MOVING YOUR LANGUAGE TEACHING ONLINE

A TOOLKIT FOR UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE TEACHERS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, the move to online learning has become a necessity for most teachers across the UK, but it is a challenge for many who have no prior experience of distance or online teaching. Online and blended language learning does offer students opportunities for engagement in ways which go beyond traditional classroom settings. However, approaches which are put together with little previous expertise of online learning and teaching are unlikely to be successful in providing an effective and motivating learning environment.

Our team of Open University distance language teaching specialists has produced this toolkit to support colleagues from other higher education institutions. Based on our research and extensive experience in aspects of distance and online language learning, the help sheets in the toolkit highlight some of the principles of online language learning and give practical advice about how teachers can create an interactive online environment for their students to support language learning within a coherent and pedagogically informed framework.

The toolkit reflects the approach developed over the course of over 25 years by colleagues from the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics at the Open University. Although we have made efforts to avoid using terminology that is specific to our institution, we acknowledge that it may still be confusing. We can refer colleagues to Valerie Irvine's interesting discussion of this subject and her statement that 'If you are engaged with online learning and are confused by the terminology, you are not alone'[1].

We do not claim to hold the only key to successful online language teaching, but we do hope that by sharing our own expertise we will provide some support to those who have to teach languages at a distance for the first time, and to their students.

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Colleagues may also wish to refer to a series of help sheets on *Teaching at a distance: methods that work* (https://iet.open.ac.uk/pages/teaching-at-a-distance) prepared by the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University.

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[1] Valerie Irvine (2020). 'The Landscape of Merging Modalities'. EDUCAUSE Review 55, no. 4.
https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/10/the-landscape-of-merging-modalities

CREATING AN ONLINE CLASSROOM

FIRST STEPS TO RECONFIGURE THE COMPONENTS OF YOUR TEACHING

This introductory help sheet provides some first ideas if you:

- o aim to move your language teaching online,

- o are starting work as an online language teacher,

- o want to move towards blended learning by integrating online and face-to-face elements in your teaching.

It focuses on initial steps in creating an online classroom when providing some or all of the components of your teaching online, building on the experience of academics from the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics at the Open University, UK.

CREATING AN ONLINE CLASSROOM

In traditional teaching contexts, lecturers and students come together in large or small groups in lecture halls, seminar rooms and other spaces and the institutional setting provides a physical structure. Students' independent study at home and work in class are interlinked. How can we adapt this structure for an **online** learning environment?

Scenario 1: Online platform as hub of the course

An online learning platform (such as Moodle or Google Classroom) can include everything students need for their course, such as:

- o **a study calendar,**

- o **interactive tools (forums, online room),**

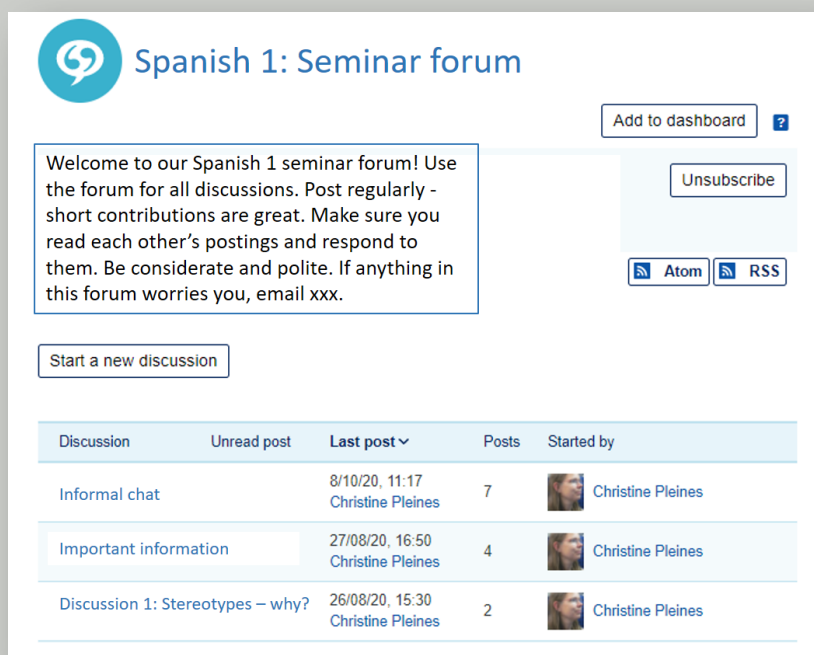- o **study resources and further links.**

Students go to their home page every day, check the calendar, connect according to schedules you set for them and do their tasks. Before setting tasks, think about how to combine independent student work meaningfully with live sessions and forum discussions.

You can, of course, use more than one platform to exploit different functionalities. For example, you might use Teams for live online sessions and Moodle or WordPress for your forum. It's best, however, to stick to **one** forum rather than have discussions in lots of different places. More guidance on how to make good use of a forum as part of your online classroom is provided under 'Scenario 2' below.

Scenario 2: Start by creating a forum

You don't have to start by using all the functionalities of a fully-fledged platform but do start by creating a **forum**. Sending worksheets by email does not create an online learning community whereas opening a forum can.

Create a **small number** of strands on your forum – as the example below. Ask your students to log on regularly. Use email for two purposes only: 1) to ask your group to connect to the forum; 2) to send personal messages that are meant to be seen only by one student; move all other communication to the forum. Your forum should be private to your course and you may need to think about the etiquette you want your students to follow.

