

# Top 10 Tips for Making the Switch to Remote Learning

By Leyland Pitt | July 28, 2020

## DIGITAL CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

### 1 Digital Classroom Set-Up

- Learn how to use the “tools of the trade” for online teaching: Zoom, an Apple Mac, iPad & Pencil, and Notability.
- The best tools are tools that can be as “alive” as possible, where real human movement (i.e. someone writing on a whiteboard), rather than electronic movement (e.g. PowerPoint slides transitioning) is possible
- If you have decent handwriting, simply use a pen or stylus on Notability on an iPad, joined to your computer, to write on the “whiteboard”. If you don’t write legibly, use the text function in Notability. However, if you can write legibly, students actually prefer it to text because it’s more “authentic”
- Put “Do Not Disturb” on, both on the computer and other devices so that things don’t pop up on the screen (e.g. email and iMessage notifications)

**Expert Tip:** Use all the technology – iPad whiteboard with pen, PowerPoint, video both from your computer and also from YouTube, spreadsheet, etc. before you actually run a class in real time, so that you can anticipate any glitches.

### 2 Zoom Classes are *not* the same as Zoom Meetings

- For Zoom classes, have some colleagues, TAs, PhD students sit in on a “test class” beforehand so you can experience what having an audience is like
- Have one of your audience take over as host in the test class so you can experience what it’s like to be in a “real class” rather than just a Zoom meeting – have them raise hands and lower them, conduct polls, use Zoom Spotlight, do all the stuff that you would do

**Expert Tip:** Always run a full Zoom class rehearsal before you teach your first class.

### 3 Screen Time vs. Break Time

- Sitting in front of a screen trying to concentrate is tiring – cut your students some slack.
- Both you and they have all kinds of distractions – pets, kids, neighbors, household noises, doorbells etc. Online is NOT ideal
- Have good breaks, and finish at least 20 minutes early
- Try not to go for longer than 70 minutes at a stretch in a typical 3 ½ hour class – people need to stretch their legs, and take bathroom breaks
- Plan on finishing early in a 3 ½ hour class. They might have another class later, and that instructor might not be as kind and considerate as you are
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**Expert Tip:** Aim to do about 80% of what you would have done in “real” class – so what if you don’t get everything done?

### 4 Teaching Assistants and the Digital Classroom

- Use the TA as your extra set of eyes and ears in the class and debrief with them during the break and after class
- Insist on a really good TA who will sit in the class throughout; communicate by phone with the TA before class, during breaks, and after class
- Have the TA monitor the chat to gauge individual student activity and presence.
- Content of chat isn’t really good material to grade so don’t worry about that.
- TA can alert you to issues (e.g. Steve had his hand up but you didn’t see it”; “Rosie has a really good idea, ask her to talk about it”; “George is an expert on this by the way” or “Mary has WiFi issues”)
- The TA is also your technical backup, either live, or in the chat (“your mike isn’t on”; “I’ve put last week’s board pdf in their shared space”), especially on the rare occasions you might encounter serious tech problems

**Expert Tip:** Always make the Teaching Assistant a co-host. They are your technical backup, either live or in the chat.

## **SOCIAL CONNECTION AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

### **5 Simulations enrich the learning experience**

- There are really excellent simulations available for most courses that students can do in groups outside of class e.g. Marketplace
- They are happy to spend LOTS of time on those and learn LOTS by “doing” rather than studying a textbook or listening to lectures
- Try to find short exercises, such as negotiations, that can be done online, live, in front of the class. You can put individual students or groups in breakout rooms where they can prepare.

### **6 Team presentations enhance learning**

- Have students in groups do a presentation in each class, preferably only one group per class
- Try to leave the topic up to them, that way they get really creative and excited about it
- Suggest a time (e.g. 30 minutes + questions), but don't be rigid on that. Give them the time, you can always make it up
- Best to start each class with a group presentation, that way you can plan for the rest of it, rather than having them rush at the end. You're a better timekeeper than they are, so manage your time not theirs

### **7 Guest speakers are a HIT**

- Students LOVE having a guest in a class, and its much, much easier online. No travel, no time barriers, guests can be anywhere.
- They don't have to be famous, just interesting
- Students are really good at finding their own guests, let them do so
- Don't restrict their (the guests') topics, people speak best when they talk about things that they care most about

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

### **8 Allow your students to access the recorded sessions on their own time**

- Use the record function on Zoom or whatever software you're using, to record the classes
- You might not want to watch or listen to them again, but some students do
- If you are using a whiteboard function like Notability, save the boards to a pdf and email those to students

### **9 We're all in this together...show your students you care**

- Answer student emails as soon as you can – it shows you're there and that you care.
- Most people are stressed; immediate response can alleviate that

### **10 Stay connected to your students outside of class**

- Send regular emails to the class just to catch up – they don't have to be about the course – they can be funny, interesting, anything that keeps a conversation going
- Make fun of the situation, stupid bureaucratic rules etc.