

[The Benefits of Blended Learning](#)

By: [Mary Bart](#) in *Trends in Higher Education*

Blended learning, which combines face-to-face learning with a mixture of online activities, has been hailed as both a cost-effective way to relieve overcrowded classroom and a convenient alternative to the traditional classroom experience. But it has quickly become much more than that.

“There’s a growing body of evidence that suggests blended courses really are an effective way for students to learn,” says Ike Shibley, PhD, associate professor of chemistry at Penn State-Berks. “Blended courses can actually lead to increased student engagement, not less.”

But for [blended learning](#) to work well for you and, more importantly, your students, it requires a fair amount of upfront prep time in advance of the course and the discipline to stick to your course plan. More so than in traditional face-to-face courses, Shibley says.

In the recent online seminar [Organizing Blended Courses for Optimal Student Engagement](#), Shibley showed examples of the detailed “class guides” he developed for his blended courses. These guides provide explicit instructions on the activities and [learning goals](#) for each week, including expectations for what needs to be accomplished before, during and after class.

“In my blended courses, when they get to class we really hit the ground running,” he says. “They know they have to be ready to start learning as soon as class starts and that means putting in the work outside of class. When we meet, they’re more prepared and more engaged.”

They also get better grades.

Since redesigning his general chemistry course from a traditional to blended format three years ago, Shibley has watched the course average rise by nearly 25 percent. He attributes part of that increase to the fact that his blended course has more [active learning](#) activities that require more time on task. There also are weekly online quizzes, which despite being worth a relatively small percentage of a student’s overall grade, are surprisingly popular with students not to mention good predictors of overall course success.

Shibley offers the following tips for using online quizzes effectively:

- Have a quiz bank that will randomize the order of the questions
- Don't make quizzes longer than one hour
- Use scaffolding questions with easier questions first
- Don't ask too many questions straight from the book or notes
- Keep a consistent schedule regarding the opening and closing of quizzes

"A blended learning design is really a way to reconceptualize everything you once thought you had to do as a teacher, and it can be one of the most exciting times that you'll have," says Shibley. "I often hear that teachers want to get motivated mid-career ... if you're one of those faculty, this is an opportunity to really change a course drastically and, I'd argue, for the better."