Next step: Think about **where** to put resources and other links (e.g. worksheets, links to study resources, link to online teaching room). At the start, all of the above can just be included in the forum. In the longer term, it will be better to find other spaces, e.g. a well-organized page where you upload all material for students to access – things can get lost in a lengthy forum strand. For example, in Moodle you can create a page, or a subpage or a folder and store documents within it. In Teams, a team is organised in channels and each channel has an area where files can be uploaded.

THE COMPONENTS OF TEACHING

As a next step, consider the **different components of your teaching**. What is most important? How can different elements be reconfigured within your online environment? If offering a blend, what works best face-to-face, what might work equally well (or even better) online? What can you do online that's *not* possible in a face-to-face classroom? How can you combine different elements to ensure effective learning?

List activities you do with your learners:

- o   Lesson starters / learners contribute their experience / activating prior learning
- o   Class discussion of topics / opportunities for spoken interaction
- o   Lectures or lecture-style elements (lecturer talks supported by presentation slides)
- o   Reading (intensive / extensive), listening (intensive / extensive), …

Consider how these components can be adapted to an online or blended learning environment, for example:

Component	Ideas for transferring to online / blended learning environment
Lesson starter	Short contribution from each student in the forum
Discussion – which medium could work best?	**Asynchronous forum discussions** offer more time for reflection. In a **synchronous live session** in an online room, discussion can be more spontaneous and potentially more interactive. Students need to build trust in each other and confidence with the tool before this works well.
Lectures / lecture-style elements	These could be done as a **recording/screencast**, for example as part of a flipped classroom approach: Students access content beforehand, then come to a live session to discuss. On the other hand, lectures could also be delivered **live**. The use of **chat** in a live lecture can provide a level of interactivity not often achieved in face-to-face contexts.
Reading / listening	Post resources for students to access in their own time. Consider **what support** they might need in using these resources. **What response** should they make, e.g. discuss with you in the next online session, post their reaction in the forum, complete a worksheet (which will be discussed in a live session or forum)?

YOUR CONTEXT AND CONSTRAINTS

Different learners and different settings require different approaches, and your context will dictate or guide some of your choices.

Below are some further questions you may wish you ask yourself and you will find more ideas in the other resources in this toolkit.

Who are your learners?	How used are they to using the tools you provide for them? What netiquette or safeguarding issues do you need to consider? Do you need to consider issues of accessibility for your learners? This could be the case if you teach students with disabilities, or from disadvantaged backgrounds.
What tools are available to you and your learners?	Does your institution provide access to platforms and tools? Will you need to identify your own? If you need to use several tools (for example an app to set homework and a separate VLE or LMS), how will you ensure students understand the purpose and use of the different tools and platforms?
How much time is available to your learners?	Are your students expected to study for the same amount of time as usual? Will online learning take more time? Will you need to adapt your planned activities to keep to an agreed student workload?

In summary, when thinking about moving some or all of your teaching online, it is relevant to

- think carefully about how to make good use of the opportunities the online environment offers,
- recognize the importance of reconfiguring learning rather than just moving your teaching across,
- design for a coherent learning experience.

If unsure (or short of time!), **move step by step**. It doesn't have to start all at once, new practices and new tools can be introduced gradually.

CREATING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

USING A FORUM AND OTHER TOOLS TO ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS

The traditional college community: An educational community at a college or university benefits from many interactions between individuals and groups including structured lessons, but also informal contact and conversations in the seminar room, in corridors and during breaks. This is something to bear in mind when thinking about creating an online community.

The online community: It is important to provide a structured learning environment with regular opportunities to connect with tutor and peers. Students need the support of their community to thrive. In languages this is especially important because language learning requires interaction. Designing varied and well-integrated activities will aid learning and community building. However, it's easy to overload learners: more tools and more activities does not always mean more engagement. Here is some guidance to help you create an online community, focusing mostly on the use of forums.

ONLINE FORUMS

Forums can keep students connected to their tutor and peer group. They are useful for community building, information sharing and group discussions.

Principles of forum moderation: When moderating your forum, you will typically encourage contributions, give regular responses, keep discussions going, summarise information, provide feedback, and conclude discussions. It is important to have rules of engagement (netiquette / institutional guidelines about online conduct) and also to think about the level of your engagement. 'Light forum moderation' is often best: the moderator is present but does not stifle discussion by intervening constantly or correcting all errors.

Use of target language in forums: You will be considering which language you want your students to use in online forums. Your language choice will depend on the level of study and may vary according to the purpose of each forum activity or discussion. In some discussions you may allow students to use English (for example, when exchanging study tips). Other activities could encourage students to use the target language, however simple. You can refer students directly to a resource where they can find the language they need, or you can provide some phrases for them in the introduction to the task. You can also have some discussion threads where students can freely mix languages (especially as such plurilingual practices are now thought to aid rather than hinder language learning).

Forum Activities	
	o **Easy** activities that allow meaningful communication through quick, low-risk participation; can combine social focus and language practice. "I had a good / boring /… weekend, because…"
	o **Group-building** activities, e.g. 'two truths and one lie' (everybody posts two things that are true and one lie – the others have to guess)
	o Sharing **study tips**
	o Sharing **interests**: for example, posting about a film they watched

Varying forum activities to keep up interest	o **Images**: students post an image of their favourite object / landscape /…
	o **Description**: students describe what they see when sitting at the computer/the holiday they are dreaming of, …
	o **Divergent** discussion: students discuss a controversial topic
	o **Convergent** discussion: students make a joint decision, e.g. which candidate is the best for a job

Some examples of forum posts

Starting a forum activity:

"In this strand everybody will write about their favourite place. I'll make a start. My favourite place is xxx, because… What is your favourite place and why? If you like, post a picture with your contribution."

