



Pearson

# HANDY GUIDE TO TEACHING ONLINE

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# Teaching online: the first steps

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# Part 1: Choosing the right tools

Live online lessons have been growing in popularity in the ELT industry in recent years. However, with schools closing due to the spread of Coronavirus, millions of teachers and students around the world have suddenly had to move their teaching and learning online over the last few weeks.

If you're in this situation, it may well seem daunting, especially if you're not a fan of technology. The good news is that the methodology we use to teach online is the same as it is face-to-face. We just need to adapt our lessons to take into account the different tools we have available.

## Getting the right equipment

To teach live online lessons, you need:

- A computer, laptop or tablet with a webcam/camera
- A good internet connection
- A headset if background noise is an issue
- A platform on which to teach live lessons
- A means of communicating with students asynchronously (to manage homework, assignments, questions, etc.)

## Choosing a live lesson platform

If you've ever attended a webinar, then you'll already have some idea of what a live lesson might look like - even if you've never taught one yourself.

Live lesson platforms offer these features:

- The capability for teacher and students to use video and audio to see and hear each other
- A 'hands up' feature so students can get the teacher's attention
- The ability to mute a student or allow just one student to be heard
- A chat box
- An interactive whiteboard
- The ability to share your screen so students can see what's on your computer (e.g. slides, or a Word document)
- Breakout rooms which allow for pair and group work

[Skype](#) is very popular free tool and familiar to many teachers and students, though it doesn't have a whiteboard or breakout rooms. [Zoom](#) is incredibly popular among teachers and has all of the above features. It's free for 1:1 lessons (unlimited time) and groups (up to 40 minutes). Other platforms include [Adobe Connect](#) and [WizIQ](#), which have even more features. These require subscriptions but free trials allow you to try them out.

Whatever platform you choose to use, it's a great idea to use their help or support pages, join a live demo or look out for tutorials on a video channel to see how it works. Then, try it out with someone you know like a teacher or a family member, so you feel confident with it before you start teaching. Don't feel that you need to use every feature immediately.

### **Communicating with students asynchronously**

One-to-one teachers or teachers of small groups often communicate with their students via a tool such as email, WhatsApp or Slack.

But if you're looking for a tool to share documents, set homework, have asynchronous discussions, set quizzes, etc. then opt for a learning management system. You may already use one at your school. If not, you could use something like [Edmodo](#) or [Google Classroom](#).

There are other asynchronous tools that facilitate independent learning. All of these tools offer at least basic features for free:

- [Padlet](#) – an interactive noticeboard where learners can add photos, text, documents, links and audio recordings.
- [Flipgrid](#) – create a video community where you record a video posing a question or setting a task and learners respond with their own video. They can then see and respond to each other.
- [Actively Learn](#) – add questions or notes to an article on a website, share the link with students and they read it and respond. You can see their answers.
- [Quizlet](#) – you and students can create flashcards to help them learn new vocabulary.
- [Storybird](#) – you and students can create story books with beautiful art and share them anonymously online.

Don't feel you need to use all of these tools. They're there to be helpful rather than to overwhelm. Decide how you're going to structure your teaching and choose the tool(s) that will help you do that.

## Part 2: Exploiting your platform's features to achieve learning aims

### Teaching online: the first steps

Let's take a look at some ways that teachers can exploit the features of a platform while teaching a live online lesson. Our goal is to ensure each lesson achieves its aims and is as communicative as possible.

### Teacher talk

In an online lesson, teacher talk is the same as in the physical classroom. You'll be able to use your device's camera and microphone to talk to your students, while seeing them at the same time on your screen.

One issue with online learning, is that rapport and engagement can be harder to achieve. For that reason, it's a good idea to keep teacher talk to a minimum.

### Using the whiteboard

Your platform should have an interactive whiteboard. If not, there are websites that offer these for free (e.g. [miro](#)). You can use this and share your screen via your platform so students can see it. You can use the whiteboard for exactly the same things as you do in the classroom.

Depending on your device, you'll be able to handwrite or type text, and highlight, change colour and font size etc. You can also ask students to write on the whiteboard too. You can also share text using the chat function in your platform.

### Setting tasks

One issue with being in a virtual classroom is that you can ask students to complete something in their books, or note down ideas, but you can't monitor to check they're on task. When setting tasks, you might want to relay instructions in the chat box so learners can check them if they weren't listening. You'll definitely need to do this for late arrivals.

