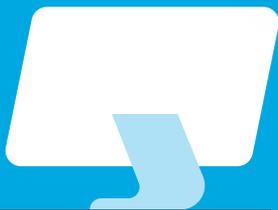


THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

Distance Learning

FOR EDUCATORS



Millions of students across the United States have transitioned to distance learning environments in a matter of days.

As this transition happens, educators are completely redesigning curriculum and instruction and optimizing teaching practices for this new environment.

To enable educators to quickly set their class up for distance learning success, this guide features strategies from digital communication expert, A. Lee Judge, and eLearning designer, Nicasia Anzalone Caires, to deliver remote instruction, engage students, and reach out to parents and families at a safe social distance.

This guide was repurposed from our webinar, *How to Set Your Class Up for Distance Learning Success*, which you can [download here](#).

To help you launch your distance learning plan, we will address the following topics:

- Configuring Your Distance Learning Tech Stack
- Developing Communication Strategies for Your Distance Learning Environment
- Optimizing Instruction for a Virtual Medium

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Configuring Your Distance Learning Tech Stack



With the transition to online environments, educators, students, and parents are having to explore and adopt a wide range of tools and pick up on new skills quickly to help manage this rapid change.

The good news is that many of these tools may already be available to educators through their schools. Others often have free versions and low-lift implementations to help you get started quickly.

We will break down these content creation tools you can use to enhance your digital toolbox into three categories:

- Existing Digital Classroom Platforms
- Screen Video Capture
- Conference Platforms

Digital Classroom Platforms

Let's first talk about some of the tools your school district may already have. A couple of the popular ones that may already be in place because of the ability to have embedded email processes are Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom.

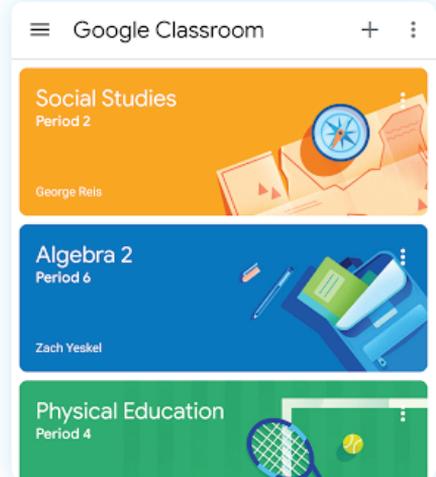
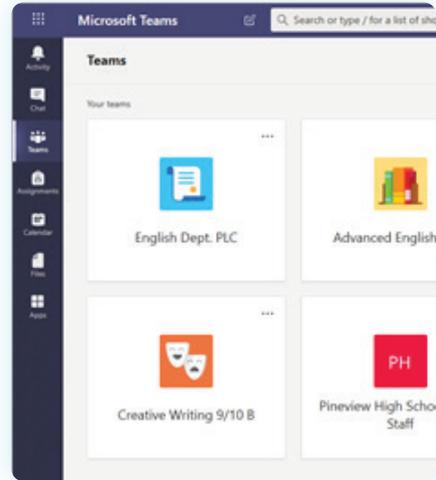
Amidst this change, these tools have now evolved from a nice-to-have to a need-to-have.

And there's also, of course, other more specific edtech platforms and learning management systems like Schoology, Edmodo, and Khan Academy, as well as hundreds of others that you may be familiar with or are already using. Those more often end up being tools used for specific subject areas or activities and do not function as your overall communication platform.

That's where Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom come in handy.

These tools are very specific to your school district and what you already have in place. Many districts likely already have students distributed with their own email addresses and Google IDs that help facilitate classroom management.