"The increase in tuition fees at English universities a few years ago has been very controversial, and we'll use this strand to debate the pros and cons. Make sure you have read (xxx in your course materials) and use expressions from the list "Giving your opinion" (attached again here). While students in Germany only pay a small administrative fee for studying at a university, in England, tuition fees are now over £9000 per year. What are the pros and cons of such fees? What is your opinion?"

Responding to posts / encouraging contributions

"I've been to xxx myself a little while ago and loved it. Has anybody else in the group been there?"
"You've mentioned a lot of arguments against tuition fees. What might be the arguments in favour? Are there any?"

Feedback

"Thanks for the great contributions here! Here is a little bit of language feedback…"
Note some good expressions which will be helpful for you in your exam essays:
(Pull out some examples of good expressions students have used in the forum)
"Pay attention to the following
Word order (example)
Expressions with prepositions (example)"

Summarising / Concluding

"To summarise the main points made in this discussion:
Arguments against tuition fees: xxxx
Arguments in favour: xxxx
Almost everybody in this group is against tuition fees."
"This discussion is now closed as we're moving on to our next topic. Look out for the strand on xxx and make sure you contribute by Friday."

FURTHER GUIDANCE ON ONLINE COMMUNITIES

E-mail: Occasional individual email contact with learners can help keep them engaged with their community, but it does not create a community. This one-to-one contact can also be provided by phone or via other synchronous communication tools (e.g. skype, FaceTime, etc.)

Live online sessions: Regular live online sessions can play an important role in building a community and keeping learners engaged. They can be whole group or small group events – or both, if you have online rooms with breakout facilities. In languages, of course, live sessions are particularly useful for interactive speaking skills practice.

Taking the lead from the students: It's important to include students in the discussions of how to create a supportive learning environment. They will have their own preferences regarding how they like to connect.

Encourage the formation of peer-support groups and have volunteer 'student buddies' who are willing to facilitate such groups. You may be able to provide an online room where students can meet without a teacher.

Acknowledge that students will use the online environment in their own ways, they are likely to take social activities outside the official course platform, and this also helps them to stay connected.

Safeguarding: Make sure you follow your institution's safeguarding advice in order to keep you and your students safe online.

FURTHER TOOLS FOR BUILDING ONLINE COMMUNITIES

This help sheet concentrates mostly on forums, but of course there are many different ways for students to engage jointly online which can help build a community.

Collaborative writing tools: Offer opportunities for co-creation, for example, students write a text together, or each complete a different part of a task/a worksheet (jigsaw principle).

Visual collaboration tools: Can help visualize joint engagement, for example, everybody uploads an image onto a tool such as 'Padlet' (https://en-gb.padlet.com), or each student contributes 20 words on a topic and the contributions are then shown in a word cloud (e.g. wordart.com)

Survey tools: Especially in larger groups, surveys can be an easy way to give an opinion on a topic anonymously or come to a group decision. The teacher can then publish the overall outcome.

A platform which offers a number of tools is edmodo (https://new.edmodo.com/).

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.

TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS ONLINE

DEVELOPING READING, WRITING, LISTENING, SPEAKING SKILLS AND INTERACTION AT A DISTANCE

Below are some strategies to address the needs and particularities of the productive and receptive language skills when teaching online. We look at how to teach reading, writing, listening and speaking both synchronously and asynchronously.

LISTENING

Listening skills can be practiced in both synchronous and asynchronous teaching.

Synchronous teaching

In a meeting room (zoom, adobe connect etc.) and in small groups (breakout rooms). Depending on the platform, you can share videos by screenshare or audios with enabled source sound. You might also ask your students to listen to an online resource before the class and work on the comprehension activity during the lesson.

When teaching synchronously online, it is especially important to keep students engaged and involved. Use the variety of features available (e.g. breakout rooms, shared screens, chats) and give your students the opportunity to get involved with the content and with each other in different roles and at different levels, for example, by varying between small group discussions and plenary discussions, or by holding student-led discussions in chats or breakout rooms.

Most meeting software will allow you to record meetings. If appropriate and if your students agree, recordings of interactive tutorials can be helpful for reinforcing listening skills and good preparation for further spoken interaction.

Asynchronous teaching

Outside sources: media, news websites where students can listen to audio files and/or watch videos and work on related activities with the help of exercise sheets or quizzes.

Think about how you can scaffold these resources for your students and how you want them to respond/share the information they got through listening and watching. It is important that teaching online is not just sending students to lots of different material, but to ensure a coherent, level-appropriate learning experience.

SPEAKING AND SPOKEN INTERACTION

Speaking and interaction can also be practiced synchronously and asynchronously.

Synchronous teaching

Synchronous teaching in a meeting room (zoom, adobe connect etc.) and in small groups (breakout rooms): role-plays, dialogues, information gap, simulations (any form of meaningful communicative interaction). The online context lends itself to shorter, but more frequent sessions, in this way students could get speaking practice more often than in a classroom-based environment.

You can also encourage your students to access communication exchange sites according to level and interests.

Asynchronous teaching

1. **Voice recorder** activities (if available to you): students listen to an audio and record a response. Then they play their response back and compare it to a pre-recorded model.

2. Recording can be done with a **phone**. For example, you can use your mobile phone (which usually has built-in Voice memo and recording features that can provide good enough sound quality). The important things to remember when recording audio using a phone are:

   o   keeping the phone close to the person speaking,

   o   recording in an environment which is not resonant and has a minimum of reflective surfaces. A normal domestic environment, with lots of soft furnishings, should be fine,

   o   and: keeping an eye on the size of the recording: it can be difficult to upload and handle files with a large size.

