



Southmoreland High School

A/B and SOLA Instructional Models

Instructions for Students & Parents

This instructional guide was developed to assist both students and parents as we begin this groundbreaking, never before seen 2020-2021 school year. We understand there might be questions that arise even after following this guide; however, we believe this guide will answer many student and parent questions. We will attempt to paint a picture of the school day for in-person instruction and for not-in person instruction. The first day of school for all students in the District is September 8th; it is a **B-day** and **Day 2**, across the District. Students who attend school on A-day will attend on Day 1, Day 3, and Day 5. Students who attend school on a B-day will attend on Day 2, Day 4, and Day 6.

Let us provide clarification on some common language as it relates to instruction this year. Many terms are used interchangeably, which is confusing. Programming in each building is different. **This reference guide is relevant for SHS students ONLY participating in the A/B and SOLA models of instruction.**

Most on-line teaching happens asynchronously, with synchronous learning usually taking place only if there is a specific need for live discussion or interaction, or as a strategy to build community among learners. What's the difference between synchronous learning and asynchronous learning? The answer could have a significant impact on your on-line education experience. Synchronous learning is on-line or distance education that happens in real-time, whereas asynchronous learning occurs through on-line channels without real-time interaction. Many hybrid learning models will include a blend of both asynchronous and synchronous on-line learning. But models that use a strictly synchronous learning approach or a strictly asynchronous learning approach will have some distinctly different features.

What is Virtual Learning?

Virtual learning is a learning experience that is enhanced by utilizing computers and/or the internet both outside and inside the educational organization's facilities. The instruction most commonly takes place in an on-line environment. The teaching activities are carried out on-line whereby the teacher and learners are physically separated (in terms of place, time, or both). Virtual learning can be defined as a virtual learning environment with electronic study content



designed for self-paced (asynchronous) or live web-conferencing (synchronous) on-line teaching and tutoring.

Virtual learning offers remote access to an unlimited array of educational services, including topics and on-line tutors delivered worldwide. The learning process can be individualized through virtual learning, considering the personal level of competence, individual needs, and different learning styles of each student. Virtual learning is flexible through time, space, and location. Virtually learning can occur from the safe and secure comfort of your own home.

What is Synchronous Learning?

Synchronous learning refers to all learning types in which learner(s) and instructor(s) are in the same place, at the same time, for learning to take place. Synchronous learning includes in-person classes, live on-line meetings when the whole class or smaller groups get together. In synchronous learning, students usually go through the learning path together, accompanied by their instructor, who can provide support while students are completing tasks and activities.

Synchronous learning is the kind of learning that happens in real-time. Synchronous learning means that you, your classmates, and your instructor interact in a specific virtual place, through a specific on-line medium, at a specific time. Methods of synchronous on-line learning include video conferencing, teleconferencing, live chatting, and live-streaming lectures.

What are the advantages of synchronous learning?

→ Classroom Engagement

Synchronous learning provides the learner active discussion, immediate feedback, and a personal familiarity that can only be achieved through real-time interaction. Real-time interaction is an incredibly important distinction if you're making the transition from the traditional classroom to an on-line setting. The personal contact you get through live video conferencing, lecture broadcasts, or messenger chatting can make it a lot easier to transition. You can essentially have all the personal engagement of a classroom without attending in-person.

→ Dynamic Learning

This experience comes with more than just engagement, though. There's a case to be made that synchronous on-line learning is simply an excellent way to learn, that it allows for a more dynamic exploration of topics, ideas and concepts than is possible in a medium with a time lag. Videoconferencing, for instance, makes it possible to ask questions and receive answers mid-lesson, to discourse and debate with classmates at a brisk and exciting pace, to drive a conversation into unexpected new directions collectively. There is a speed and immediacy to synchronous on-line learning that, at its



best, evokes the same level of accountability and engagement as classroom attendance. If you thrive at a swift pace, surrounded by competing and complementary ideas, this is as close as you'll come to the real thing.

→ **Instructional Depth**

With synchronous on-line learning, you'll interact regularly and frequently with your teacher(s). It also provides a regular opportunity for face-to-face discussion, and individual guidance. If you're the type of student that does your best work with the help of available and supportive instruction, you're probably a synchronous learner.

What are the disadvantages of synchronous learning?

→ **Rigid Schedule**

If you've chosen on-line learning because of your hectic and unpredictable technology issues, synchronous learning may present you with some challenges. The defining characteristic of this learning experience is its adherence to a set schedule. Lectures and class discussions will take place at established meeting times. You may have a hard time satisfying course requirements if your job as an X-box gamer keeps you up at strange hours, or your social media interactions render you fully occupied during the day time. If flexibility is the number one reason you've decided to go the on-line route, make sure you can manage your synchronous learning responsibility around your schedule.

