

DEVELOPING YOUR TEACHING VOICE ONLINE

COMMUNICATION AT A DISTANCE



Your teaching voice will depend on your values and opinions, as well as the institutional policy in place at your college or university. It is also open to change according to the context you are teaching in - and especially in shifting from face-to-face teaching to online.

You need to be aware of the **constraints and affordances** of the online teaching and learning context in general. Online or blended learning offer much flexibility and a chance to work more independently away from college or university premises. However, it offers less or no face-to-face contact with colleagues and students. There is also a lack of visual cues in online classes. Furthermore, students require regular access to a computer or device, as well as good internet connectivity; and technical issues can occur when teaching or learning online.

You and your students will require familiarity and confidence with the **Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) / Learning Management System (LMS)** that is being used at your institution.

You may even have the chance to **choose between** what online teaching platforms you use. For instance, Microsoft Teams may suit your institution's requirements, or you may wish to complement it with Canvas which allows different types of quizzes or a wiki for collaborative tasks.

It is important that you encourage **questions** and **listen** to students' voice and feedback regarding your online teaching tasks and practices so that you can reflect and develop.



SETUP 1: YOU ARE TEACHING IN A VIRTUAL CLASSROOM (SYNCHRONOUS TEACHING)

Greet your students and encourage them to greet you and each other. Put on your web camera and encourage your students to do so, if broadband connection makes it possible.

Explain to your students how you would like them to speak and **take turns**. Most virtual classrooms have a "raise hand" feature. Your students might not be aware of the affordances of the online environment you are using, a short tutorial before the class can be helpful.

Explain how you would like them to ask **questions**. You might give them microphone rights all through the class, however, this can cause echo and be disturbing, so consider giving microphones only at certain times.

Explain how you would like to use the **chat** window.

Don't be afraid of silent **pauses**, students need time to process your instructions and carry out the activities.

Allow time for **catching up**.

Check understanding, progress and involvement frequently. You might use a short quiz, an opinion poll, or open-ended questions, e.g. “What’s your opinion on ...?” “Which point/sentence/activity did you find the most difficult/easy/interesting/funny... and why? Try to avoid closed questions like “Do you understand it?”

Pay attention to the **lack of visual cues**, you might not pick up on difficulties you would in a face-to-face classroom. You might mitigate this by inviting students to ask questions at all times and by checking on their understanding frequently. You can also use a set of emoticons, e.g. to express agreement or understanding, confusion, etc.

Break down the tasks into small chunks, the class might work better.

Give plenty of **visual support** while explaining the tasks.

Also make sure students understand the different teaching and learning **methods** you use, e.g. explain why and how they should work in breakout rooms, for instance, to practice speaking in pairs, work on tasks in small groups, prepare something to present to the rest of the class.

It might be useful to remind your students of the **dates and times** of synchronous classes.

Consider asking your students to **prepare** for the classes, this might refer to the teaching content e.g. by sending them a task sheet; or can be a technical setup.

Make sure your students know where they can find **information**, worksheets, recorded classes, etc. on the class website, if there is one. And that they know how to **contact** you.

Too many “additional” materials and links can be daunting and confusing. Keep the online environment as **simple** as possible.



SETUP 2: YOU ARE POSTING A WORKSHEET OR A POWERPOINT (ASYNCHRONOUS TEACHING)

Greet your students and **explain** what and why you are posting.

All **instructions** normally given orally in the classroom need to be communicated in writing, usually via email, forum, social media or other platforms or in short screencasts or videos, or within the worksheet itself.

Instructions and explanations should be provided in **small steps** as students will be working on their own.

Consider that you are not there to explain/answer questions on the spot: try to **foresee difficulties and challenges**. Imagine you are in the classroom, what are the most likely questions you would get? Consider providing examples and sample answers where appropriate. If you have the facilities, you might use a critical reader or student to read the materials and flag any issues they see.



SETUP 3: YOU ARE TEACHING IN A FORUM (ASYNCHRONOUS TEACHING)

Greet your students, you might upload a short welcome audio or video. Also encourage them to greet you and each other. If you don't know each other introduce yourselves. If you find it appropriate, you might create a "fun facts" video about yourself and ask them to do something similar, it is important that everybody feels comfortable about it.

You have to establish a **netiquette** so that students are respectful and thoughtful towards each other and each other's comments.

You have to **manage students' and your own expectations**, e.g. explain that working online does not mean that teachers are available 24/7. Explain when you will be answering their questions and what your turnaround time is.

In the online context both teachers and students can feel 'disembodied' from each other. It is important that students feel part of a **learning community** and teachers play a central role in developing and enhancing this community. Consider how you can build connections with your students in this learning setup, and how you can help them connect to each other.

You might think of yourself as a **facilitator** who enhances students' participation and engagement rather than a teacher standing at the front of a classroom.

Create and share a **task or study plan** so that students know the key dates and times. Make sure they have enough time to carry out the tasks.

Collaborative tasks, where students work with each other on an exercise or project can work well in a forum. They can comment on each other's contribution, negotiate and come up with a shared output.

Consider that a forum allows for more interaction, but **not in real time**. Also explain how much participation you expect in the forum discussions.

Think of how much **control** can be given to students in using the forum – although this will depend on students' age, level and the context. For example, in replying to posts, 'liking' posts, or even designing tasks and activities for each other, e.g. making a short narrated ppt presentation on a specific study topic; preparing a worksheet or a simple quiz for the others.

Allow for **self-reflection** by assigning self-reflection activities.

Short and long **audio and video** recordings or screencasts can address specific points, e.g. difficulties that arise, specific language points, detailed instructions.

It is important that you manage **your online presence**. You can post frequent announcements or reminders in the course forum (or send by email or post on social media),

Timely and strategic **feedback** is an essential part of asynchronous teaching and remote learning. This might be general feedback for the whole class in the forum or individual feedback in a private message, email, etc. You can share model answers too.

Make sure your students know how to **use the feedback** they get. Encourage them to ask questions on the feedback.

You will find that the more you teach asynchronously (and online in general) the more **confidence** you will gain.