

Getting ready

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. This first guide focuses on the key initial activities at whole school, teacher and class level.

Whole school level



Build on your own experience! Since the school closures teachers now have direct experience of delivering remote learning. **Brainstorm and share** your experiences of remote teaching and learning with your colleagues - what worked well, what

not so well etc. Tap into your colleagues' expertise or **share your own expertise** - it's never too late to learn something new.

The guidance of continuity of schooling by the Department of Education and Skills recommends the 'adoption of a whole school approach to engagement with students to ensure consistency of approach so as to not overburden students or their parents and guardians.' **Deciding on a platform** (as a school) to deliver online learning is an important step. A consistent learning environment for remote learning will offer a consistent learning experience to the student much like the familiar setting of a classroom. There are options out there. [Google Classroom](#) is a popular platform and there is also a good suite of classroom technologies by [Microsoft](#). Other options include [Edsby](#), [Moodle](#) & [Schoolology](#).



Create a survey for your school to find out which devices your students and teachers have and whether they have access to broadband. Collecting this information will help you to make informed choices regarding the best software to use when planning for remote learning. A student may have access to a device but could be sharing it with family members and so unable to attend online class at a particular time meaning they might need access to a recorded class or class material. [SurveyMonkey](#), [Microsoft forms](#) & [Google forms](#) are simple and easy ways to collect this kind of data.

Potential survey questions:

- What devices do you have access to?
- Do you have full access or is the device shared?
- Do you have a working camera and microphone on your device?
- Do you have access to broadband?
- Is this access restricted?
- Do you have a working printer?
- Do you have a quiet space at home to do your work?

After a prolonged period of remote learning, it can become difficult to keep track of the students' work online. An **ePortfolio** would be a good way for students to **organise all their work in one place**. The ePortfolio can effectively become your student's online copybook. They can add text, pictures, videos and documents to showcase all their hard work. One ePortfolio should be enough, as having a separate one for each subject could become very complicated for students to keep track of. Therefore, which ePortfolio tool to use should be decided at a whole school level. [Scoilnet](#) has a great overview of eportfolio software options and uses.

Considering the events of the last few months, getting relevant **CPD** (Continuous Professional Development) is more important than ever. The PDST has an [online course to aid teachers during the school closures](#). Keep an eye out for CPD opportunities online and it's certainly worth seeking CPD on a whole school level to enable best practices in the event of a potential return to fully remote learning. A whole suite of online courses are available on the [PDST website](#) for free to improve your knowledge of teaching online. There is also a [distance learning section](#) on the PDST website with several resources to support teaching and learning online.

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Teacher level

Remote learning is a shared experience between learner and teacher. Teachers faced challenges delivering remote learning but what was the experience like at the other end? Ask your students how they got on. What worked well? Were the tasks clear and what did they learn? Send your students a **questionnaire** or sit down with them and **listen to their experience**. Put yourself in their shoes! Have ongoing check-ins to see how they are getting on, what is working/ isn't working etc. - a good way to start each term.

When working with technology **don't assume the students have all the skills** - get them ready. You don't need to be an expert on the use of technology, [YouTube](#) has a great library of instructional videos to explain how things work. Showing or linking your students to a video before they need to use the tool could answer a lot of questions the students may have. Consider creating a checklist of what students need to know how to do e.g.: muting microphone, finding a website, downloading documents, naming documents, choosing location to save documents etc.



Remember that websites like [YouTube](#) can also be very useful if you are having difficulty using online teaching tools. Simply type in your issue in the search bar and you'll likely find a short video explaining how things work. Don't overuse the

expertise of a colleague, try Googling and finding the solution yourself before involving someone else. You are very likely to better understand things in the long term when you discover it for yourself.

Choosing applications and software for remote learning

There is a lot of software out there that can enhance the learning experience for students. There are so many options available and we all have our favourites. Some things need to be considered before using these tools.

- How much does it cost?
- Is it compatible with student and teacher devices?
- Is it complicated to use?
- What are the benefits of using it?
- Does it need to be installed?
- Does it use a lot of data or a lot of space on the device?
- Is registration required?

The most successful online platforms are intuitive. **Simplicity is key.** Teachers have all been there in the classroom explaining a task and every hand goes up and the teacher is suddenly inundated with questions. When a task or assignment needs to be completed, the student will likely be alone on their device so make sure the instructions are clear to encourage the student to engage with the content.



[Zoom](#) proved to be a popular tool for teaching during the lockdown and there are many alternative **video conferencing** tools out there: Google Meet/Hangouts, Facetime, Webex and Microsoft Teams. But the notion of zoom fatigue will resonate with all

teachers (and students) so remember that it isn't necessary to be on screen and live for every lesson. Use the live classes to focus on the engagement with the students that face to face contact allows: checking in, connecting, dialogue, feedback and explaining. In particular it's a good opportunity to address issues or concerns the students may have.