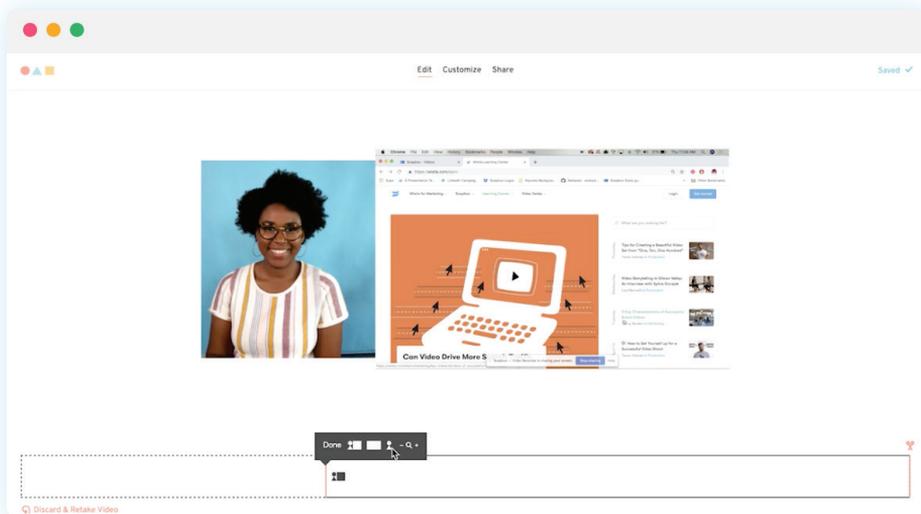
As you transition online, now is a time to dig into what your school district already has that you can use.



Quick Screen Capture Instructional Videos

To make the classroom come alive online, we also encourage you to take it a step further by diving into new ways to digitally communicate and facilitate learning with students, such as video. Of course, students are used to seeing their educators faces every day, and having that visual connection is often key for many types of learners.

Here, we will cover a few ways that you can find some easy browser-based tools to enable you to create engaging content without having to purchase additional software.



Many of these video hosting platforms were traditionally used by salespeople to enable them to speak to their clients, but they are also a great tool for educators. The overall benefit is you can easily create a video with your own personality in it, share your screen, and send a link directly inside an email to communicate. It's a great way to communicate with students to provide a really engaging video quickly.

With these tools, you can walk students through content and also have your presence felt while delivering the material. For example, Vidyard, Wistia, and Screencast-O-Matic enable you to share your screen and record yourself talking in short succinct videos. Using those tools, you can also edit the videos and then share them via email or within your other learning platforms.



vidyard.com



wistia.com



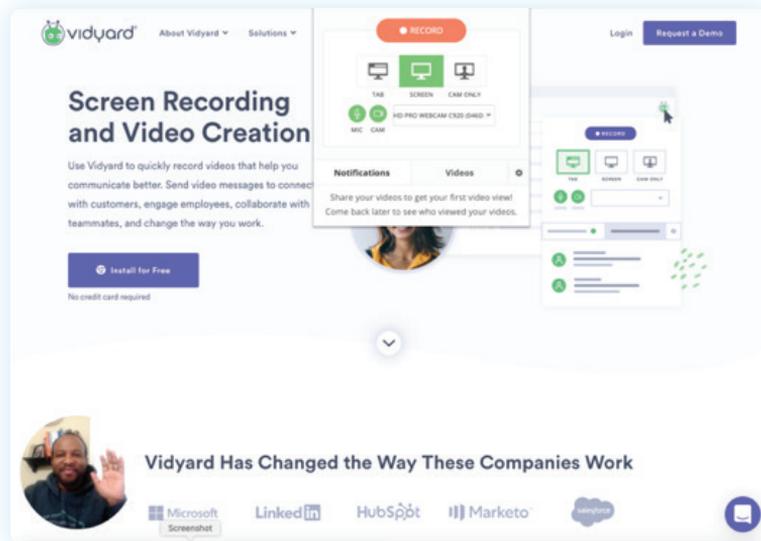
screencast-o-matic.com

In most cases, these all have free versions that don't require you to download any software, which allows you to quickly develop engaging videos to share with your students.

Other screen capture tools you can consider are Jing, Quick Time, TechSmith Capture for iPhone, Camtasia, and Snagit. In addition, other applications that webinar participants shared they are using include Loom and Powtoons.

Example: Recording and sharing screen while you host from your webcam

This is an example of a video Lee created. In the bottom left corner, you'll see Lee, while the rest of the screen is his browser that he recorded via the chrome plugin for Vidyard.



You can record either a small window of yourself or do a full or split screen. Tools like Wistia and Vidyard even allow you to go back after you record and decide what part of the video you want to show your full video or your full screen.

This way, you can decide where to emphasize the board versus the screen or web page.

Once done, you can save, publish, and send it to students – often within the same platform.

Teleconference Platforms

Now let's talk about teleconference platforms, which are great for connecting in real time with students and establishing that remote connection. The most popular tool you hear about today is definitely Zoom.



