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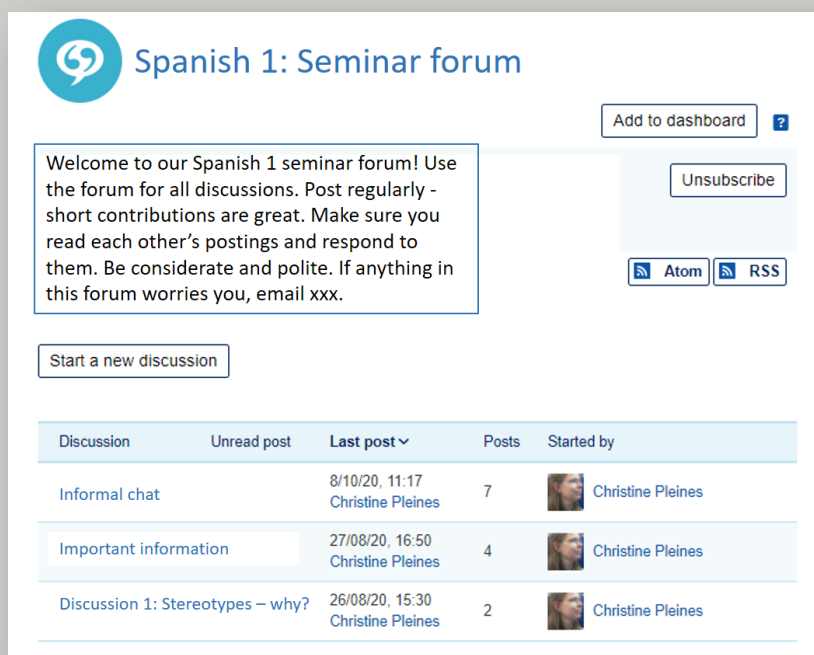
- o **study resources and further links.**

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.

Spanish 1: Seminar forum

Add to dashboard ?

Welcome to our Spanish 1 seminar forum! Use the forum for all discussions. Post regularly - short contributions are great. Make sure you read each other's postings and respond to them. Be considerate and polite. If anything in this forum worries you, email xxx.

Unsubscribe

Atom | RSS

Start a new discussion

Discussion	Unread post	Last post ⌄	Posts	Started by
Informal chat		8/10/20, 11:17 Christine Pleines	7	Christine Pleines
Important information		27/08/20, 16:50 Christine Pleines	4	Christine Pleines
Discussion 1: Stereotypes – why?		26/08/20, 15:30 Christine Pleines	2	Christine Pleines

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.