3. Recording a **dialogue**. If both speakers are together and recording on a mobile phone, it would be better to record each sound clip twice (once with the phone close to one person and the other being "off-mike", and then with the positions reversed – but you might want to disinfect the phone in between the recording to minimize the risk of transmitting Covid-19!). The two versions can be combined in editing which is possible on most phones). If the two people are recording separately, we recommend that each person speaks *both* parts (the "other" part serving to provide a reference and to help with timing), and then editing the two versions together. To check the recording environment, it's important to listen back to a test recording on headphones (or earpieces) and listen out for echo.

4. Leaving **voice messages** in a chat group, such as WhatsApp or on a voice board like Wimba in moodle. Students can reply to each other's voice messages. If using this facility, it is important to obtain the **consent** of all the participants that they are being added to the group.

WRITING AND WRITTEN INTERACTION

Writing is typically taught asynchronously, although synchronous teaching in a classroom is also possible, but with shorter exercises, more frequent feedback, and more detailed instructions. A forum or a wiki is a very good medium to practise writing and interact with other students. It is a good way to build a learning community and enhance peer support. A forum is an ideal medium for meaning-focussed written communication. It gives the students time to reflect on their responses, depending on your objectives, you can encourage them not focus on accuracy, but on communication. You can help through

- o   providing useful expressions in advance;
- o   moving the discussion forward (but not necessarily always interfering straight away);
- o   summarizing good ideas and useful language.

These tasks will allow you to summarise some common errors and tailor teaching to difficulties that have emerged in the discussions.

READING

As with writing, reading is generally taught asynchronously, although synchronous teaching in the classroom is also possible, but with shorter exercises, more frequent feedback, and more detailed instructions. The advantages of teaching reading online can be

- o   that students can be given more choice of what to read;
- o   they can easily switch between reading in their first language and reading in the target language;
- o   it is easier to find graded texts.

IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES FOR LISTENING, WRITING AND READING

Most of the activities below relate to asynchronous teaching. Most of these activities can be provided in a simple word or pdf file or in Google sheets, for instance, which can be posted on your forum or VLE. Depending on the technical support available and your Virtual Learning Environment, a wider variety of interactive activities might be available to you such as gap-filling, pair matching, etc.

Listening, writing and reading: typical activity types
o   Free response questions where students type their responses. Give advice on how to type special characters.
o   Single-choice activities, where students choose a single option from a range of options.
o   Multiple-choice activities, where students choose multiple options from a range of options.
o   True of false activities.
o   Drag-and-drop questions where students drag the correct answer to the right place.
o   Unjumble activities; write comments in forums or chats.

Figure 1 - Open University Beginners' German reading activity with single-choice answer

FIGURE REFERENCE

The Open University (2012). 'Online quiz. L193: Rundblick: beginners' German (restricted online access).

Photo curtesy of Elke St.John

FACILITATING A LANGUAGE TUTORIAL ONLINE

LIVE ONLINE CLASSES

If you have not facilitated an online language tutorial before then **preparation and optimising student interaction are key to success**. The first step is to make yourself familiar with the platform that your institution uses or recommends. However, don't feel pressured to have to use all the functionalities: a simple live tutorial can still be a good interactive tutorial.

PREPARING THE TUTORIAL

Have a **teaching plan** and **objectives** for your online tutorial.

Send **preparation work** to your students and a link to your tutorial with meeting time. Remind your students what equipment they need to attend and participate in a live tutorial.

Make sure you have the right **equipment** and a good connection well before your tutorial starts so that you have time to resolve any technical problems.

Prepare a **welcome screen** to show students that they are in the right place and they know what time you will start. You can encourage students to do their **sound checks** as they are waiting (see Example 1).

BEFORE THE TUTORIAL BEGINS

Log in to your room in **good time** to **upload** your teaching materials, **test your sound**, and try the **functionalities** you intend to use in your tutorial.

As students arrive, **check their sound and microphone**. You can do this by asking them 'what's the weather like with you'/'have you had a nice day so far?'. Or you can ask them if they have done the preparatory work or if they have the right materials in front of them. This encourages students to respond to you so that you know they can hear you and they can speak. Welcome the late comers through the text chat and make sure they can hear you.

Give **relevant instructions** to students who have sound problems if necessary. For late comers, do this preferably via the chat to avoid disrupting the tutorial. It may be that you need to speak to a student in a separate room to take them through the issue or send them to the IT services if the issue cannot be resolved, while the other students get on with a simple introductory activity.

Use a visual to **outline** what you are going to do in the tutorial, ask students if they wish to cover something that is not on your list (see Example 2).

Think about **recording** the tutorial (and follow appropriate protocol, regarding asking students' permission, if necessary).

DURING THE TUTORIAL

Always begin your tutorial with a **warm**-**up** activity.

Prepare short, task-based, problem-solving types of activities which are varied and which can lead to a bigger activity at the end of the tutorial.

Make sure your activities are designed so that students can get engaged. Focus on interactive activities with the board (gap fill, drag and drop, write, etc.), with you (questions and answers, etc.), with fellow students (questions and answers, role-plays, cards with missing information, etc.) but also allow for time for individual reflection and personal work.

For activities developing speaking skills, make sure your visual teaching materials include prompts (see Examples 3 and 4). Send materials via email before the tutorial, if necessary.

In language tutorials, the emphasis is on practising **speaking** skills but do not hesitate to do **grammar revision**, **reading** or **writing** activities if relevant to the objectives of the tutorial.