(Photo credit: JTA/SAR ACADEMY)

In addition, Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom also have teleconference capabilities. Skype, if you already have Microsoft embedded in your school district, might be a tool you also already have available.

Security Considerations

Like other platforms discussed, Zoom was created for enterprise business use, so they weren't prepared to service the wide range of uses for which it is now being employed, from virtual classrooms to happy hour to public events.

As a result, Zoom (as you've likely heard) has caught quite a bit of slack lately because of hacks and privacy issues. They've had to quickly respond by updating their software with more security patches. In fact, they've updated their website with educational pages for how to use Zoom and how to be safe using Zoom in order to catch up to its new use cases, especially in the education realm.

Strategies to Enhance the Security of Your Zoom Use

Protect Meeting ID

One of the major issues was that Zoom users lacked enough protection for Meeting IDs. This resulted in what is now coined as zoom bombing, which occurs when people jump into meetings uninvited and take over the broadcast.

To prevent this, it is important to protect the Meeting ID and not make it public. Instead, send it directly to your students and ask them not to share. In addition, Zoom is taking measures to hide the ID when the meeting is in progress.

Provide Guidelines to Participants (beforehand)

Also, you can provide guidelines to parents and students before initiating class via Zoom. You might include a dress code or rules for what can be shown on camera.

18+ Maintain Adult Presence

You also want to maintain some presence while you're on Zoom. This means that if you have a Zoom with your students, be sure to end the meeting when you're finished with it so that the students don't linger on and have their own online recess while you're away.

Think of it like walking away from your classroom. When you wouldn't leave a physical classroom, don't do this on Zoom either.

🕒 Use the Waiting Room

A new feature Zoom added is a waiting room, which some other platforms already have. This is on by default and enables you to only allow people into the virtual classroom or Zoom conference that you approve.

This quickly shuts down the chances of zoom bombing, so it's important to utilize for safety.

Other Tips for Your Tech Stack



With the use of digital tools, security is definitely a priority, especially with laws and regulations like COPPA and FERPA as well as a district's AUP. Here are a few tips to streamline how you check or vet applications in alignment with these guidelines.



Check for COPPA Compliancy

Verify information policies and age requirements.

Before using, assess how an application or tool uses Personally Identifiable information (PII) if students will be interacting with it at all and setting up an account, especially if they're under the age of 13.

There is a COPPA amendment rule that states that operators must post a prominent and clearly labeled link to an online notice of its information practices. If you don't see something like that in the About Us section or Privacy section, steer away from that app.



Configure Settings for Optimal Security

Research settings options and use them to protect students.

When using different applications, make sure you're leveraging the different settings to protect students as best as you can.

For example, you may want to disable the chat in a teleconference. Students don't need to be chatting constantly, and by doing so, that's one less thing for you to monitor. You can turn that channel on when you're looking for responses or feedback from students.

Or perhaps another teacher can help you monitor that channel. This way, they can remove students if necessary or put out fires as they arise.



Get Parent Permission

Inform parents and request permission.

You'll also want to make sure that you're getting parent permission no matter what you do.

Send out a note to parents about the apps you are using, the privacy settings enabled, and any guideline students must follow.

For example, let parents know you will use Zoom in a closed environment with the chat disabled. Or, you are using a tool that requires a log in, but you set up the usernames and passwords, so they are not identifiable to students.

Developing Communication Strategies for Your Distance Learning Environment



In the physical classroom, you're able to easily interact with students, encourage them as they learn, and communicate to them how you feel. In an online environment, teachers don't have the benefit of that face-to-face connection.

Here, we'll take a closer look at communication strategies to bridge the virtual connection to students and parents.

“Successful virtual learning is all about relationships.”

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

You have to get creative to cultivate those relationships that make learning successful. It's about students trusting that you're still going to be there for them and that you'll provide all the materials and all the wonderful directions that you've given in the classroom.

That level of trust is what keeps students motivated and working in this virtual situation that they may or may not be used to at this point in their learning careers.

One-Stop Shop

Keep all information in one location.

Make sure you organize materials just like you would for a lesson – always prepared with everything ready. By keeping these resources in one easily accessible location, you will help yourself as you connect with students and ensure students have what they need to learn.

Even though you're building this plane as you fly it, you do want to make sure that you're still following typical practices.

Ready-Made

Take advantage of ready-made content to meet students where they are and consider various modalities.

