pedagogy-time-disruption/advantages-and-disadvantages-synchronous-and-asynchronous-teaching>

students, and to provide interesting and entertaining content delivery – and preferably ‘live’. I am convinced that spontaneous reaction and interaction with the content topic and with the student at that precise intuitive and interactive moment is essential for students to experience and absorb the deepest learning.

It is essential that the lecturer shows care for their students, by enriching them with meaningful learning experiences, such as real-life business stories to heighten enthusiasm and passion for the student. This type of learning content is priceless.

I also believe that the lecturer now needs to be a performer rather than just a teacher - delivering content, not unlike a television presenter – capturing and holding interest, speaking clearly with enthusiasm in the delivery of the story, and providing information that sticks with the viewer.

The University of Washington<sup>3</sup> (USA) notes: ‘Research has demonstrated that engaging students in the learning process increases their attention and focus, motivates them to practice higher-level critical thinking skills, and promotes meaningful learning experiences. Instructors who adopt a student-centred approach to instruction increase opportunities for student engagement, which then helps everyone more successfully achieve the course’s learning objectives’.

In one of my articles, *‘Never Lose The Moment’*<sup>4</sup> I note that **‘Change is essential** - the transition from face-to-face to online teaching, stemming from the global pandemic of COVID-19, has provided fresh visionary platforms for creatives, academics, and business entrepreneurs. Delivery of learning materials in the online environment cannot remain the same as classroom delivery, as lecturers now need to grab hold of each and every moment and nurture their student audience with continual engagement through heightening interest, introducing relevant surprise events, and allowing more fluid interaction through increased student participation’.

The institution where I lecture has been using guest lecturer presentations for a few years, which are a wonderful tool to value-add to student learning whether online or in a hybrid teaching environment. However, in using this method the guest presenter needs to be completely comfortable operating the audio and visual equipment in the delivery classroom which interfaces with ‘blackboard collaborate’<sup>5</sup> - our delivery platform. It is best that the presenter understands how to fly that model plane safely (by way of analogy), usually requiring some flight training or there will be mishaps and accidents along the route. As the guest presenters are not usually staff members, they would be unfamiliar with the tech tools being used.

So, in 2021, I implemented a highly effective approach with the use of ‘interview style guest presentations’, where I, as the lecturer, act as the interviewer, interviewing a successful entrepreneurial guest as the feature performer.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://teaching.washington.edu/topics/engaging-students-in-learning/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ubss.edu.au/never-lose-the-moment/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.blackboard.com/en-apac/teaching-learning/collaboration-web-conferencing/blackboard-collaborate>

This style of offering is unique to the classroom, as it is more in the vein of a fireside chat<sup>6</sup> along the lines of a television host and guest, rather than a TEDx-talk format<sup>7</sup> The fireside chat interview style events take place in the lecture room which is fitted out not unlike a television set for the event, with a comfortable 2-seater leather lounge (for the guest) and a 1-seater matching leather chair (for the interviewer) with coffee table in front of the lounge set. The backdrop image, behind the set, is a wall projected view of our stunning Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House, creating an attractive tourism type feel, an aid to advertising the impeccable location of Sydney, Australia – as most of the institutes' cohort are from overseas.

The set design in the classroom provides an inviting and homey environment, like a living room television talk show. This interview style format allows students to feel more in the moment and to interact more comfortably during the class event, thereby invigorating student participation.

I consider and engage the best suited business entrepreneurs to interview, then set class dates that coincide well with the subject unit content. I then conduct thorough background research about the guest and prepare the flow of questions for the interview. These questions are designed to benefit learning content with discussions about their business stories and career experience. I liaise with the guest ahead of the event date so that they are comfortable with the questions, and for the guest to better understand how the event will be framed.

Interview style guest presentations enhance learning in the classroom because they are spontaneous whilst at the same time are focused with a clear plan. This method helps hold viewer interest. The interviewer is the producer, the editor and the notional pilot, steering the ship according to the swells and currents of the moment. The interviewer needs to feel and understand the moment and move swiftly and accurately in the interview chair by delivering and producing clear, open and comfortable conversation with the guest.