Make sure your **instructions are clear** and that students understand what they have to do. It can be helpful to give task instructions **orally** as well as to write on a slide in advance, so that students don't forget what you've said (see below, Example 5).

Encourage students to communicate with you regularly through **emoticons and text chat** so that you know they are engaged during the tutorial: this is one way to make up for the loss of physical cues. Be aware, too, that **silences** can be more common when teaching online and do not necessarily mean that students are not engaged - sometimes they just need more time to process instructions and questions.

Practise **error correction** the same way as you would face-to-face: choose a technique and let students know how you will proceed.

During the tutorial, allow for **discussions** and **plenaries**. Choose your preferred method and let students know how they should take turn to speak (raise hand, etc.).

If you deliver a **lecture** type of tutorial, set students a task as you present your content so that they **remain active** while you speak.

Tip: Be aware that not all students will feel comfortable participating orally. If you can, work in **small groups or pairs**. This can encourage peer learning as students with better speaking skills or more confidence can help their peers without the pressure of a large group. You may even find it useful to allocate a group leader to each group who will encourage their peers to take part. In order to work in smaller groups you may need to use '**break out rooms'**, which you will need to familiarise yourself with in advance. It is useful to have visuals for break-out rooms too (see Examples 6, 7 and 8).

END OF TUTORIAL

Recap what you have covered and ask students if they have any **questions.**

Inform your students of the **next meeting time** and give them the **preparation** work for next tutorial.

Encourage students to **communicate** with you and with each other in between tutorials, using the course forum preferably, or by email.

If possible, allow some time at the end for students to **reflect** on their learning (i.e. completing a learning log or thinking about: was the tutorial useful? what have I learned? Was I sufficiently prepared? What will I do differently for next tutorial/during next tutorial?). They can also give **feedback** on the tutorial: what worked well/not so well for them and what would they like to focus on in the next tutorial.

EXAMPLE SLIDES FOR TUTORIALS

If you have not used slides for teaching before, the key is to keep them simple until you build up your knowledge of their capabilities. These slides have been created using PowerPoint, but there are also other options for creating slides.

All the slides below are examples from tutorial materials © The Open University.

Example 1: Here is an example of a welcome screen for a beginner's German tutorial, with suggestions for what you can include:

Example 1

Example 2: Below is an example of a plan for a first tutorial in beginners level German, practising speaking. Please note that in the first tutorial(s) you may find it useful to make time to go over the basics of the online learning platform that you are using.

Example 2

Example 3: illustrates an example of the sort of prompts you may wish to give for a pair of students to engage in a fairly sophisticated dialogue. Clues and prompts will help students maintain the dialogue going.

Chronodrive:
vous faites vos courses en ligne
vous venez les chercher au
magasin une heure plus tard

Conversation téléphonique

Client/e: - **commande ce matin à 8h en ligne**
            - **confirmation 8h04**
            - **il est midi**
            - **attend les courses au magasin depuis 1h**
            - **numéro de commande: chrono010713_8:00**
            - **insatisfaite**
            - **réclame annulation de la commande**

Employé/e: - **demande au client/à la cliente de patienter un instant**
             - **demande le numéro de client/e**
             - **demande l'heure de la commande**
             - **problème avec la commande, client/e doit attendre encore**

Example 3

Example 4: illustrates an example of the sort of prompts you may wish to give students to engage in debating ideas, practising giving opinions. Prompts giving the language structures they need to use will support students and help them practising the correct structures.

Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de:

l'homéopathie?

la réflexologie?

la sophrologie?

l'acupuncture?

l'ostéopathie?

la phytothérapie?

du termalisme?

À mon avis, c'est...

Je trouve ça....

J'y crois/ Je n'y crois pas

Je suis d'accord
Je ne suis pas d'accord

Je suis pour/contre

Je pense que c'est...

Giving opinions

Example 4

Example 5: Below is an example of some written instructions which can be given on slides as well as orally. It is also an example of a 'drag and drop' exercise, in which students match up two words. Depending on the platform, the 'drag and drop' can be done in different ways. Students can work in small groups and bring their answers back into the main room, or students can be asked to take it in turn to answer. If 'drag and drop' is not possible, they can write the answers in the chat.

Reflexive verbs

Below are a list of pronouns (in red) and reflexive pronouns (in blue). Drag the reflexive pronouns up to match the correct pronouns.

ich   du   er/sie/es   wir   ihr   Sie   sie

sich

uns

euch

sich

sich

mich

dich

Example 5

Examples 6 and 7: Here are two examples of activities that can be done in smaller groups, in order to encourage everyone to participate. You should be able to 'monitor' these groups in their rooms and give them guidance and feedback.

And now practise this conversation in pairs

- Guten Abend! (good evening)
- Guten Abend!
- Wie heißen Sie? (what is your name?)
- Ich heiße … / Mein Name ist … Und Sie? (my name is...and you?)
- Ich heiße … Wo wohnen Sie? (my name is...where do you live?)
- Ich wohne in … Und Sie? (I live in...and you?)
- Ich wohne in … (I live in...)
- Auf Wiedersehen! (Goodbye!)
- Tschüss! (Bye!)

Keep swapping roles!

Perfect tense: regular verbs

In small groups, discuss the following questions:

- How do we 'build' the perfect tense?
- Can you think of any example sentences using the perfect tense?
- Try pronouncing these sentences and give each other feedback on intonation and pronunciation.

Example 6 and 7

Example 8: Here is an example of material to practise speaking French at beginners' level. Students can be split in small groups. With the help of a team leader, students in turn ask a question and the rest of the group respond with a tick or a cross, in turn. Students write their name in the blank boxes next to '*Qui joue?*' Then each student says a whole sentence to specify when they undertake the activity.