In addition, there are so many resources already available that can be utilized to introduce and teach concepts. This will help you to save time and find different resources that appeal to different modalities of learning.

Simplify Productivity

Choose simple ways for students to demonstrate learning.

Most importantly, choose simple ways for students to show what they know. Teachers have to consider that many students are not accustomed to the demands of online learning, and perhaps their parents are not either, so having a student upload something might be a huge ask for the parent at home.

Instead, ask students to complete a simple exit ticket either in a chat, through an easily accessible online tool that is low lift for them and their parents, or over the phone.

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Chances are that you still can employ a lot of the same methods you did in a more traditional classroom environment. Parents weren't there every day, but you still communicated with them regularly.

Consistency and Cadence

Keep communication format and timing consistent.

To maintain that relationship with the parents, you want to give them a consistent communication format on a regular schedule. Are you going to do a Monday email and a Friday email or a weekly update? Whatever it is, just keep that consistent.

Scannable Structure

Ensure the communication is easily digestible.

To simplify communication, you want to make sure that the communication method you're using to transmit your information to the students and parents is in a scannable structure. This helps them pull out the most important information and digest it quickly.

Progress Updates

Make it meaningful and preferential.

You also want to make sure that you offer progress updates to parents. Keep those meaningful and keep them preferential.

If a parent does not have the wherewithal to use Zoom, then offer them a phone call, email, text, or whatever it is that you have set up for communication within your district and within your district's policy. It may be something as simple as a global announcement's system.

Be Available

Offer flexible scheduling.

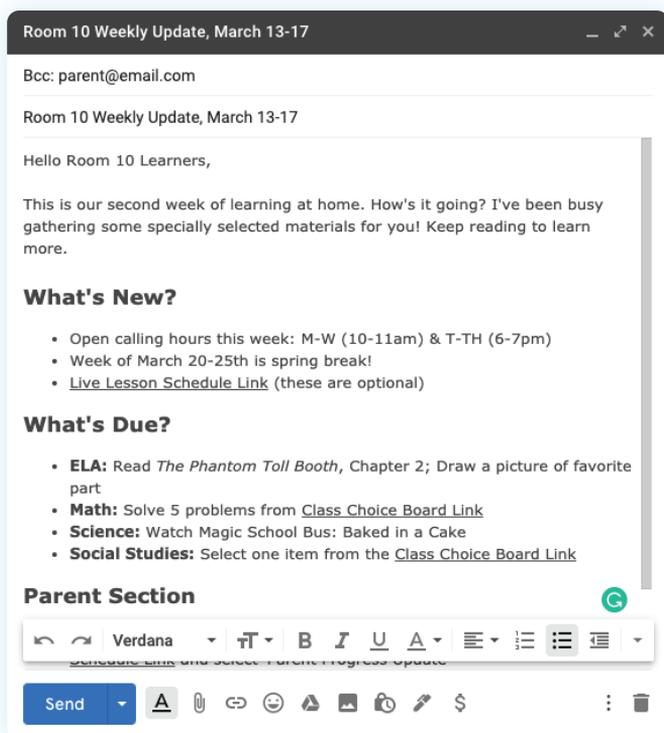
But most importantly, offer a flexible schedule. Parents are still working from home. You're working from home. Students are trying to work from home and be good office mates. So, offer that flexibility for time and method.

Example Communication Methods

To demonstrate these strategies in practice, here are some real-life communication methods educators can and are employing to stay connected with students and parents.

Example Email Communication

This example the actual template Nicasia used during her years as a virtual teacher. She calls it, what's new and what's due.



Elements

- + Clear, identifiable subject
- + Brief, warm, positive intro
- + What's New? (announcements)
- + What's Due? (lessons for the week)
- + Parent Section
- + Contact Section

