

Content and Collaboration

During Covid-19 school closures, teachers adapted and innovated in moving their classes online. Building on this experience, teachers can now refine their approaches to online learning.

To help guide this process, Learnovate has compiled a three-part practical guide for post-primary teachers to act as a support when preparing for online and blended teaching and learning. The purpose of this third guide is to share ideas for preparing assignments and lessons in your subject department. It addresses two main issues - how to find and prepare resources for online learning and how to get your students working collaboratively online.

Getting started

The return to school will be a very different experience to previous years. The students will have had very diverse experiences of being home during the lockdown and they may be concerned about the return to school during a pandemic. The **students' well-being** is an important factor and it would be worthwhile to include some discussion about this with your students. The NCCA has put together some ideas to help students with the [return to schooling to support their well-being](#). There are [lesson plans](#) available that may be useful for SPHE or tutors to help students with the return.



Setting up a folder or [Padlet](#) online could be a useful way of **sharing resources** within your school or subject department. An account can be set-up in a matter of minutes and shared with several contributors to create a great collection of resources. A shared folder is another great way to share content with a group but Padlet can give a better visual representation of the files and it is also possible to add notes and links to useful information online. The PDST provides a [useful manual](#) to explain how to make the best use of Padlet.

Finding & Creating Resources

[Scoilnet](#) is an **official education portal of the Department of Education and Skills** that offers links to resources online for teaching and learning. The website has a vast database of these links and resources and offers a filtering system that enables the user to find their specific subject, topic or level required. The database has content available for Junior cycle, Senior cycle, Transition year and LCA.



The portal also gives the opportunity to users to add new resources or links that may benefit other educators who are searching for good online materials for use in class.

Scoilnet also has a suite of other websites that may benefit you in your subject area. The [Science Education Resource Hook Series](#) has a collection of videos you may find useful with Physics, Chemistry and Biology classes. For languages, [ppli.ie](#) has lots of resources for many languages as do [German.ie](#) and [French.ie](#) for their specific languages. Other websites include [The Irish Flag](#), [Scoilnet Maps](#), [Census at School](#), and [Webwise](#) which has a useful collection of lessons on internet safety called [thinkb4uclick](#).

During the school closures, lots of teachers turned to **social media for support with online learning**. There are many discussion forums and social media groups for different subject areas like [Gaeilge](#), [English](#), [Maths](#) and [Science](#). These groups can be a useful place for teachers to discuss their work and share resources and ideas. Searching groups on Facebook can link you to a group for your specific subject area. Most subjects are catered for but if your subject area doesn't have a group, why not begin one yourself? Twitter can also be a really valuable resource, for example [@EdChatIE](#) and many more national and international education twitterati.

Many teachers have created very useful **subject specific websites** online for their own students and the information and resources are available online for everyone to access. These websites can be found very easily with a quick google. Search for useful sites within your subject area like [Gaeilge](#), [Science](#) and [History](#). The best way to find these sites is to search for notes on more specific things like a poem on a course or a period of history.

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[YouTube](#) and [vimeo](#) are fantastic resources for videos that could compliment any lesson and both offer the opportunity for you to upload and create your own content to be shared with your students and colleagues. YouTube can sometimes be blocked in



schools and a more limited catalogue [TeacherTube](#) is a good option if that is the case in your school. TeacherTube is a great option on its own as it divides content into subject areas which may make it easier to find what you need. When the video you need

isn't on YouTube, you can always make your own: video yourself doing a science experiment, talking over a presentation, showing an exercise regime for a PE class or writing on a whiteboard! Remember that once your video is uploaded, it can be accessed online to be used again for future lessons.

Recreating very practical classroom dynamics such as an experiment in science has proved difficult for many students and teachers especially considering the safety issues concerned and also the access to relevant materials. Many experiments are currently available online on YouTube and TeacherTube. Teachers can also create their own content which is easily uploaded on YouTube to be shared. Students will not have the same experience as doing the experiment themselves but there are ways to evaluate if the student has understood each stage of the experiment: a student can ask and answer questions on the experiment, they can write their own summary of the experiment or even present the experiment in a storyboard format. Websites such as [storyboardthat.com](#) can be used to show your understanding of the experiment in a more visual way. This website can be accessed for free provided you are comfortable leaving the storyboards online for public viewing.



The use of **infographics** is a very effective way of giving information that can be difficult to understand or visualize in a lesson. Online Software such [Piktochart](#) and [Adobe Spark](#) are free and available online for use.

Most educational publishers will have an online space which requires registration. These websites or apps are often loaded with resources which include help with planning support, presentations, ebooks and many other useful materials for both student and teacher. Publishers online spaces include: [educate.ie](#), [Edco](#), [Folens](#), [Gill Education](#), [CJ Fallon](#) and [Mentor Books](#).

As the year progresses and exams are looming, you may need to make more **references to exam questions**. All official state exam materials including marking schemes are widely available on [examinations.ie](#) by clicking Examination Material Archive » Click the checkbox » Click the drop down menus to find what you need. Alternatively, you or your students can download the [pocket papers app](#) to give quick access on a mobile device. There are two separate apps one for Junior Cycle and another for Senior Cycle, and maths logbooks are also available on the app.

Collaboration

During the lockdown from March 2020, collaboration between students decreased dramatically. This is not surprising as everyone was in their own homes, learning alone. Students and teachers found the lack of interaction really difficult and for some upsetting. If schools need to move to distance learning again, it is possible to **keep collaborative activity going online**. The social aspect of school is so important for learners' well-being but also for their learning. Collaboration and interaction with peers can help learners work through questions and problems and motivate them to keep learning. Setting up collaboration online is like setting up collaboration in the classroom. Structure the work as you would in the classroom:

1. Provide a clear group task with clear sub-tasks and timelines if needed;
2. Specify roles (leader, time manager, researcher, note-taker, ideas generator, etc.);
3. Be clear about shared and individual responsibilities - each person has a role in making sure the team is successful.