Qui joue ...? Quand?	✔ ✘	d'un à	au aux au	aux au	à l' au
Qui joue... ?					
échecs					
bridge					
instrument de musique					
ordinateur					
Scrabble					
loto					
boules					

Example 8

MAINTAINING MOTIVATION

KEEPING YOUR STUDENTS ENGAGED
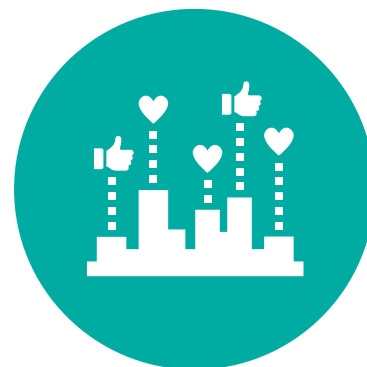
It can be challenging to maintain students' and teachers' motivation in all kinds of learning environment and there are particular constraints when it comes to online learning. These include lack of in-person contact with teachers and fellow students, lack of visual cues in online classes, technical issues and problems accessing the internet, among others. In this section we will explore self-assessment, language practice and what you can tell your students to increase their motivation.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

o   Design **engaging**, **relevant** and **doable** activities so that students gain a sense of achievement.

o   **Maintain regular contact** (in person in blended learning, or by course forum or email if online only).

o   **Encourage students to meet** outside of the regular tutorial times (online or in person if this is possible) and set them some group work relevant to their lives, studies or jobs.

o   Encourage students to **form groups and meet socially** to practise the language in an informal setting online or in-person, if possible.

ENCOURAGING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Developing self-assessment skills is key to successful language learning and motivation. Here are some areas that you can focus on:

o   Encourage students to **take stock of progress** and to reward themselves when they reach a milestone.

o   Encourage students to **identify their goals** and what they need to do to achieve them.

o   Encourage students to **keep a log** of activities undertaken each week and reflect on which activities work best for them.

o   Encourage students to **identify strengths and weaknesses** and focus on strengths, while using the constructive feedback that is provided by their lecturers and tutors.

o   Encourage students to **take an active approach** to their language studies by explaining how they can engage actively with their studies, for example how to read or listen actively and critically.

Checklist for encouraging self-assessment in students

You can encourage self-assessment during classes or through the use of a checklist, which your students can complete. Here are some tips you might give:

o   Think about **why** you are learning a language, and **what set of skills** you want to develop and for what **purpose**.

o   Set realistic and achievable **goals** for yourself and identify **what you need to do** to achieve those goals.

o   Be **honest** with yourself, think about what is likely to keep you motivated.

o   **Reward** yourself when you have reached an important milestone.

o   Think about what it is that you **like** and **dislike** about online learning and make study plans accordingly.

o   Don't compare yourself with fellow students, instead look back regularly at the start of your studies and evaluate what you have achieved so far.

What to tell your students when it comes to…

Working with others	o You might feel that other students are more fluent than yourself. Remind yourself that you can learn from them rather than feel you need to compete. o Identify a student who is a little bit better than yourself and use them as a role model. o Don't hesitate to reach out for help if you need it, contact your teacher and your fellow students. o Take advantage of every opportunity that is available to you to practise and learn the language, particularly tutorials with your teacher, students who are first language speakers of languages other than English, and the wealth of free resources, tools and materials available for learning a language.
Making mistakes	o Don't be afraid to make mistakes and don't despair if it takes you time to learn. Performance in tutorials is usually not assessed and it is the place for students to have a go, make mistakes and receive feedback.
Encouraging language practice	o Work on the language **little and often**. o Try to practise the language at **any given opportunity** (**internet**: films, radio, books, articles, games, language websites; **in-person**: next door neighbour, speak to yourself in the house, practise vocabulary to yourself while shopping at the supermarket, attending a medical appointment; **blog** about your language learning and take part in your course **forum**).
Reflecting on their own motivation	o Acknowledge that you will have good days and bad days. o Recognise the signs that indicate you are losing your motivation and act on them. o Make note of your progress. Regularly look back at where you were when you started and acknowledge the progress you've made.

DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

ASSESSING STUDENTS' WORK ONLINE

Below is a selection of different types of assessment strategies that you may find useful when teaching online. It is usually recommended to break down the assessment in several components and mix the types described in the table below.

Asynchronous assessment	o can be digital / computer based
	o also includes all forms of analogue assessment to be done offline and submitted online (i.e. an essay to be submitted)
	o issue: proof of identity
	o supported by declaration confirming autonomous work, identity, plagiarism rules
Synchronous assessment	o oral or written exam via video chat (proof of identity): technical possibilities e.g. screen sharing, drag & drop or free writing activities via programmes such as Adobe Connect
	o online group work
Continuous assessment / portfolio assessment	o collection of variety of assessments
	o advantage: allows for observations of development of marks over a period of time and reduces risks connected to identity fraud
Computer-based assessment	o multiple or single choice questions
	o quizzes
	o online generators available
	o blog entries, online group work
	o oral or written exams via video chat
	o recordings of audio or video material etc.

HOW DO I PLAN FOR ONLINE ASSESSMENT? [PEDAGOGICAL PLANNING]

o adjust **evaluation criteria** if necessary

o formulate and communicate **learning objectives**

o **methodology**: competence-oriented vs. factual knowledge. Reflect on which competencies you are aiming to assess, chose a fitting exam method and compose exam accordingly

o consider **equal opportunities**: are there factors that might prevent learners to their full ability? This could, for example, include technical factors such as no access to a camera or a bad internet connection?

o consider **level of difficulty**. Be aware that ... research has shown a tendency to make exams easier when exam circumstances change. This applies both to setting questions and to marking.