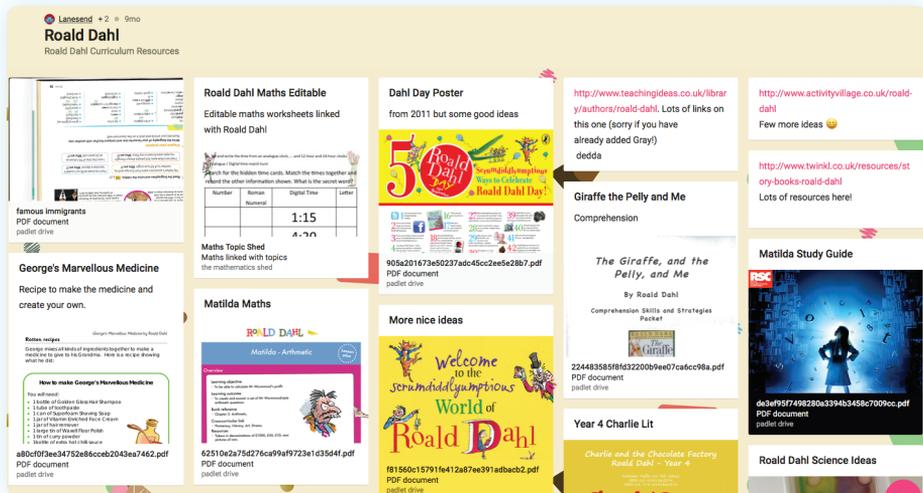
In addition, you'll notice that at the top that she sends it to herself and blind copies (BCCs) parents and students to protect their emails.

Using this template, she received a lot of positive feedback from parents who appreciated knowing exactly what they were getting each week.

Example Padlet Board

Padlet is a great tool to visually curate and organize resources. You can add items and move them around as needed, and you can make the board read only so you are the only one who can edit. It's super intuitive and makes information easily digestible and appealing.

You can upload videos, URLs, documents, images, and other items. It also works on a computer, iPhone, iPad, and Android Kindle.



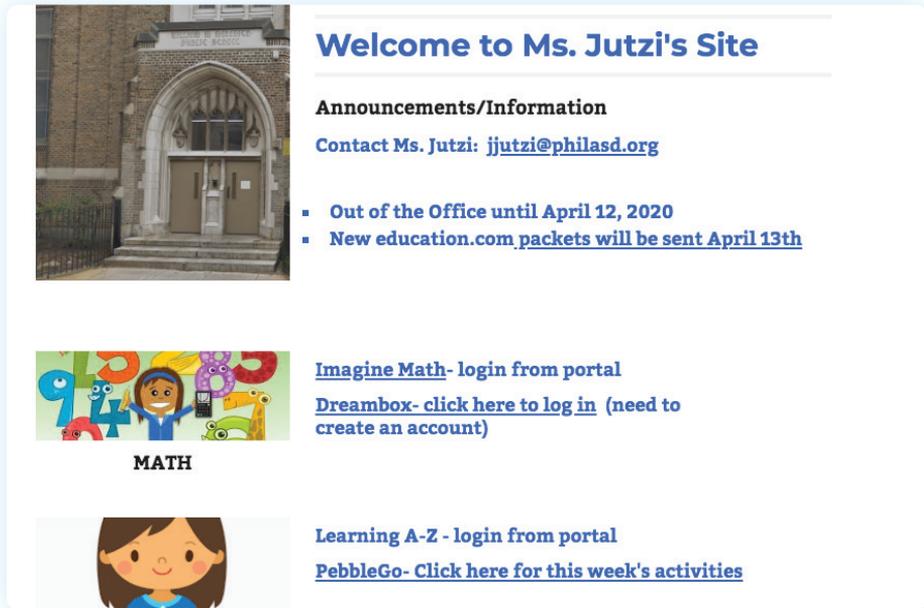
(Photo credit: Miss Lamb's Blog)

If your district doesn't provide a place to curate all of your information and resources for students, this is a great application. You can even put a link to the Padlet in that email that you send home to parents.

Example Website Communication

For those of you who are using Google Classroom or similar applications, you can also create some form of a website.

This example is from Ms. Jutzi's google site. She's a kindergarten teacher in the Philadelphia School District in Pennsylvania.



The screenshot shows a website layout with a header, a main content area, and a footer. The header features a photograph of a brick building entrance and the title 'Welcome to Ms. Jutzi's Site'. Below the header, there is a section for 'Announcements/Information' with a contact email and two bullet points. The main content area is divided into three sections, each with a colorful illustration and text links: 'MATH' with 'Imagine Math' and 'Dreambox' links; 'Learning A-Z' with 'PebbleGo' link.

