

RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER COVID-19 CLOSURES

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Introduction

This guide aims to give some suggestions for English teachers to support learners returning to school after closure. It is important to recognise that learners will return to school having had many different experiences. Some will have had resources and support from parents, teachers or tutors. Other students may have had difficulty finding the space, equipment or help they needed to study at home. Guidelines for health and safety, hygiene and physical distancing to protect you, your students and the wider community should also be followed carefully.

Getting started

Finding out what students have been doing can help you to understand their needs now they are back at school.

Ask and answer: Ask them some questions about their time out of school, in either English or their home language (depending on their level). Write the questions on the board. Ask them to ask and answer the questions with a partner. Older students can then write on a piece of paper that you can collect and read afterwards. Let them choose which questions they want to talk about.

Choose some of the questions below and add your own.

- What did you do when the school was closed?
- What was good?
- What was difficult?
- Did you do anything different with your family or friends?
- Did you watch any TV programmes or listen to the radio in English?
- Did you use any websites or mobile apps for learning English?
- Did you speak in English at home? Who did you speak with?
- Did you read parts of your English coursebook or other books in English?

Ask some of the students to share their answers if they are too young to write their answers. Give encouragement and recognise any difficulties they have had. Use their replies to plan support for those learners who need it. After class, read anything that is written down and write a short reply to each student if you have time.

True or false: Ask students to write five sentences about what they did while school was closed, most true, but one or two that are not true. In pairs or groups, one student reads the sentences and the others listen to all, and then guess which are true and which are invented.

Ideas for classroom management and learning

Adapting activities: Your school or country may have important rules to protect teachers, staff, learners and the community. Think about how new rules affect activities you can do with students in the classroom. If some are not suitable now, can you adapt or replace them with safer activities? For example:

- Pair work or groupwork might need more space, which means that students find it harder to hear their partner(s). Try setting up activities where one student is the speaker and the other responds with signals (for example, for 'Yes', 'No' or 'I don't know') or encourage learners to listen and use a number of brief, but suitable, responses which you teach them before they listen.
- Try some active listening tasks where the listener doesn't speak but notes down the key points of what their partner says about a topic (for example, 'Three things I liked or didn't like about staying at home'. What were the three things? Were they likes or dislikes?).

Using the environment: If your school has outdoor space that is safe for children, can you use it? Is there anything there that you can use for language learning and to allow learners to use the space more? For example, could you use things in the area around the school for describing things by place, size or other description? Could you make a treasure hunt, using questions in English for children to find and answer?

Catching up: If learners have lost a lot of learning time, trying to cover the set syllabus may seem too much. Make sure that you keep checking what students are able to do with the language that they study. This may be through pair speaking, writing to another student, which you monitor, or a regular quiz.

Thinking about the future

Has any useful learning come from the experience of the closure? What could help to support learners when school is open, and which could be useful if any learners can't come to school in the future? Are there things you can set up now to make it easier if school has to close again?

Try to find out if any learners or their parent need guidance to use information or activities that are sent to them. Can you give more time or attention to children or parents who could not access any support provided outside the school?

Useful links

- UNESCO guidance on preparing to return to school: <https://bit.ly/UNESCOReturnToSchool>
- UNESCO IIEP guidance on returning to school: <https://bit.ly/IIEPReturnToSchool>