HOW DO I GET ORGANISED ON THE DAY OF ASSESSMENT?

This depends on the kind of assessment you're carrying out. A good strategy for **oral assessment** might include the following points:

o Have students arrive at the online room at a predetermined time. Allow ample time for each student, with a slot for identification and warm-up, the actual assessment time, and time for administrative work and documentation. Depending on the kind of exam, you might want to allocate time after each student for the marking process or use the recordings after all exams have been carried out. Some systems enable you to put students into a waiting area and allow them into the main room one-by-one.

o Inform students about the requirements of the assessment and announce that you are going to record the session. Depending on your exam, this can include giving them tasks to prepare in advance or using the time in a waiting area.

o Give students some warm-up time, for example by engaging in an informal chat.

o Give students a clear indication of what is going on, what they are expected to do, and where in the exam they are. For example: "You will now have 3 minutes to warm up. This part will not be assessed."

o At the beginning of the recorded part, ask students to identify themselves by clearly stating their name, and possibly by showing their ID into the camera.

o If the exam includes a pre-recorded part submitted by students, ask them to identify themselves clearly at the beginning of the recording and finish of by saying 'end of recording'.

o If there are technical difficulties or the sound quality is too bad, offer another time slot, and possibly another VLE/platform.

o Check on requirements regarding how long you need to preserve the recordings. If no specific answer is available, it is safe to assume that you should keep the records as long as you are keeping the records of analogue examinations.

HOW DO I DOCUMENT ASSESSMENT WHEN TEACHING ONLINE?

o **record** documents/contributions of candidates (screenshots, copy chats etc.)

o students send in material as assessments via **email** or **learning platform**

o **recording** of assessment needs to be announced/agreed

o specify **aids permitted** (such as dictionaries, calculators, certain websites…) and get candidates' consent to using them in the agreed way

o explain **academic practice standards** (sources, quotations etc.) that apply and plagiarism rules

HOW DO I PREVENT CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM?

Moving assessment online is often accompanied by worries about learners' (excessive) use of supportive tools (or even cheating) and thus distorting the results of the assessment. Below are examples of strategies that can be employed to reduce this risk:

o   Multiple assessments: assess in small steps but often, and with a variety of different tasks. This will help in order to have a broad picture of learners' development over a period of time. Consider marks on observations collected over a period of time.

o   Check identity: where necessary, carry out identity checks (e.g. with the help of computer cameras)

o   Be clear: Outline the rules of fraud and plagiarism that apply clearly and ask for learners' consent to these rules

USING A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

WHAT TO PROVIDE IN AN LMS OR VLE

When moving your language teaching to a distance mode, you may be able to make use of an online learning management system (LMS) or virtual learning environment (VLE). In fact, your institution may already provide such a system to its teachers and learners. This help sheet is only relevant to those colleagues who are involved in the creation of LMS or VLE courses, or in discussions about them.

The LMS may be the sole platform used to deliver your learning at a distance, or it could be one of several tools involved in the delivery of your teaching, as part of a hybrid model. The advice below is based on the Open University languages model, but it will of course need to be tailored to your own context.

The LMS can be the backbone of your teaching delivery. The main elements are:

o   a study planner
o   online materials and activities
o   assessment materials
o   resources
o   communication tools.

Below you will find more guidance on each of these elements.

STUDY PLANNER

The study planner is typically the main page that is displayed when students access your online course in a learning management system.
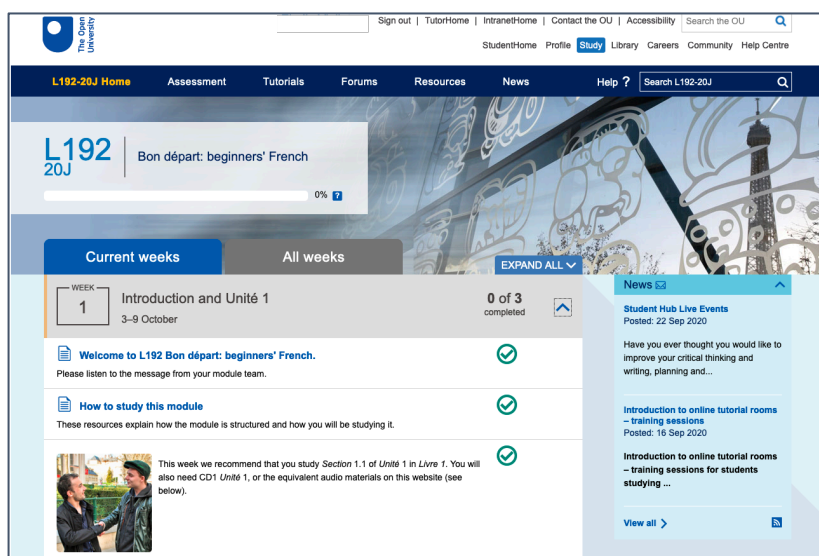
Figure 1 - Open University Beginners' French study planner sample

It can be organised chronologically (e.g. 1 block per week) and provide a week-by-week plan, or it can be thematic (e.g. 1 block per unit) and provide links to all the resources needed for that unit.

It should contain only key information and links to further pages: if it is too busy, it will be confusing. Each block or section should provide an at-a-glance view of what learners need to cover in a given week or unit.

It should contain all the steps students need to work through each week or for each unit, such as for example a link to the relevant materials, a link to the relevant assignment, a link to the relevant resources or tools.

Instructions must be brief but very clear (see Figure 1 and 2).