Welcome to Ms. Jutzi's Site

Announcements/Information

Contact Ms. Jutzi: jjutzi@philasd.org

- Out of the Office until April 12, 2020
- New [education.com packets will be sent April 13th](#)

MATH

[Imagine Math](#)- login from portal
[Dreambox](#)- [click here to log in](#) (need to create an account)

Learning A-Z - login from portal
[PebbleGo](#)- [Click here for this week's activities](#)

On this page, she curates links to the different websites that students need to complete their work as well as login instructions for the different resources. She also shares instructional tips for parents who may not be used to teaching different subject matter.

As you can see, the simple format makes this easy to read and navigate, and having all the resources in one centralized location eases the lifts on parents and students.

Example High School Communication

For a high school example, this is courtesy of Tammy Berkely at Seminole County Virtual Schools in Florida. She created a canvas site to organize lessons and resources for her students.

Personal Fitness Resources

Basic Help <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navigating eCampus• Pace Chart• Calculating Target Heart Rate Zones• How to Complete Student Agreement• Saving a Document as a PDF	Module Three <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3.04 Target Heart Rate Zones• 3.07 Statistics Quiz• 3.08 Fitness Log	
Module One <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.06 Initial Fitness Assessment• 	Module Four <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fitness Log 4.08	

Module Two

FLVS Platform: SCVS Fitness Lifestyle Design Help

Getting Started <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navigating Course• Accelerated Pace Chart• Traditional Pace Chart• Student Agreement		Collaboration Project Help <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration Project with teacher as Partner• Locating Project in Course
Module 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.03 Fitness Assessment Chart• 1.06 Target Heart Rate Zones• 1.06 Part 2 Activity Journal	Module 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.06 Part 2 Activity Journal• 2.11 Journal Four	Module 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3.08 Activity Journal Five

You might also consider adding:

- + Contact information in prominent locations
- + Availability and appointment calendar
- + Announcements
- + Links to resources
- + Due dates and a link to syllabus

Optimizing Instruction for a Virtual Medium



To begin optimizing instruction for virtual mediums, it's important to consider what differentiates a physical versus virtual environment.

- How did you communicate?
- How did you manage your materials?
- How did you assess learning?
- How did you have your students collaborating?

In the virtual classroom, you have to redesign how you deliver instruction and the materials you use to foster learning.

Make it simple

Make sure not to overwhelm students with some new app, tool, or technology every week. Get them comfortable with one and go with it.

Make it digestible

Give them small chunks or bitesize pieces that are more digestible and lighten the cognitive load.

Make it predictable

Streamline the implementation with the same process and cadence every week so that students can become familiar with it.

Meet it accessible

Know your audience and meet them where they are. Who needs accommodations? Plan for those needs with ready to use curriculum, multilingual resources, in-app support, menus, and so on.

In addition, there are more specific instructional strategies for distance learning based on the structure, either synchronous or asynchronous. In the following sections, we will explore these in greater depth.



Synchronous Learning Online

A synchronous model for distance learning is most similar to the typical classroom. In this model, you are likely broadcasting directly to your students, and they can see your familiar face, if you are using a camera, or at least hear your voice.

TIPS

- Use a professional, plain background setting.*
- Use a still image with your voice.*
- Pre-record the lesson so you can focus on questions.*
- Review the guidelines if using the chat.*
- Know and use the app settings to create a worry-free learning experience.*



Asynchronous Learning Online

An asynchronous model is similar to any sort of online course you may have taken in which you log in and do the work at your own pace.

This approach offers more flexibility to learners to access material when and how they are able. It also enables students to engage with content in a more personalized and blended way.

TIPS

- Remember not all students have equal internet and technology access.***
- Provide off-line activity options for students without access.***
- Keep instructional videos short.***
- Make videos as interactive as possible.***
- Avoid overcrowding the screen with information.***
- Utilize phrases such as “pause the video” for longer recordings.***

Building Your Home Video Studio

Whether synchronous or asynchronous, you are likely having to create a makeshift video studio at home to stay connected.



To help you make sure your videos are quality and engaging, you need to consider:

- Camera
- Sound
- Environment
- Lighting
- Camera Placement

These elements all impact how you communicate and how you are received. For all of these, we'll focus on how to use what you have readily available as well as share some items you may want to also add to your arsenal now that you're more likely to be working and teaching remotely. Most of these items are fairly cheap and easily obtainable online. For schools and districts, it may be worth investing in some of these to enhance the quality of online instructional delivery, but again it's not necessary. First, use what you have.



Camera

Your laptop likely already has a webcam, and they are fine but not the best quality.

