

# Distance Learning Teacher Tips

## **Creating Connection and Community:**

Nothing can replace the human connection of being all together in the physical classroom. But you can still take time to create an environment of empathy, community, respect, and kindness. In fact, research indicates that it is important to the well-being of students to do so. Consider playing music before class starts so that as students enter the online class, they enter an inviting and pleasant community. The absence of music will also let them know that their audio is not working.

The benefits of a quick “Check-In” at the start of each online session are well-documented.

### **Check-Ins can:**

- set a tone for respectful learning and create a climate of trust which extend throughout the session
- help students feel a sense of importance and belonging
- combine social, emotional, and intellectual learning

During the Check-In, you can ask students to listen closely to each other and during their turn describe how they’re doing or feeling, and anything important is happening in their lives. Or if you have less time online with students you might simply use agreed-upon hand gestures or personal drawings when you ask the question.

At the end of an online session, you could also “Check Out” with students, by asking them to complete sentence frames either verbally or in writing: Something I learned today was \_\_\_\_; I am curious about \_\_\_\_; I am looking forward to class next time because \_\_\_\_\_. You can use the Discussion Board on Realize to do the Check-Out if time is tight.

## **Connecting to Students’ Lives**

Help students see connections between the content you’re studying and the situations around them. Do round-robin brainstorm or quick draws when the topic at hand might relate to the news, their friends, or experiences. This will help make the content more relevant and engaging to students.

## **Breaking Students into Small Groups or Pairs**

If you want students to step through the Interactives or work in small groups for some other purpose, you may be able to use video breakout rooms on your video conferencing software. Use your software to place specific students into each breakout room or let your videoconferencing software automatically break students into rooms.

## Using Headphones

When headphones are available, students are more willing to engage in the class because they don't feel like the other people in their home are listening to what is going on.

## Using Project-Based Learning

Vary instruction to increase engagement. For example, for some topics consider using the Topic Inquiry or Quest Inquiry found in the full course for each topic. These are Civic Discussions, Team Projects, or Document-Based Writing Activities with step-by-step instructions and numerous support documents for students. They can be found at the top of each Topic in the Realize course. Students can spend time in Breakout groups during online classes working on the Quests and/or can schedule time online with their partners or small groups.

## Using Chat Features

Chat features can help keep students engaged during an online class and can help you assess what students are understanding.

- Try to avoid asking questions with right or wrong answers since wrong answers will be on display for all students to see.
- Ask a question and ask students to type their answer in the chat but ask them not to hit SEND until you tell them to. This allows each student to answer on their own without being influenced by what other students are writing.

## Using Private Message Features for Think-Pair-Share

You can use the Private Message feature on video classrooms to do Think-Pair-Share activities.

- Assign or ask students to form pairs.
- Pose a question to students and give them time to think about an answer.
- Ask students to each send one or more private chats to each other with their answers.
- They can chat back and forth asking clarifying questions and answering them.
- Give students a few minutes to complete their chat conversations.
- Ask a few pairs to share what they discussed.

## Integrating Social and Emotional Learning

**Self-Awareness:** Set aside a short amount of time to do a guided meditation exercise or a breathing exercise with your students to help them understand the

benefits of these types of activities. Practicing these on a regular basis can help you reduce or manage your levels of stress.

**Social Awareness:** Work with your students to create a classroom environment that affirms students' diverse identities and cultures. Take time to share and learn about each other's lives and backgrounds. Plan activities and interactions that encourage a positive classroom culture.

**Self-Awareness:** Ask students to use a personal journal to record interests, needs, ambitions, feelings, attitudes, and emotions. Recording these on a regular basis can increase self-awareness which can lead to enriched emotional intelligence, greater empathy, improved decision making, better communication, and stronger relationships. **Self-Awareness:** Ask students to identify a personal strength they have such as honesty, kindness, loyalty, creativity, patience, determination, good listener, enthusiasm, or perseverance. Ask them to focus on one of their strengths for a week and record actions they take or examples of instances where they used that strength. Point out that it is important to recognize our own strengths and to put them to good use. It is also important to recognize that everyone has different strengths that they bring to the community.

**Relationship Skills:** Model strong relationship skills by taking time to appreciate each student as an individual and by showing that you are interested in knowing them as a person, not just as a student. One way to do this is to check in with students to see how they're doing outside of class. Ask students about their perspectives and concerns on contemporary issues.

**Self-Management:** Remind students that physical activity is part of a healthy life-style and has benefits for mental health as well. Team sports are not the only way to include physical activity in your life. Yoga, walking, and taking the stairs are all ways to incorporate physical activity into daily life. Share tips that you use to fit physical activity into your life such as walking with friends or exercising first thing in the morning or on weekends.

**Responsible Decision-Making:** As much as possible, offer your students choice and voice. For example, consider offering them a choice of how to demonstrate their understanding of content. You might also consider allowing students to have a second chance to demonstrate their understanding when appropriate. Also encourage students to think carefully about their choices when you do offer them a choice, and about the consequences or effects of those choices on themselves and others.

### **Go Slow At First**

Expect the first weeks of distance instruction to go slow as everyone gets up to speed on all the new technology functions and routines of the remote learning environment. Patience, understanding, and more patience!