### Getting feedback on tasks

You can, of course, nominate students and ask them to give an answer verbally. However, one real benefit of online learning is the chat box. If your students are able to write in English, they can all type an answer into the chat box. This allows you to assess the understanding and ability of *all* students and not just one or two. It also ensures that learners are participating in the

lessons, and engaging with the material. With smaller groups, you might ask learners to share their ideas on the whiteboard. You also have the option to nominate a student to speak using their microphone.

### **Whole class discussions**

Whole class discussions will need to be more carefully managed in an online environment, so learners don't talk over the top of each other. It's a good idea to practice sufficient wait time after questions yourself, so a time lag doesn't affect communication. Students can use the 'hands up' button to show they want to speak, and you can mute students who have already spoken to give others a chance (you can do this politely!). You might also be able to select the one person you want to speak, so others are muted. Again, you may want to invite everyone to contribute in the chat box.

### **Pair/group work**

Breakout rooms are a fantastic way to enable pair and group work in an online lesson. You can usually pair or group the students yourself, which takes longer, or ask the platform to do this randomly, which may result in unsuitable pairs.

You can then go into each breakout room to monitor what is happening in there. It does mean you can't see what's happening in the other rooms at the same time. However, it's actually easier to listen and assess each pair/group as you don't have the background noise of other students to distract you. Breakout rooms take time to organize, so fewer, longer pairwork activities may make more sense than numerous shorter ones.

Of course you can also hold pairwork activities without breakout rooms, but the students not talking will need to be given a task (assessing, listening for key vocab, agreeing, disagreeing etc) which they can complete in the chatbox. If pairwork activities include brainstorming ideas, it makes sense to use the chatbox.

If you don't have the benefit of breakout rooms, another option is for speaking practice to be done outside the lesson for homework using something like Padlet or Flipgrid (see part 1).

### **Playing audio and video**

How you do this depends very much on the platform you're using. If you're using something like Zoom or Adobe Connect, you can play video or audio on your computer while sharing your screen and students will see/hear it. With other platforms, you may need to share the link or the mp3 files with your students and ask them to watch or listen outside the platform themselves.

## Sharing materials

If you use classware to accompany your coursebooks, then you can work in a similar way to in a face-to-face classroom. Bring up the classware on your device and share your screen. Your students can write in their coursebooks. When sharing your screen, remember that PDF readers allow you to zoom in and out: zoom in on the exercise or text you're using.

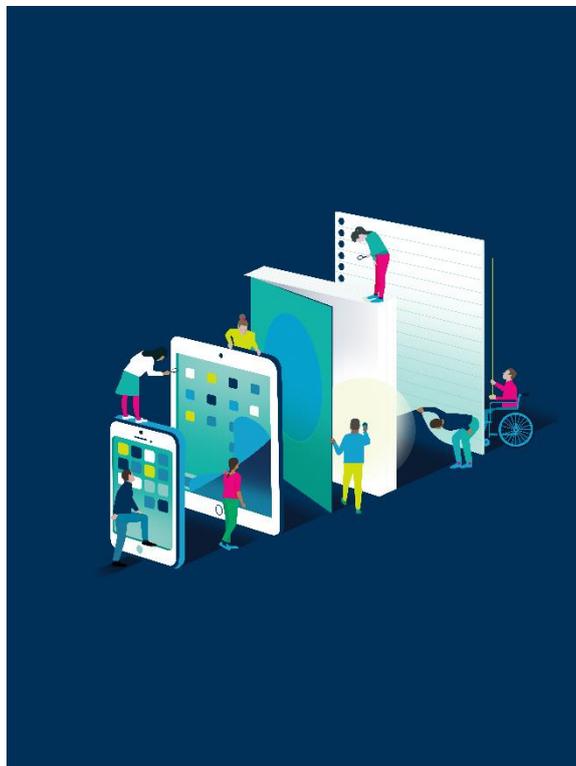
If you want to bring in other texts, for example, then you could share this on the whiteboard. You could also bring the text up on your screen and share your screen with students.

Ideally, all the text should be visible on the screen at once. For longer texts, share it via your learning management system, email or through an app like WhatsApp.

Finally, it's important to remember that the first time you ask students to use a tool, you'll need to make sure they have clear instructions. Build extra time into your plan so your students can work out how to use it.

## Pronunciation

When modelling pronunciation it makes sense to get closer to your webcam: that way your students can see the shape of your mouth.



## Part 3: Engaging learners in an online lesson

### Teaching online: the first steps

In this final part, we'll go into some ways that an online teacher can get and maintain engagement.

### Building a rapport

If you already know your students, then you should already have a good rapport with them. However, if your students are new to you then you may need to make a little more of an effort to obtain a rapport. This is because physical distance can be felt when working online. It often makes it harder to create a connection between you and your students, and also between the students themselves.

