Delivery Methods

"The delivery method is the medium through which course content is transmitted and human interaction occurs". The choice of delivery method is influenced by a number of factors that include the nature of the content, the characteristics of the learner, the specific environments for learning and the available technologies.

Delivery methods fall under two broad areas: Synchronous and Asynchronous

- **Synchronous learning:** A real-time, instructor-led online learning event in which all participants are available at the same time and can communicate directly with each other.

Synchronous methods provide immediate availability of the instructor for questions and feedback. It provides many different types of tools, is similar to the classroom, and allows for real-time collaboration among participants.

- **Asynchronous learning:** Learning in which interaction between instructors and students occurs intermittently with a time delay. Asynchronous methods allow time for reflection, allow participants to work at their own pace and can be highly structured.

The following table lists some of the examples of synchronous and asynchronous methods of delivery.

Synchronous	Asynchronous
Teleconferences (SKYPE) ,Video conferences, Audio Conferencing, Web Conferencing	Discussion Boards, Calendar-dates for assignments, examinations, events etc.
Chat/ Chat Rooms	Website Links- listservs
Instant Messaging : MSN, IRC- Internet Relay Chat, ICQ	Group Announcements Messaging / E-mail
White Boarding	Surveys & Polls
Virtual Classroom	Threaded Discussion

Advantages and Disadvantages of Synchronous and Asynchronous Methods of ODL Delivery

Synchronous Methods of Delivery

Features of synchronous systems include:

- live interaction in real-time
- allowing individual and group work
- presentation formats incorporating both discussion or lectures
- learning both from the tutor and other students input
- resource tools and materials that can be introduced, presented, shared and removed
- student activity that can be monitored and facilitated by the tutor.

There are four major advantages to synchronous systems:

- **Motivation** - synchronous systems focus the energy of the group. They provide motivation to distance learners to keep up with their peers and continue with their studies.
- **Telepresence** - real time interaction helps to develop group cohesion and the sense of being part of or belonging to a learning community.
- **Quick feedback** - synchronous systems provide quick feedback on ideas and support consensus and decision making in group activities. These help to enliven distance education.
- **Pacing** - synchronous events encourage students to keep up-to-date with the course. They also provide a discipline to learning which helps students to prioritize their studies. *(Adapted from 'Distance Education Solutions: North American Web Developers Conference, October 1997').*

In addition to the above, content can be

- produced in less time and expense;
- used for any content type having a long or short lifespan and for large or small audiences;
- created quickly, which makes it especially useful where there is an immediate need.

Disadvantages of synchronous delivery methods

- Difficulty and /or expensive getting to the venue
- Inability to repeat the work or a lecture towards mastery.
- Limited opportunity to allow remedial or extension exercises.
- The learner is dependent on the ability of the teacher.

Asynchronous Methods of Delivery

There are four major advantages to the asynchronous delivery methods:

- **Flexibility** - access to the teaching material (*e.g.* on the Web, or computer conference discussions) can take place at any time (24 hours of the day, 7 days a week) and from many locations.
- **Time to reflect** - rather than having to react 'on one's feet', asynchronous systems allow the learner time to mull over ideas, check references, refer back to previous messages and take any amount of time to prepare a comment .
- **Situated learning** - because the technology allows access from home and work, the learner can easily integrate the ideas being discussed on the course with the working environment, or access resources on the Internet as required on the job.
- **Cost-effective technology** - text based asynchronous systems require little bandwidth and low end computers to operate, thus there is more equal access, particularly global access.

Other Advantages

- Allows students to access material at any time.
- Supplements classroom resources.
- Allows students and instructors to communicate with each other at any time.
- Typically useful for large audiences.
- Useful where the need is not immediate.
- Ideally suited to structured content requiring pre-examination.

Disadvantages

- Takes more time and resources.
- Loss of face-to-face contact, if this was the only mode.
- Possibility for overload of resource material.
- Possible loss of a sense of continuity and immediacy.