

Guide to online teaching

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Introduction

This guide is to give you some ideas of teaching online and to show you some resources out there that can help you. Everything in this guide is a free resource, although some do have paid options if you want to use those yourself.

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The realities of online teaching

- You need to work to create an atmosphere, as there is no natural atmosphere created by the students interacting. Plan varied, engaging lessons and get student feedback on what they want to do frequently. A lesson that might be mildly boring in a classroom will seem much more boring online, so have lots of quick, energising fillers prepared for when you feel the energy dip.
- Make your gestures, voice and intonation more exaggerated. It's much harder over video call to get nuances, and students need extra help to get these.
- While it's important in class, note taking is even more so online. Ensure that students are noting down important points, writing answers down themselves and keeping their own study logs. Students simply watching you write the answers on the board will promptly forget everything as soon as they log off. Find a way to track this, whether this is through having students send you their notes regularly, or keeping online notes somewhere you can also access. Writing in the chat is not enough, as this disappears.

Teaching tips

- Be encouraging and friendly! It is important students feel comfortable.
- When they make a mistake, make sure you write it down. Keeping a diary of mistakes will help you to understand what problems the student has and you can revise these to help them.
- Choose together how to correct. Some students want to be corrected as soon as they make the mistake, other students prefer for you to wait for them to finish speaking. Deciding this together will help you to create a nice atmosphere in the class and the student will feel more listened to.
- Accuracy v fluency. Accuracy is how correctly you say something, and fluency is how easily you say it. Students can have very good fluency, but low accuracy (so they will speak easily in English but you will struggle to understand them!) or they can have good accuracy but low fluency (so they will speak very little, and with a lot of worries, but make few mistakes). Plan activities that work on both in your lesson. For example, start each class with 5 minutes talking about their weekend, without any preparation or correction (during the 5 minutes). This will build fluency, as they get used to just talking.
- Make everything about them! Students (and everyone else!) love to talk about themselves and will remember language more easily if it is connected to their lives. As well as asking what they want to revise, talk to them about the situations they want to use English in, and practise for those.
- Reading is the most important skill, and regular reading will help students to improve all their English skills. Encourage them to read every day in English and keep a diary of new language they hear.

Suggested resources

<https://elllo.org/>- this is short for English Listening Lesson Library Online, and it has hundreds of listening and video clips that you can use in class. Each clip shows the accents featured, so it is a great way to expose students to different accents or providing variety in a monolingual class. The activities with each clip are basic, so it's best to create your own activities, but each clip has a full script to help.

<https://breakingnewsenglish.com/>- this website regularly features news and current affairs at different levels, each with a host of activities. Each story comes in usually 3 levels, so you can use it with multilevel classes, or increase the complexity over a series of lessons.

<https://busyteacher.org/>- a huge resource of worksheets and additional activities. The only thing to be aware is that, because worksheets can be submitted by anyone, there can be mistakes or other languages featured. Read before you use.

<https://ed.ted.com/>- these lessons are based on TedTalks, and a great way of introducing these videos to students. They are best used with higher level students, but it also can be used with lower students with more support and preparation.

<https://www.podcastsinenglish.com/>- similar to ELLLO, this has lots of audio resources to use with students to encourage conversation, use as homework and as starting blocks for activities. Most worksheets require a membership, but the audio alone provides lots of material to create your own lessons.

<https://quizlet.com/en-gb/> a teacher favourite, but a great way to do focused vocabulary work in online classes, as students can create their own online vocabulary lists to share with each other. You can also set vocabulary challenges and track progress.

<https://kahoot.com/schools-u/> Kahoot helps you create games online, which can add a bit of fun and variety to your lessons. Students will need their phones separate to whatever they are watching the lesson on, and you will need to display the game through the whiteboard. To make sure things run smoothly, give the maximum time on each question, so if someone experiences a technical issue, they still have time to answer the question.

<https://www.er-central.com/>- this website is a fantastic way to get students into reading every day and more practice. There are lots of resources too. You can set up classes as a teacher, or get students to set up their own student accounts. The levels are a little opaque, but helpful in that you can set different students whatever texts you want.

<https://readtheory.org/>- Again, lots of reading resources online to help with variety and revision in an online class.

<https://writeandimprove.com/>- This website autocorrects writing and gives writing tasks. The autocorrect technology is not as good as a real person, but it can be a good way to get ideas and get first rounds of corrections in before you complete the proper edit.