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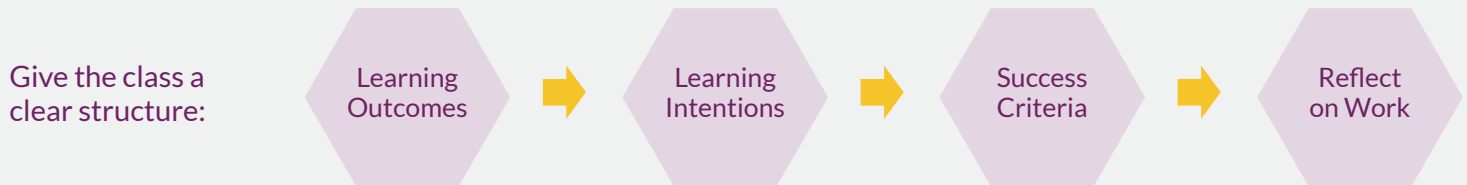
There is more communications between teachers and students now. This makes doing the work easier because you can see all of the questions that people are asking and what answers the teachers are giving. It's like a big team online and it makes the move to online school much easier. - Trinity Access Covid-19 Student Survey

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Class Level (Online Learning Content)

Preparing lessons is time consuming. Think long term and develop a task that needs to be completed over a few lessons. Focus on longer tasks like project work and collaborative work.



Mix it up. In online learning environments, mixing it up means **delivering the learning content in a wide variety of formats**: text, presentations, infographics, video and audio, case studies, assignments, scenario-based exercises, group discussions, knowledge checks, quizzes and gamified learning. Maintaining this mix should keep it interesting and encourage engagement. It isn't necessary to mix too many formats but adding something different to a lesson every so often will give your approach a fresh feeling.

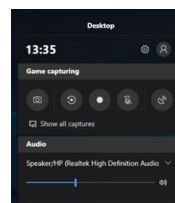
Break it up. In online learning environments, breaking it up means delivering the learning content (or larger piece of knowledge) in bite size pieces that are more manageable for the learner to process and easier to recall. The use of presentations to break a large body of information into smaller chunks is one of the most effective ways to break things up.

One of the most time consuming things when delivering lessons online is the design of good visual or interactive tasks to compliment your lesson. Why spend all your time putting these resources together if they already exist? There are 1000s of resources online, take the time to **search** before you begin creating something new. Websites such as YouTube and Scoilnet are a good starting point. Consider using some of these:

- YouTube clips
- Podcasts
- Film trailers
- Music videos & songs
- TED talks

Educational publishers also have a range of online resources available when you register on their websites. They often have good teaching and learning tools as well as ebooks and planning materials.

Don't expect the documents you find to match your work perfectly. Remember that **most documents are editable and can be adapted** to suit your needs.



Screen capture software gives the opportunity to pre-record a video of yourself explaining the content of the lesson or assignment. Screen capture recording is possible on any computer with a working camera:

- Use Shift-Command-5 on your MacBook to record what's happening on your screen
- Video screen capture is also on Windows 10 as a built-in feature - click the window button and the letter G and the game capturing feature should appear for you to record whatever you are doing on the screen.

Share the content you have created; store the documents where others can access it on a shared school platform or location.

Plan **synchronous** and **asynchronous** learning time. Don't stick to one format, **keep it interesting**. Synchronous classes occur when both teacher and students are online at the same time. Asynchronous is when the work (or class) is not online all together at the same time such as when you have set online work for completion through your chosen format. Sending work online in an asynchronous manner can give the teacher time to correct and give feedback while the students are engaging with the content online and also can allow the student to work at a time that is suitable for them.

Online live video time is really valuable so use it wisely for communication and collaboration rather than "delivery" of content.

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It's helpful to connect via live video at least once a week to catch up with everyone, explain things, check-in, set students up to work together offline and give some oral feedback.

Many video conferencing apps also give the option to **record the video stream** of a live class, allowing you to share the video on your chosen platform with all the students which is then available for them to review material or reference sections when needed. It also gives the absent student the ability to catch up.

Keep in mind that students will be receiving a lot of work online in a remote learning situation. Make sure you are giving your students a **realistic timeframe** to complete tasks and assignments. Coordinate as a staff how much work is assigned with each lesson to avoid students being overwhelmed. In some cases, negotiating a fair deadline may be necessary to ensure the student engages.

Glossary of terms

Blended Learning	Blended learning is an approach to teaching that combines the traditional classroom dynamic with the use of digital technologies. Using this approach in your classroom would make any return to remote learning a more natural transition.
Synchronous	Students and teachers are in the same place (online or in classroom), at the same time, so all activities happen in real time. Allows for live communication; great for discussions, Q&As, and other real-time activities.
Asynchronous	Not in real-time. Teaching materials are posted online, and students can work through them in their own time, communicating with each other and the teacher via different channels such as email, shared docs, forums and chat channels. Best used outside "here and now" teaching; offers greater flexibility to achieve tasks over a period of time.
Breakout rooms	Built into some live class (synchronous) video conferencing tools, this allows you to imitate group work by creating artificial groups.
Screen recording	Allows you to screen capture; useful if you want to provide instructions on how to use certain software or record an explanation to an answer.
Screen sharing	Shares your screen for others to see in a synchronous environment; works well for sharing presentations, documents or live demonstrations.
LMS - Learning Management System	Online system used to manage online learning, collaborative learning and learning content. Eg Blackboard, Edmodo, Moodle, Google Classroom, Schoology etc.
VLE - Virtual Learning Environment	Similar to Learning Management systems but more commonly used term for them in formal education.
ePortfolio	A digital collection created by a student of their course-related work.

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