→ **Technical Difficulties**

The above concern is especially pressing if you're a person on the go. Suppose your parents require you to have supervision throughout the day when you are not attending for in-person instruction, this kind of mobility may force you to complete coursework in weird places like coffee shops with Grandma, the doctor's office with Uncle Joe, and Aunt Myrtle's house. In that case, you're probably always carrying a laptop and always searching for a wireless signal. That search could be pretty stressful if you're desperately trying to log in for a lecture, videoconference, or heaven forbid an exam. As a synchronous learner, technical difficulties like spotty internet, crashing hard drives, and dying batteries can become anything from an inconvenience to a disaster. Instead of logging in and sitting for your exam, you're sweating profusely and yelling at your computer. Who has the time for that?

What is Asynchronous Learning?

Asynchronous learning happens on your schedule. While your teacher(s) will provide materials for reading, lectures for viewing, assignments for completing, and exams for evaluation, you can access and satisfy these requirements within a flexible time frame. Methods of



asynchronous on-line learning include self-guided lesson modules, streaming video content, virtual libraries, posted lecture notes, and exchanges across discussion boards or social media platforms.

Asynchronous learning is a student-centered teaching method widely used in on-line learning. Its basic premise is that learning can occur in different times and spaces particular to each learner. In asynchronous learning, teacher(s) usually set up a learning path, which students engage with at their own pace.

Why Do Many Instructors Teach Asynchronously?

Streaming video and connecting to on-line meetings uses significant amounts of data and requires fast internet connections to which not all students may have access. Even in cases when most students do have high-speed internet and can connect to meetings successfully, it only takes one glitch or two glitches in connectivity or audio/video troubles to affect the overall quality of the meeting.

Audio and video troubleshooting tend to take up a significant portion of on-line meetings, including preparing ahead of time, and in-meeting troubleshooting. It is not infrequent for microphones that worked well to stop working suddenly, webcams to go dark inexplicably, or for files to disappear from your desktop just when you needed to share them. With asynchronous learning, teacher(s) can take their time setting up the learning path before students have access.

Successful on-line meetings with large groups require a lot of stars to align. Having a good meeting means everyone logs in on time, has few or no tech issues, can control their individual learning spaces, makes sure the dog doesn't bark, or the baby brother doesn't cry. Some teacher(s) prefer not to deal with this if they know learning outcomes can be reached asynchronously just as well.

On-line collaboration and group work can very well be done asynchronously. Remember that hour-long meeting that could have easily been an email? The same thing goes for learning. While it is always good to have synchronous check-ins, office hours, and Q&As, most thinking and grappling with course content can be done asynchronously. Keep live meeting times short and use them to answer questions and run through difficult-to-write-down topics or issues.

Whether students are choosing to learn on-line, or there is a circumstance that makes on-line learning their only choice, hour-long lectures, or web meetings will quickly exhaust learners. If



synchronous sessions must occur, they should be kept short and sweet and allow as much interaction between participants as is technologically possible.

What are the advantages of asynchronous learning?

→ Flexibility

If you've got a demanding schedule or weird hours, you're probably an asynchronous learner. Your learning will typically revolve around materials that can be accessed on your own time (though often within a set time frame like a day or two). Materials might include text-based lecture notes, self-guided interactive learning modules, or pre-recorded lectures and podcasts. Suppose you need to complete a module on the car ride to Walmart or listen to a lecture on headphones while your dog naps or you work the graveyard shift for X-box gaming or sleep until the middle of the afternoon. In that case, you do your best reading while reruns blather in the background, then asynchronous learning is for you. Asynchronous learning gives you the materials. It's up to you to complete them at your convenience.

→ Pacing

One of the most empowering features of asynchronous learning is the fact that your experience is typically self-guided. Read at your pace. View on your time. Complete work based on your availability.. If you're a quick learner, you can choose to power through materials and units that come easily to you. If it takes you a bit more time to absorb new information and knowledge, this path also gives you the chance to review information, take notes, and practice retention without concern over the speed of a lecture or your classmates' pace. Shape your learning experience based on your needs as opposed to the tempo of the classroom.

What are the disadvantages of asynchronous learning?

→ Isolation

If you like the personal touch and do your best thinking when you feel like people are listening, asynchronous learning can be a lonely experience. Social media and email can't deliver the same kind of intellectual energy as real-time interaction. This atmosphere is also a less collaborative one. The opportunities to interface with, debate, and network with classmates are scarcer. In many ways, asynchronous learning is best for you if you plan to get in, get some skills, and get out. (There's nothing wrong with that plan, by the way.) If you're looking for the kind of enrichment that comes from discussion, feedback, and just a little bit of social interaction, you might be disappointed by your asynchronous learning experience.