- During teacher talk stages of the lesson, avoid looking at your screen. Instead, look directly into your camera. To your students, it'll seem as if you're making eye contact with them.
- Make sure you smile too. I'm sure you'll do this naturally, but you may find you need to smile wider and more often online than in a face-to-face setting. Record yourself to see how you come across in a lesson to help adjust this.
- To make sure that students get comfortable with each other, use the same tricks you'd use in a face-to-face class. Start lessons by getting students to ask each other questions about their evening/weekends either in open class or via pair/group work in breakout rooms.
- Tell learners to ask follow-up questions to answers to encourage them to show interest in each other. You should also have students work in different pairs to get to know each other, and so on.

### Engaging learners

Just as in the face-to-face classroom, the topic, material, and activities will help to engage learners. In addition, the following tips might help.

### **Use facial expressions**

While you don't want to overdo this and have your students wonder if you've been drinking too much coffee, you may need to use more exaggerated facial expressions to help keep students watching you on screen during teacher talk stages.

### **Use your voice**

Vary your voice to keep teacher talk engaging. Go soft, go loud (without deafening the class!) and use intonation. This will help you sound more interesting when you speak and sound more interested in what students say. Because of the video element, you may need to exaggerate this a little more than in the classroom, but not too much. You don't want to come across as patronising.

### **Keep learners occupied**

This means avoiding lengthy teacher talk where students might easily become distracted by other things on their device. Keep students as active in the lessons as possible. For example, set questions and give wait time before nominating students to answer. Then, nominate several students in turn before confirming if they're right. That way, they all know they need to have an answer ready.

Alternatively, get all students to write an answer or draw a picture on a piece of paper and hold it up to the screen. They could also give thumbs or thumbs down to indicate answers, or you can get them to type answers in the chat box.

Use breakout rooms for pair and group work, and set fast finisher tasks so that those students don't get distracted and find it hard to get their focus back.

### **Think about what students can do in their own time**

There's no real need for students to be sitting on a platform in silence reading a text and answering questions for a long period of time.

Get them to read it at home before the lesson and come to class with the answers. This also goes for listening, speaking (especially if you don't have breakout rooms), and writing.

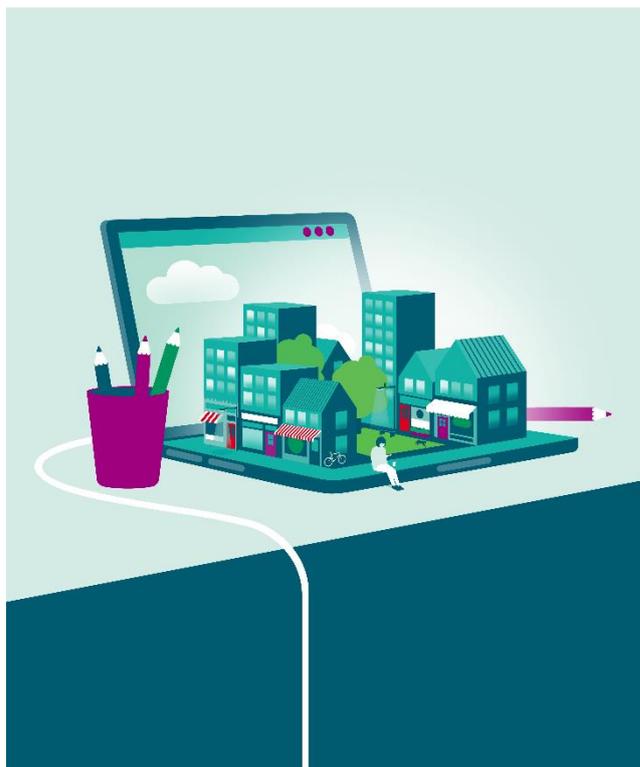
Of course, if students are unlikely to do these tasks for homework, then the classroom is the right place for them.

## Use visuals and realia

Just as you would in the face-to-face classroom, use a variety of visuals such as cartoons, story books, photos, and realia to keep students engaged, especially young learners. You can bring them up on your computer and share your screen. For young learners, puppets can be a great way to keep students interesting in teacher talk.

## It takes practice and patience

I hope this guide has been helpful. Online learning is different to face-to-face teaching in some senses, but in the end much of what we do in a face-to-face environment can be transferred online. We just need to get to grips with the platform and adapt our approach to suit the tools we have. So, wherever you are and whoever you'll be teaching, good luck and enjoy!





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