

TOP TIPS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENT LEARNING ONLINE

Starting to support student learning online may feel quite daunting, particularly if you have to make that change quickly or in a time of uncertainty. However, if you keep things simple and remember that even though you might feel like you're just talking to a computer there are real people listening / watching and your dialogue is with them. Focusing on the familiar - the people, the pedagogy and your subject – will keep that dialogue going and make the move to online much more manageable.

We hope that these top tips will help you to start supporting students online and to manage some of the anxiety that anyone engaging online for the first time might feel.

- 1. Keep things simple.** Focus on maintaining communication and support using tools that are familiar to you and your students (if possible). Email and phone are still useful tools. The course page on your institutional VLE is also critical, with its capacity to host forum discussions and an online webinar room (or rooms) for staff and student interaction.
- 2. Keep the people, the learning, and the community at the heart of thinking and practice.** We can become focused on the technology – but it is just a tool to facilitate discussion and engagement. The important point is to engage with each other, focus on the learning and support each other in our learning communities.
- 3. Use your time wisely.** Focus the limited time you have on the interactions that matter. Share resources you have already developed and reuse those shared by others. Ensure that your online interactions capture your voice and the approach to teaching that students are familiar with. This will be far more important to students than superbly produced new resources.
- 4. Make yourself available.** If students aren't seeing you regularly in person, you need to ensure that they can do so online. Make time for virtual office hours, space for students to come and ask questions or seek reassurance. Be clear about when and how you can be contacted, it's OK to have boundaries on this (nobody wants a message at 2am!).
- 5. Plan and practice.** Whilst supporting student learning online might seem intimidating, like any new thing, it will become less so with practice. Start with the basics, seek guidance on how to use it, then practice or do a test run. Don't try to learn every aspect of the tool at once, it's OK not to provide all-singing and dancing online support as soon as you start out.
- 6. Ensuring learning stays active.** Even with a large class, you can use the spaces available to you for interaction and activities that encourage students to work together. Make use of discussion forums, ask students to 'meet' together and feedback into the main discussions, encourage people to engage with each other's input.
- 7. Accessibility matters.** In a rapid move to online, make sure you check in with your students to ask what support they need to be able to access or engage online. Make use of the built-in accessibility options e.g. captioning or transcript on video and audio. The disability service can provide support and the learning technology support team can offer guidance on how specific tools can be used to meet different needs. Most importantly, though, keep speaking to your students to ensure they feel supported.
- 8. The informal matters.** Moving online doesn't mean you have to lose the informal interactions, the light-hearted encounters that light up any teaching space and bring your learning community together. Keep your teaching voice authentically you, whatever medium you use. And consider an informal space for your group – a forum for general chat, a virtual coffee break. This is as important for staff as it is for students: online working can be lonely, unless you build space for informal encounters.
- 9. Experiment, but don't worry if things don't work.** If you find yourself suddenly having to work in an online space, there will be a lot of trial and error – from you and your students, that's absolutely fine. And remember, there is plenty of support out there to help you in this new space. You may be increasingly working online, but you are not alone.

SUPPORTING YOU TO ENGAGE WITH STUDENTS ONLINE

If you're not sure where to start, the Supporting Student Learning Online: Rapid Response Toolkit provides basic tools to maintain communication and support for learning.

The Toolkit can be accessed at

<https://lta.hw.ac.uk/supporting-student-learning-online>

It is being continually developed so it is worth bookmarking the site and checking it regularly. There is also a programme of live online support sessions to answer questions and give you chance to learn about and practice using online tools in a supported environment. Access the support sessions and additional resources at

<https://lta.hw.ac.uk/supporting-student-learning-online-additional-support-and-resources>

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