Photos or images can be used, sparingly, to help provide a visual structure by differentiating between sections (see Figure 1 and 2).

Figure 2 - Open University French Studies 1 study planner sample

ONLINE MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES

These are best organised in chunks equivalent to the length of sections in the study planner (i.e. one week or one theme at a time). Each chunk or section should be linked to from the study planner.

Any materials needed by students which are not online can also be referred to in the study planner (e.g. this week you will study chapter 2 in your grammar book). That way, learners can see everything they need to study in a given period of time or for a given theme or unit (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Open University Beginners' German study planner sample

ASSESSMENT MATERIALS

If assessment is a key part of a course, it is useful to have a dedicated section of the LMS for this. It should contain all assignments with instructions and information on deadlines and submission. It should also provide any assessment guides, rules or regulations, if relevant. It should include or link to any tools needed to prepare or submit assignments (for example a link to an online assessment submission system, if relevant). Assessment materials should also be included or linked to in the study planner (see Figure 3).

RESOURCES

Resources that are useful to more than one section of the learning materials can be pooled in a central 'resource' online area or page, especially if they are useful for revision purposes. They can be resources from the course, links to central resources that are not specific to the course (such as university-wide systems or content) or links to additional external resources.

Useful resources for a language course could include the following:

RESOURCES	EXAMPLES
content summaries that are useful for **revision**	grammar, vocabulary, or culture notes
reference documents and tools	links to online dictionaries, libraries, etc.
external resources that students can use in their own time for further practice	links to TV/radio channels, films, news, etc.

If audio-visual media are embedded in online activities, or if audio tracks or videos are needed to work with books or workbooks, it can be useful to also include them in a specific resource area of the LMS for students to download to computers or mobile devices in bulk.

Where relevant and possible, it is good practice to include alternative versions of the same materials in different formats, for accessibility purposes.

Figure 4 - Open University Spanish Studies 2 resources page sample

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Communication tools are important to allow learners to connect with teachers and with each other. It helps students not to feel isolated and contributes to keeping motivation. They can be used for social purposes, for teachers to share news or information with learners, for students to ask questions, etc.

When teaching at a distance, you may also use some online communication tools to deliver online classes.

Online communication can be

- o **synchronous**, such as in a live class delivered through a video conferencing tool, or

- o **asynchronous**, such as online discussions or chats taking place in online forums.

It is useful to consider what options are available to you, and which tool best serves your purpose when designing an online course or choosing a tool or tools to deliver your teaching or support your students. You are likely to need different tools for different purposes, but you may wish to ensure that you do not ask your students to use too many different tools, to avoid confusing them.

Links to the relevant tools can be provided in a central online area or page, or they can also be included in the study planner when they are used for any scheduled events**,** e.g. online tutorial, theme-specific forum discussion, etc. (See Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Open University Advanced German study planner sample

FIGURE REFERENCES

Figure 1

The Open University (2012). 'Study planner'. L192: Bon départ: beginners' French (restricted online access).

Figure 2

The Open University (2017). 'Study planner, week 6'. L112: French Studies 1 (restricted online access).

Figure 3

The Open University (2012). 'Study planner, week 4'. L193: Rundblick: beginners' German (restricted online access).

Figure 4

The Open University (2019). 'Resources'. L226: Spanish Studies 2 (restricted online access).

Figure 5

The Open University (2010). 'Study planner, Thema 1 '. L313: Variationen: Advanced German (restricted online access).

REFLECTING ON THE BLEND THAT'S BEST FOR YOUR OWN LEARNERS

REVIEW YOUR PRACTICE AND EVALUATE THE GUIDANCE PROVIDED IN THIS TOOLKIT

This final reflective help sheet aims to guide your reflection around themes raised in the toolkit and asks you to evaluate the guidance it provides in terms of its relevance to your own institutional context. Using the questions below, you can query the fit between the advice included in these help sheets, your workplace, and the approach you are taking to online learning and teaching. This should help you to identify what works and what could be improved. It can also give you the chance to explore why and try to find your own solutions tailored to your specific learners and learning context.

YOUR ONLINE TOOLS

What is/was your starting point in terms of the online environment and tools that are available to you and your students?

Does/did this enable you to create a coherent, well-designed approach to online/blended learning?

What influence do you have on its structure? Could it be improved? Are you able to make any changes?

YOUR LEARNERS, TEACHING ONLINE AND ASSESSMENT

Who are your students? How comfortable are they using online tools? Are they independent learners? How can you harness their preferences for specific learning activities, tools or ways of communicating?

How did you incorporate the different elements of your teaching into the online or blended environment so far?

How does your teaching and assessment fit together? What role do the online elements play in teaching / in assessment?

WHAT WORKED WELL/NOT SO WELL AND WHY

What worked well when you tried it?

What did not work so well?

What could be the explanation?

o   lack of a well-designed online space

o   lack of technical support

o   failure to motivate students in this new learning space/ failure to create an online community (how could this be addressed?)

o   difficulties in providing sufficient support for weaker students

o   lack of integration of different elements of the 'blend'

o   teachers' lack of experience (for example in leading online sessions)

o   or another reason?

Which of the above can you influence? What can you change to improve the learning set up? Can you mitigate for any issues that are out of your control to help your learners?

THE TOOLKIT

How did this toolkit help you?

Where did it fail to help?

What advice would you give to someone in your own situation?

Is there anything else that could be provided as part of this toolkit that would be helpful to you?

Please do contact us to let us know how we could improve this toolkit, and to share your success stories! You can use the following mailbox:

Online-language-learning-toolkit@open.ac.uk