Overview and Definition

HyFlex, a word combining “hybrid” and “flexible,” was first coined in 2006 by Brian Beatty, a professor at San Francisco State University. HyFlex is a type of teaching modality that offers students the choice of attending classes in person or online, synchronously or asynchronously (Beatty 2019, 29).

A typical HyFlex setup has the instructor in the classroom with students who have chosen to attend in person. Cameras and microphones broadcast to the online synchronous students, while recording both in-person and online interactions for online asynchronous students to view at the time of their choice.

HyFlex learning offers students flexibility in how and when to attend each class session, thus giving students autonomy in choosing their learning time and location. The flexibility in this modality extends to asynchronous attendance and asynchronous interaction. Offering instruction in this modality can particularly benefit undergraduate and graduate students who have outside-of-class obligations like work and family. Also, captioned video, recordings and transcripts provide greater accessibility.

Why Do You Need to Know?

Post-pandemic, colleges and universities have been looking to balance online and in-person course offerings to accommodate student preferences. HyFlex modality offers the maximum flexibility (Penrod 2022). A literature review conducted by co-author Blynne Olivieri Parker revealed that while HyFlex has been tested and used in credit bearing courses, there is a dearth of evidence about the use of this modality in information literacy instruction. As classes offered in this modality expand, librarians can expect to encounter it when doing one-shot instruction. Since HyFlex combines in-person and online synchronous and asynchronous modalities, teaching in HyFlex requires pedagogy and preparation distinct from fully in-person and fully online classes. Librarians encountering a request for a HyFlex one-shot should expect a significant amount of preparation, including providing information in multiple formats for accessibility, in order to successfully engage all students and meet learning objectives.

Current Applications in Libraries and Higher Education

Co-author Olivieri Parker is a professor and interim head of Learning and Research Services at
the University of West Georgia. During Fall 2024, Olivieri Parker taught two one-shot instructional sessions in HyFlex mode using rare books and archival materials. The setting was the research room in special collections which has a large central table with seating for 8, a computer, and a wall-mounted monitor. In that room, a Meeting Owl was set up in the middle of the table which was connected to the instructor laptop, enabling the instructor to look down to see the students attending synchronously online, instead of behind her at the monitor. In-person students could engage with synchronous online students either through their own laptop or by viewing the monitor at the front of the room. The online meeting space was through Zoom, and a recording was later posted to the Learning Management System (LMS).

One session was on the topic of a soldier’s experience during World War Two. In-person students had primary source materials (letters, reports, and photographs) in front of them, and were oriented to special collections and safe handling practices. These students had time to examine the materials and respond to guided questions on an exercise sheet. For online students, scans of the same primary source materials were loaded into the LMS, along with the exercise sheet. Online synchronous students viewed the scans and accessed the exercise sheet and contributed to the discussion through Zoom chat. Asynchronous students also accessed the scans and the exercise sheet on the LMS module, viewed the class recording, and contributed their observations in the online discussion section. All students were assigned to post in the online discussion forum about the historical or cultural context of one primary source.

The other session was an easier fit with the HyFlex model, as it was a short lecture on early printed books. The most challenging aspect of this session was having the Meeting Owl visually capture parts of the bound text, like catchwords or the hand-written family genealogies in the margins, which were shown to in-person students. Close-up images of the text and marginalia were provided in the LMS module for online students with a video of the instructional session posted after the class concluded.

Reflecting on the HyFlex classes she taught, Olivieri Parker’s number one suggestion is to slow down. Often, instructors covering the same material will speed through it, a response born of familiarity with the beats of the content and rhythm of one-shot classes. Balancing the in-person with synchronous online students means that these beats are different, and the conscious decision to slow the pace of the class to ensure student understanding is key. Along with the slower pace, Olivieri Parker suggests more frequent check-ins with students in all modalities throughout the class, and leaving ample time and space for students to formulate their questions. Frequent check-ins with students can also help alleviate discomfort the in-person students might feel about asking questions or offering thoughts and comments while being on camera and recorded, as expressed by one of Olivieri Parker’s students, who said “being on camera can bring out self-consciousness, but once we started, I didn’t feel that anymore. We were learning, and I found myself wanting to contribute to those who couldn’t be there in person, be it synchronous or not.”

Potential Hurdles
Teaching in HyFlex is time and technology intensive, and requires support from Information Technology (IT) services. For rooms that do not have Meeting Owls or ceiling-mounted camera and microphone systems permanently installed, IT or the librarian needs to arrive early, set up and test the technology, and stay after to break it down. Librarians should be flexible and comfortable troubleshooting potential issues, such as with recording and captioning. Having
another librarian as a co-teacher, or working with teaching faculty who are able to navigate technical difficulties, can be helpful.

While HyFlex is touted as being beneficial for students in terms of flexibility, for instructors it presents a number of challenges. One downside is that as an instructor it is difficult to “read the room” for student comprehension. The best way to assess student comprehension is through online discussion boards and assignments. Secondly, during class the instructor’s attention is divided between the in-person students and online synchronous students and ensuring that what students are seeing and experiencing is as equivalent as possible. Finally, it is challenging to build classroom social cohesion. For the instructor’s relationship to asynchronous students, direct communication is helpful to maintain engagement. Among the students in the class, seeing and hearing each other is vital. Requiring all students to engage with discussion boards and post video discussion posts may not be comfortable for all students.

Conclusion
Overall, HyFlex modality is easier with lecture-style content delivery and more difficult with active learning information literacy one-shots. For an instructor, this modality requires time and attention to the technological set-up of your teaching space. It carries a heavier cognitive load before, during, and after the teaching session to ensure that all students have an opportunity to engage with the content and with each other.

If you find yourself asked to teach a HyFlex class, start by rooting yourself in the value you as a teacher bring to the classroom and focus on the importance of building relationships between students. HyFlex can feel like a content-driven modality, and centering your values as an instructor will help shift that mindset. Beyond this, keep experimenting! HyFlex is still relatively new, and that affords ample opportunity to try new activities and approaches in the classroom.

Tools Discussed
- Meeting OWL
- Zoom

References


Further Readings
- Explore the Technology Behind Today’s HyFlex Classroom
- HyFlex Learning Community – Building the Hybrid-Flexible Future Together
- Overview: Hybrid Learning Models | NEA
- Self-Regulation, Motivation, and Outcomes in HyFlex Classrooms
• Student Engagement in the HyFlex and Online Classrooms: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic