# Teaching During Disruption

Pedagogy during times of disruption requires flexibility and creative problem solving. COVID 19 has everyone scrambling to move sessions online. Those of us experienced in online teaching and educational technology are also moving quickly to help. Fortunately, there are tons of resources available.

Teaching using new methods may feel frustrating and even unsatisfying at times but try to be patient. There are many tools and strategies at your disposal and the Office of Faculty Development is ready to help you. As someone who teaches online and served as the faculty development person for an online program for many years, I can provide you with some insights into online teaching.
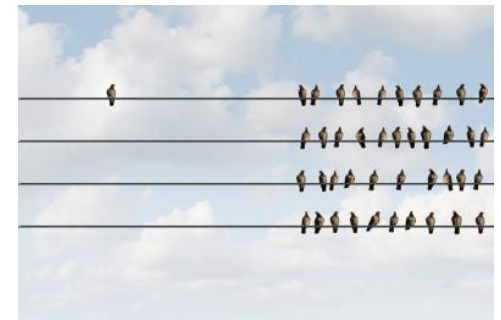
Tips for Making the Move Quickly

Here are a few general tips on moving to online teaching.

1. Take a deep breath and reflect. What are your biggest concerns? Get some support to work through those issues.
2. Assess. Go over your sessions for the coming weeks. What content do you already have that can be put online immediately? What content needs to be adapted or created for an online environment?
3. Prioritize. Create the following three lists for the upcoming weeks and focus on first things first.
    a. Must have immediately.
    b. Important to have as soon as possible.
    c. Nice to have when time permits.
4. Engagement. If you normally ask a lot of questions, consider putting those questions into a discussion forum or quiz.

5. Be selective. Resist the urge to dump everything into a folder. Highlight materials you want learners to focus on. If (like me) you find it challenging to reduce what you want to share, create a "supplemental materials" folder. Learners like having lots of available resources, but they don't want to feel overwhelmed and buried by content.
6. Communicate. At the end of the day, teaching is all about communicating. This is no different in an online environment. Check in regularly and communicate using the announcement tool or discussion feature. Give learners a way to ask questions and discuss their concerns.

Finally, recognize that these are stop-gap measures and not best practices. You may have to take some shortcuts right now; however, this is also a good opportunity to reflect on how you would create a more satisfying online learning experience in the long-term.

Synchronous vs. Asynchronous

The first thing to consider is whether you want to teach your session synchronously or asynchronously.

	Synchronous	**Asynchronous**
Definition	Instructors and students gather in real-time but in an online environment using a video conferencing tool like Zoom.	Instructors provide course materials that learners access at their convenience. Setting deadlines is still possible.
Considerations	• Do they need to see you? A webcam is all you need. • Do you need to see them? For a stronger community, turn on webcams. I would advise against making this mandatory since some learners prefer privacy. • Do you use slides? Share slides using screen share.	• Do they need to see the board? If you use the white board a lot, an asynchronous session may be a better choice. • Is everyone available at the same time? If scheduling is an issue, asynchronous might be preferable. • How comfortable are you with the technology?
Advantages	• Immediate, real-time learner engagement. • A greater feeling of community and less isolation. • More responsive exchanges between learners and instructors and among the learners themselves. • An ability to ask and answer questions in real time, which can help prevent miscommunication. Do not underestimate the value of this in saving instructor time. You can answer the question once for all the learners, rather than having to send out 77 emails answering the same question.	• Flexibility makes the session more accessible for learners. • Self-paced. Learners can speed up, slow down, or pause. • Increased cognitive engagement as learners have more time to explore content. • Ability to work out technological issues before leaners access the session.
Disadvantages	• Finding times that work for everyone.	• Lack of social interaction with peers and instructors. • Learners may feel less personally involved in learning.

	• Technology challenges. Some learners may not have fast enough networks available. You may struggle to teach and manage the technology at the same time. • Noise. Outside sounds can be a distraction. Seventy-seven learners with live mics can create a lot of background noise. You can ask learners to stay muted unless they are commenting or asking a question.	• Course materials may be misunderstood with no opportunity to ask questions in real time.
Tools Available	**Zoom** – is a video conferencing tool which allows you to engage in live conversations with learners using audio, video, and text-based chat features. Zoom provides a link you send learners to access the meeting via computer or phone. A Zoom session can be recorded and made available later.	**iLearn** – the School of Medicine's learning management system is currently Blackboard, but we call it iLearn. See more information below on tools within Blackboard. **Zoom** – you can record sessions in Zoom and make them available to learners in iLearn. **Panapto** – you can record sessions in Panapto from your desktop or in a classroom. **Articulate** – is an authoring platform that can incorporate interactive elements. The Office of Faculty Development can provide services to use this tool with your content.
Tips for Teaching	• Communicate! Let your learners know with as much advanced notice as possible when and how they can access the session. • Log in at least 5-10 minutes early. • Display a "welcome" slide before the session officially begins so learners know they have reached the right location. • Put "the sessions will start at – whatever time" on the welcome slide. • Start and end on time. • Don't be dismayed if you notice attendees exiting and returning. People sometimes lose wi-fi connection. • Use the raised hand symbol to acknowledge learners who wish to speak. It's sometimes difficult to know how to break in during an online session. • Use break-out rooms to allow learners to work in small groups.	• Communicate! Let your learners know how they can access the session, if there are any deadlines, and how long the material will be available to them to complete the requirements. • Create modules. Organize your content within modules to make it easier for learners to navigate the lesson. • Sound is everything. Use a good quality mic and do what you can to eliminate background noises. • Test. Don't record an entire session without checking that your mic, screen share, etc. are working first. • Make it lively. It is harder to focus when watching a video than a live lecture. More energy and animation are required than what you may be used to in class. • Keep it brief. Make videos no more than 10-12 minutes. That's the average attention span of your learners. Also, if you make a mistake, you don't have to go back and record an entire hour-long session.

	- Use outside resources to increase engagement. Consider having learners comment in a Google Doc or other shared space. - Consider assigning pre-session work, like contributing to a discussion forum. - Keep an eye on the chat box. It can be helpful to have a second person handling the chat box, especially if you are new to distance teaching. - Provide back-up. Upload all materials such as slides, readings, recordings, links, etc., to the learning management system. - Consider accessibility. Translate slides into PDFs so learners can access them from a mobile device.	- You can use more than one video per lesson. Use multiple videos and break them up with a learning activity. Put in questions, reflections or something to keep learners engaged. - You ain't Fellini and this ain't the Academy Awards. If your cat walks across the room during recording, you don't have to re-record. Learners appreciate authenticity. - Don't reinvent the wheel. If you find a great YouTube video – use it. Especially when you are trying to get content up in a hurry. - Video isn't everything. You can use infographics, links, readings, discussion, problem-solving activities, etc. See below for tools available in Blackboard. - Consider accessibility. Translate your slides into PDFs so learners can access them from a mobile device.
Troubleshooting	Provide troubleshooting tips to your learners. While helpful in either scenario, it's particularly important in a synchronous session. Here are some tips to share: - If your mic isn't working, use the phone number in the Zoom invitation and set up a Zoom call. - If your internet connection is slow, temporarily turn off the video and maintain audio only. - If you have earbuds or a headset, wear them. - Mute your microphone if you are not speaking and unmute when you wish to speak. - Use the "raise hand" feature if you wish to join the conversation or ask a question. - If you don't have a microphone, use the chat box to ask a question, make a comment, provide a link or other resources, etc.	

Options for Online Content

When most people hear "online or distance learning" they immediately think of videos. There are many more options. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses, so consider which is best for the content and for your learners. Usually, a combination of methods is best. Many of these methods you can do yourself from your own computer, or the Office of Faculty Development can assist you in producing these items and getting them online.

Method	Description
Readings or documents	Uploading a document or providing a link to a document is one of the easiest ways to put content online.
Slides	You can make your slides with or without speaker notes available online. Consider transferring slides into a PDF so all learners will be able to access them whether or not they have PowerPoint.
Live session	As described above, using Zoom or other videoconferencing tool, you can meet your session in real-time with your learners present virtually.
Recorded live session	A previously recorded podcast of a classroom lecture is a good stopgap measure if you need to get content up quickly, but it is not a good long-term solution to online content.
Slides with voice over	Using free or available software, you can move through your slide show and record a voice over narration.
"Talking head" video	Using your webcam, you can create a video of you talking into the camera. This type of video is helpful for short announcements and helps put a human face on your online content.
Picture-in-picture video	Most recording programs have an option for picture-in-picture where you can show slides and have a smaller image of yourself. Be mindful of the additional cognitive load for learners and the distraction factor if using this method.
Produced video	Using a recording studio or a classroom and recording equipment, you can create a video produced specifically for online use. This is a more time-consuming method, but it produces the most professional results.
Interactive content	Using an authoring tool like Articular you can incorporate interactive elements into your session. This could be pausing between videos to ask a question or two or something more complex like having learners scroll over an image to identify elements. Your goal in the long-term should be to make your online sessions as interactive as possible.

The Office of Faculty Development can assist you with any of the above by either teaching you how to do it yourself or by creating it with you.

Blackboard Tools

Blackboard, which is the learning management system we call iLearn here at UCR, has many tools. In fact, one of the advantages and disadvantages of Blackboard is that they have a tool for *everything*. Here are a few that you may find useful as you move quickly to teach online.

Announcements – You can send a mass email to all learners using the announcement tool. The advantage of announcements over email is that you don't need individual email addresses and all your course-related messages are archived within the course site. A video announcement is a helpful way to put a human face into the online learning environment and create a better sense of community.

Assignments – You can have learners upload work you would normally do in your face-to-face session. This might include reflections, problem solving, case study reviews, etc. This is the best tool to use if you wish the work to be only visible to you. For things you would like to share with the entire learning community, you might want to use . . .

Discussions - You can create threaded, written discussion forums to engage in dialogue. You may think discussion in an online environment is impossible, but I can tell you from experience that most instructors find the quality of the discussion in an online course superior to that in their face-to-face classes. The reason is obvious. Learners have more time to reflect and prepare an answer and they are under less pressure to answer immediately. It's a good idea to have at least one forum where learners can post any questions.

Modules – You can organize content into sections by creating modules. These can be done by topic, by week, or whatever makes sense for your teaching situation. Organization is critically important when moving to an online learning environment. Modules help clarify what students are expected to do and in what order.

Additional Resources

How to Be a Better Online Teacher – *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Online Teaching Strategies – EDUCAUSE

Ten Best Practices for Teaching Online – *The Teaching Professor* - Stanford

Tips and Tricks for Teaching in the Online Classroom – *Faculty Focus*

UCR Resources

Keep Teaching UCR – Main campus resource

The Office of Faculty Development – School of Medicine resource