→ Risk of Apathy

While working in a self-guided environment sounds great and empowering, it is important to be honest with yourself. Are you indeed the kind of learner with the drive, not just to pace yourself and commit to a set of personal goals, but to remain passionate and enthusiastic about the subject matter without the support and evaluation of an instructor? The reality is that some learners benefit best from access to clearly stated expectations, immediate feedback, and, to an extent, a watchful eye. If you're this type of learner, the free-form nature of asynchronous learning could be demotivating. Beware of complacency.

Educational Programs at SHS FOR 2020-2021

→ **The SOLA program at SHS is an example of a fully virtual program.** Students will not attend school for in-person instruction. Instruction is fully on-line and predominantly asynchronous. SHS offers this cyber-based education program through a partnership with the Westmoreland Intermediate Unit e-Academy. SOLA offers online courses developed and instructed by teachers throughout Westmoreland County.

→ **The A/B model at SHS is an example of a partially virtual learning program.** Students have assigned days to attend school for in-person instruction and assigned days when they do not attend school for in-person instruction. Students will alternate days for in-person instruction.

What does my school day look like in an A/B Model?

This is what instruction looked like prior to March 13, 2020, and COVID-19:

First (1) day of instruction, the teacher introduces a novel and assigns students the first chapter of the novel to read and the *Elements of a Story Chart*, asking students to identify plot, setting, characters, theme, and point of view. The *Elements of a Story Chart* will be due at the beginning of the class period on the second (2) day of instruction.

Second (2) day of instruction, students review answers to the *Elements of a Story Chart*. The teacher assigns students the second chapter to read and *Elements of a Story Chart*, asking students to identify plot, setting, characters, theme, and point of view. This assignment will be due at the beginning of the class period on the third (3) day of instruction.



Third (3) day of instruction, students review answers to the *Elements of a Story Chart*. The teacher assigns a *Culminating Activity* that will be due at the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.

Fourth (4) day of instruction, students continue working on the *Culminating Activity* that will be due at the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.

Fifth (5) day of instruction, students continue working on the *Culminating Activity* that will be due at the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.

September 8th is the first day of school and is a B-day. What does instruction look like if I am a B-day student on the first day of this hybrid model?

First (1) day of instruction is a B-day (**B-day students attend school for in-person instruction**). The teacher introduces a novel and has an assignment posted in Google classroom to read the first chapter of the novel to complete the *Elements of a Story Chart* that will be due by the end of the day at 11:59 PM on the second (2) day of instruction.

Second (2) day of instruction is an A-day (**B-day students do not attend for in-person instruction**). Students submit the *Elements of a Story Chart* to the teacher via Google classroom by the end of the day at 11:59 PM. The teacher has an assignment posted in Google classroom to read the second chapter of the novel to complete the *Elements of a Story Chart*, asking students to identify plot, setting, characters, theme, and point of view. This assignment will be due by the end of the class period on the third (3) day of instruction.

Third (3) day of instruction is a B-day (**B-day students attend for in-person instruction**). Students complete the *Elements of a Story Chart* during class and reviews with the teacher. The teacher has an assignment posted in Google classroom of a *Culminating Activity* that will be due by the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.

The fourth (4) day of instruction is an A-day (**B-day students do not attend for in-person instruction**). Students continue working on the *Culminating Activity* that will be due by the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.

The fifth (5) day of instruction is a B-day (**B-day students attend for in-person instruction**). Students continue working on the *Culminating Activity* and submit to the teacher by the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.



September 8th is the first day of school and is a B-day. What does instruction look like if I am an **A-day student on the first day of this hybrid model?**

First (1) day of instruction is a B-day (**A-day students do not attend school for in-person instruction**). The teacher introduces a novel and has an assignment posted in Google classroom to read the first chapter of the novel to complete the *Elements of a Story Chart* that asks students to identify plot, setting, characters, theme, and point of view. This assignment will be due by the end of the class period on the second (2) day of instruction.

Second (2) day of instruction is an A-day (**A-day students attend for in-person instruction**). Students complete the *Elements of a Story Chart* during class and review answers with the teacher. The teacher posts an assignment in the Google classroom to read the second chapter of the novel in preparation for an *Elements of a Story Chart*, asking students to identify plot, setting, characters, theme, and point of view. The assignment will be due at the end of the class period on the third (3) day of instruction.

Third (3) day of instruction is a B-day (**A-day students do not attend for in-person instruction**). Students complete the *Elements of a Story Chart* and submit to Google classroom by the end of the day at 11:59 PM. The teacher has an assignment posted in Google classroom of a *Culminating Activity* that will be due by the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.

The fourth (4) day of instruction is an A-day (**A-day students attend for in-person instruction**). Students continue working on the *Culminating Activity* that will be due at the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.

The fifth (5) day of instruction is a B-day (**A-day students do not attend for in-person instruction**). Students continue to work on the *Culminating Activity* and submit to the teacher via Google classroom by the end of the class period on the fifth (5) day of instruction.