Teaching students online

- Consider resources carefully. You want enough variety to add interest and maintain engagement, but also consistency. Resources that regularly update or have a consistent structure will help you achieve this.
- Assessment needs to be regular and across all skills and systems. Written tests can still be given, through remote invigilation (although this should not be done too frequently as it is not a good use of class time) or through homework assignments.
- Consider how you will change the pace. Just speaking for the whole lesson gets boring quickly, and without other students to add energy, can lead to dead lessons quickly. Put into your plan regular 'variety' lessons; for example, you can do a project lesson every 5th lesson, or a presentation every other week.
- Maintain a balance of student talking time (STT) and teacher talking time (TTT). Avoid lectures, long explanations and excess chatting by you as this is less engaging than in a real class. Ensure that the majority of the lesson is based around the students talking to each other, either in groups or smaller chats.
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- Plan how activities will meet individual students in the class, and mix up activities regularly to ensure variety, interest and interactivity. Give students the same task, but with different materials, or the same materials, but with different resources.
- Although the pace of the lesson will naturally be varied by the students, online lessons (especially where no one shows their video) can feel much slower and have lower energy than face to face. Be aware and have a few emergency fillers and warmers planned to help you recover from a stale moment.

Tips for teaching reading online

- Make sure students have access to the text themselves. This can be by ensuring that they have been sent the text ahead of the lesson, or by prioritising texts they can find online. Of course, you can have texts on the board, but it might be difficult for students to read if it's quite small.
- Think of the reading time in your plan. Will that happen before the class, during the class before the activity or during the activity? How will you account for the different reading speeds in the class? Students can't finish reading while the others move on ahead as you could in a face to face classroom, nor can they quietly check meaning with their classmate.
- Don't feel bound to only using graded reading resources. There is so much reading students can do on the internet, from Twitter and social media to newspapers. Feel free to use all of it!

Tips for teaching speaking online

- Incidental speaking in class isn't usually perceived by students as 'speaking practice'. Ensure you have some kind of assessed speaking activity to reassure students that you are tracking it.
- Breakout rooms and separate chats can be a good way to give specific time to student to student interaction, and although it can't be done for a full day, giving a full 30 minutes to students interact away from you on a task will be good for overall fluency and just getting more speaking in. Remember, but students who are still in their home country, quarantined or isolating will be missing out on all the extra speaking that students usually get.

Tips for teaching writing online

- Plan in when writing tasks will physically happen. What will you do during to help and how will you monitor this?
- All writing must be corrected and given feedback otherwise students won't see the value in it. Plan the mode of handing in, editing and feedback when you plan the activity.
- Don't neglect writing just because it requires additional forethought. Consider the opportunities for writing online that you can get students involved in.
- Handwriting, especially for exam students, is still important. Give specific feedback and tasks to draw attention to this.

Tips for teaching listening online

- If you can, make sure that students have access to the listening tracks themselves. This will avoid issues where students can't hear well because of connections. Always upload tracks and be sure to mute your microphone to avoid interference.
- Unlike in a classroom, you can give students a few minutes and the track and ask them to listen and complete a task, and listen as many times as they wish. This can be a good way to give students autonomy over listening and bring in more complex listening tracks than you might otherwise do.

Tips for teaching pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and spelling online

- Don't neglect pronunciation! Plan in a few pronunciation based activities regularly and be sure to make it very exaggerated to ensure students can pick up the difference. When teaching pronunciation, it is the mouth position that makes it correct. An accent is not a problem, so do not worry if you are shy about your accent.
- If you usually keep a class vocabulary list, make sure it is somewhere accessible like on Quizlet.
- Spelling in English is difficult. You can do a short spelling test frequently to help students to improve. You can ask them to keep a list of words they spell incorrectly, or choose words from previous classes.
- Practice! It is thought that a student must see, say, hear, read and write a word at least 11 times to remember it. You need to make sure they are getting lots of practice.
- Grammar needs to be shown with real life examples, even for beginners. Activities that make them use that grammar will help them to understand the differences between grammar tenses and how to use them independently.

Extra resources

Teaching Online by Hockly (DELTA Publishing) is a fantastic resource with lots of activities, ideas and help for changing up your online classes. MDA College has a copy available for teachers to borrow. Please contact Ariane at SoulBilingue to request a copy.

Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom by Palloff and Pratt (Jossey-Bass) is more of a discussion on setting up and maintaining online learning environments, and is a good read for teachers unfamiliar with how to approach online teaching or who want to review their style. Please contact Ariane at SoulBilingue to request a copy.

www.teachingsonline.com - this website has more up to date resources and online resource ideas.

Trinity and EnglishUK North with Macmillan have some great webinars to give ideas on online teaching.