Some useful guidelines to follow include [Cooperative Learning](#) principles or the [Bridge21 activity model](#) for collaborative project-based learning.

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Students don't need to be in a live synchronous online setting to collaborate. They can **collaborate offline through shared** documents or online through video streaming or a mixture of both - using the online time for discussion, clarification and role assignment and the offline time for working on their individual contributions and providing each other with feedback to achieve the shared goal.

Of course, students will need guidance on appropriate online behaviour, the same as appropriate classroom behaviour. Webwise.ie has lots of useful resources for schools and teachers in this area.



Collaborative activities between students should be simple to facilitate if you are registered as a school so that you are all connected online with the same resources. Web based tools such as [Microsoft Teams](#) and [G-Suite](#)

are useful **platforms for facilitating collaboration** between every member of the school community. These tools are available for free in educational settings and can be accessed easily through a browser or apps downloaded onto your device.

The above-mentioned platforms give the opportunity to share text and create a live document online that the student can work on and you can view their progress or completed work. Sharing PDFs is a useful format to provide read only text for instructional purposes during an assignment or a lesson and Google Docs and Word are more interactive versions that can be shared with an individual or multiple students to encourage collaboration.

Online communication tools are key to maintaining collaborative practice by schools and their remote learning communities. Email, chat, messaging tools and video conferencing software are an invaluable way of maintaining good communication in an online setting. Classroom management applications give the option to ask the class group questions to engage them in conversation on a chosen topic in text format. **Breakout group** discussions can be easily created and encouraged with students using conventional online communication tools like Google Meet, Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

[Open Office](#) has a suite of software available online and it is free of charge to download. Should you find that your student does not have access to



any of the above mentioned packages, you may find it useful to install the software on the student's or your device. In much the same way as G-Suite, Microsoft Teams and [iWork](#), you have text, presentation and spreadsheet software that give most of the same functionality as the more mainstream packages. This package also includes [OpenOffice Math](#) which can be used by the student as an equation editor for text documents.



Presentation software can be shared and used in much the same way as the text equivalents. There are plenty of options available including Google Slides, Keynote, PowerPoint, Impress and online presentation software such as [Prezi](#). Presentation software can be an ideal way for a **student to present their work** or simply to aid the delivery of your lessons as a teacher. Using screen capture software and inbuilt audio recording software with these packages, you can create a presentation that can be viewed in both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments.

Finding the right materials online

The **use of imagery** is hugely effective in making a point clear for the learner. Don't underestimate the importance of adding a few images to a document or presentation. The image does not need to be there for decoration only, the image can be the focus of discussion and help the student visualize difficult concepts and ideas.

Searching Google Images:



When using google images, use the **filtering features** to get more specific about what you need. After your initial search in your browser, click tools and a menu will drop down giving you plenty of options. Tools gives you the option to search by size, colour, usage rights, image type and even time. Time can be useful if the image you are searching for is associated with a specific time; for example, if you google an event and get a lot of photos of each year the event took place you can refine your search by looking for an image for the specific year or date you had in mind.

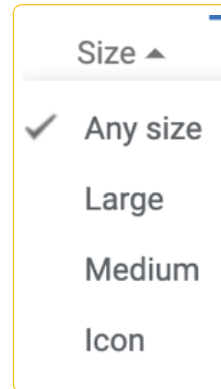
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Be **specific** when you search for an image. A good example would be a search for a picture of a jaguar. You will immediately see images of an animal and also images of a car. Try using a hyphen to exclude one of the searches. Search using 'Jaguar -car' and you will only see images of the animal.

You may have made a presentation in the past and the picture you found is blurry when stretched. This is because the image is probably quite small. Using Tools, you can ask for a larger image to suit your needs. When you are stretching the image in your presentation to make it fit well, stretch from the corners. Stretching from the side or top will make the image appear fatter or longer. You may have the perfect picture already, but the quality isn't what you need for the purposes of your presentation. A better version may be available online, simply click the camera icon on google images and upload the picture you have and it will find all similar images available online.

There are several types of images out there and choosing the right type can enhance the visuals of your presentation. Get to know the **different types of**

images available which includes Jpg, Gif, Png, linear and transparent images. Getting more specific about the image required could have a major impact on how the learner understands the lesson you are delivering. A quick example in a language class could be the use of an animated GIF image to explain an action without having to resort to translation.



Tá an fear ag siúl.

Google Search Tips

- Quotes - Add quotation marks to any search topic and the results are very different. Search for science lessons and "science lessons" The result in quotation marks can be more specific because it is searching for content with the terms in the order you have written them.
- Be specific about the filetype you are searching for. For example, when searching for history lessons online if you write: history lessons filetype:pdf you will find very specific content rather than websites.
- If you want to narrow your search to a specific website, you can let google know that you only want results from that location. Search education site:rte.ie and you will find all the results are about education and every one is from the website rte.ie.
- The use of a - hyphen is a concrete way to exclude search content that isn't relevant. Search education apps and you get some interesting results. What happens if it keeps recommending apps that are not compatible with your device. Exclude the apps you can't use simply by changing the search to education apps -android and you will find a set of results that are very different and probably suited to your device.
- Google can be used as a conversion tool and also answers Maths questions. Asking a question in the search bar will give you a quick answer which is less time consuming than using apps or particular online tools.
- Google searches tend to favour website titles and URLs, but you can search the content of websites online by adding intext: to broaden your search.
- If you found a great website and want to find other similar websites, try related: to find alternatives.

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