With this interview style format, the guest does not have much preparation to consider, as the interviewer will be the active event 'juggler'. The guest, having been pre-informed of the questions that they have agreed to, can relax and go with the flow as long as the interviewer is taking charge and never losing the moment. It is also important for the interviewer to entice the students from time to time during the interview to help get them excited, giving them something to relate to. This will maximize engagement during the Q&A element, in the last 15 minutes of the event. Care for and engagement of the students is critical in teaching. Interaction along the way from the students is encouraged, if online, via the 'chat box' and open mic when called upon.

A friendly, warm and entertaining environment is sought from this fireside chat interview format, which is designed to benefit learning outcomes by providing an interesting backdrop, feel and production style for a more engaged learning experience. I also take on the role, at the institution, to arrange interview style presentations for other subjects in other lecturers' classrooms. The fireside chat style events have been well-received with positive response and outcomes from numerous student surveys.

Michael Roberto<sup>8</sup>, Trustee Professor of Management at Bryant University, previously faculty member at Harvard Business School notes: 'Students form judgments about their courses and

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<sup>6</sup> <https://medium.com/@Slidoapp/why-and-how-to-organize-fireside-chats-at-your-event-74ee55e90334>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ted.com/watch/tedx-talks>

<sup>8</sup> <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/inspiring-minds/engaging-students-on-the-first-day-and-every-day>

their instructors within the opening moments of a class. When teachers fail to hook students' attention up front, engagement remains a struggle for the rest of the semester. To me, engagement is also about showing the students you care. An engaged student is an inspired one'.

The interview event is recorded which then forms a part of the institute's video publication series, a library series of scholarship which can be re-used and shared across various learning platforms and subjects. Additionally, these publications promote continued learning for our alumni and other scholars.

The video productions also allow for short 'one off edits' of select 'single questions and answers' to use as 'podcast titbits' for social media posts, therein creating a 'library' for lecturers to grab any short audio file relevant to their topic to intersperse in their teaching. Lecturers can use these short audio files of a single question & answer to value-add to their power point slides as snappy audiophile learning snippets.

A few months ago I produced a 1- hour interview event with special guest Frank Caruso of Caruso's Natural Health for my class: Entrepreneurship Report. I aligned this event with the start of the marketing section of the subject as I felt his story would help propel student thinking about the business that they had created for the class assessments. Frank has a wealth of experience which would aid the students on how to think intelligently about how to promote their product and brand in the global marketplace.

The Caruso event, included a history of how the Caruso business began with the focus on innovation and development of his brand and product range. We looked at Frank's life story and discussed how he introduces new products into the line and an analysis of changes in his business over the years. We discussed marketing and distribution channels where Frank shared advice to newcomers in developing a business start-up. Frank discussed his '10 principles to success in business'.

The event was well received and achieved great reviews. The Frank Caruso interview can be viewed here at this weblink:

[https://www.kaltura.com/index.php/extwidget/preview/partner\\_id/3091243/uiconf\\_id/46604333/entry\\_id/1\\_vekhtxk2/embed/iframe?](https://www.kaltura.com/index.php/extwidget/preview/partner_id/3091243/uiconf_id/46604333/entry_id/1_vekhtxk2/embed/iframe?)

As a lecturer, I very much want my students to be completely engrossed in the subject content I am delivering, where I am continually conscious of what their impression might be from what they are seeing and hearing. I use direct examples from my own businesses that align nicely to the subject learning content. This provides strong passion coming from my delivery and helps the student better understand the practical purpose of the content – something they can easily grab and comprehend which has clear reasoning. I show them a lot of what I do in business - how I do it - and discuss results, good and not so good. Real life business stories are essential for a lecturer to deliver to students, along with academic content.

In my postgraduate subject, MCR012 Entrepreneurship Research Report, there are 3 strands to the content area: creating an executive summary; designing and implementing marketing; and forecasting finance before a business opens its doors.

I take student surveys very seriously and I continue to change the focus and sharpen the tools every trimester. It is important to keep content and my delivery fresh, current and relevant.



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