



## GETTING STARTED WITH ONLINE TEACHING

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### Introduction

Many classes and school systems all over the world are taking steps to offer lessons online. However, stepping into the digital world overnight can be challenging for many teachers. Some teachers find the idea of remote teaching quite overwhelming, but it can be an excellent opportunity to develop new skills. This guide is useful for teachers and teacher educators who have little experience of online teaching and need some advice on where to start.

### Getting started

- **Don't reinvent the wheel:** There are a lot of reliable online teaching and learning materials already available, so there is no need to start from scratch.
- **Go Glocal:** It's important to think about your own teaching situation and select the tools that are suitable for you and for your students. It is good to go global, but your students will benefit more if you choose tools and content that are applicable to your local context.
- **Less is more:** Don't try and use *all* the available tools and resources. What really matters in your online lesson is **quality, engagement and focus**.
- **Join the party:** Get connected with a wider teaching community to share best practices and seek support when you have doubts.

### Providing input

- Don't assume that all your students have excellent digital skills and will know exactly what to do. It is a good idea for you to prepare them for your virtual class by sending them some instructions on how to log in, set up their audio and mic, etc. beforehand.
- Similarly, don't underestimate the value of learner training. It is useful to dedicate your first online lesson to familiarising your students with the platform and the tools they will be using.
- You can teach **synchronously** (when you and your students are online in a live lesson at the same time, e.g. using Zoom or Skype) or **asynchronously** (when you and your students are doing tasks and activities at different times, e.g. using forums and social media or working on downloaded tasks and activities). Choose your approach based on what you know about your students and your own teaching context. Usually, a combination of synchronous and asynchronous teaching is a good idea.
- Don't feel the need to try and use multiple platforms. Choose one or two that are free, easy to set up and have the features that you really need. If you want to teach synchronously, you might want to choose one videoconferencing platform (e.g. Skype) and one platform for sharing information and documents (e.g. Google Docs) where you'll leave important messages for your students and post assignments.
- Think carefully about how you will share information – especially when using videoconferencing. You can explain but also show by sharing PowerPoint slides. You might also find some useful short videos online that explain important concepts.

## Setting practice tasks and activities

- It's good to create some housekeeping rules to ensure a safe and productive learning environment. Make sure your learners and (for younger learners) their parents are aware of online safety precautions.
- You don't need to become a tech guru. Focus on the basic tools and features of the platforms that you really need. For example, muting/unmuting your students is useful to manage background noise, and using breakout rooms is useful for group discussions.
- Plan a simple structure for your lessons to follow (e.g. a lead-in/icebreaker, language input, controlled practice, freer practice, error correction and summary). Again, think about which of these things need to be done synchronously and which can be done offline/asynchronously.
- Remember to make the learners aware of the lesson focus/objectives at the beginning.
- Use slides with interesting visuals rather than a lot of text to keep your students engaged.
- Personalise your activities – use parents, siblings, pets and home surroundings as assets to learning. Interviewing a parent or other caregiver could be an engaging speaking and writing activity.

## Receiving work from students and giving feedback

- Think about a range of ways in which your students can receive feedback. Alongside your feedback, self- and peer evaluation are helpful to keep them engaged and focused.
- Your feedback should be ongoing, but you need to decide on why, when and how to provide feedback.
- Depending on the task and resources available for your students, they might turn in their work as texts, audio or video files, or images of their work.
- You can set deadlines for students to do the tasks you have set up. You can also set some time aside during the week to conduct a live session for questions.

## Things to consider

- For younger learners, keep parents/caregivers informed about the technology you are using and why/how you are using it.
- Your time and energy are valuable resources. Consider asking your students to do some tasks on their own, asynchronously.
- Create a safe and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable to flag up any unacceptable online behaviour.

## Useful links

- Cambridge English Digital Framework for Language Teachers: <https://tinyurl.com/y7u9ehe5>
- UNESCO list of distance-learning solutions – tools and resources: <https://tinyurl.com/v8cezml>
- British Council guidance on online safety for teachers and their learners: <https://tinyurl.com/yazgwqj7>