If you happen to have a webcam that's separate and can be easily mounted on top or moved around with you, that's the best scenario in most cases because you will be able to obtain better placement, produce a better quality of video, and have a better sensitivity to light.

If you do end up buying an external video camera, the main parameter is that it is at least 1080p, which describes the pixels a camera can capture. You can get one with higher pixels, but 1080p suffices in terms of quality.



Sound

In the content creation world, sound is considered as important, if not more, than the video.

To deliver high quality sound, room acoustics are extremely important. For example, if you're in your kitchen, which tends to have hard floors and less things on the wall, it's going to be more echoey and have a poorer sound quality.

Of course, you have to work with what you have and where you are. But if you have options, consider moving to a room that has more objects and things like carpet, couches, and items on the wall. These all reduce the acoustic reverb and echo in the room and will enable listeners to better hear you.

Also, if you are able to invest in one or have one available, use a headset. This will greatly improve the sound because most headsets have directional microphones, meaning that they only listen to or pick up noise that is close to them.

Functional headsets include a USB Mic, Lavalier, or your phone headphones with a microphone. These start as cheap as 20 dollars and can connect directly into your laptop.



Environment

Of course, all of us have been thrown into this remote environment. Many of us have kids at home, competing calls and video meetings, or pets eager to make their voices heard.

Knowing you can't control everything and sometimes disruption happens, you can always try to create the most ideal environment without distractions. So, if you can, try to find a space or time when you can minimize these.

Also, consider your background of your videos. If possible, think about changing it or making it somewhat like your teaching environment at school. You may want to add color, books, visuals, or other objects that fit the message you're trying to convey. These elements play into making what may become your regular video set for teaching.



Lighting

When trying to enhance lighting, think about what the light looks like coming at you when you're on camera.

You can't beat natural lighting. If there is natural light available in your space, try to position yourself so the light is coming toward you.

For example, if you're sitting with your back to a window, you'll end up with a video that looks like the one below. Instead, try to have the light coming toward you, which leads to a much higher picture quality.



✘ *Incorrect*



✔ *Correct*

Source: Zoom Support

If natural light is not an option, you can also use LED options, which are available online.

And if you don't have an LED light or don't want to purchase anything extra, you can find a lamp and try to position it behind your camera, so it faces you and gets the light on your face. Just make sure the light behind you is not brighter than the light coming toward you.





Camera Placement

We've all been on video meetings or seen funny examples where someone is only in a small corner of their picture or their nose takes up the entire image.

You want to avoid this. To do so, position the camera at eye level and then adjust so that you are in the center of the frame and taking up the right portion. This picture is a good example of that.



(Photo credit: Google)

If you use your laptop for your camera, you can put the laptop on some books to bring the laptop higher up and angle the camera, so it looks directly at you.



Involving Students

The reality is the kids are probably more video savvy than we are. 😊

And it can be challenging to create ample learning content that is engaging for them and mimics the classroom experience. To solve for this, you can encourage students to participate in this process.

For example:

- Students take turns creating morning announcements.
- Students host a virtual show and tell for their classmates.
- Students read a book to their peers.
- Students create an instructional video to review a math concept.
- Students give a virtual presentation on a Social Studies topic.
- Students create a podcast to summarize a book they read for ELA.
- Students do a virtual science experiment or recreate phenomena with simple household materials.
- Students put on a one-person play in a foreign language and record their masterpiece.
- Students take a picture of art they are creating, and teachers post it to a virtual wall for everyone to see.

Students are nifty when it comes to content creation. You would be surprised at how elaborate your students would get if you give them the chance. Encourage them to use technology they have available to create and collaborate with their classmates.

Additional Questions & Resources



We had great audience questions during the webinar, and we wanted to share a few of these here with answers from our moderators.

What advice would you give to administrators communicating to teachers?

Help teachers work smarter, not harder. For example, I've seen teams of teachers getting together where all grade-level teachers in a particular building send one email out per grade level.

In addition, keep in mind the best practices of consistency and cadence, and communicate with your teachers in the same way. Give them regular updates, offer flexible check-ins, and be clear in all communication.

How can you support parents who speak a language other than English at home?

First, a lot of sites and tools are now producing their content and support resources in English and in Spanish, so look for resources with multilingual options.

To translate your own materials, reach out to a parent or older student who may be bilingual and ask for assistance.

How can you best support students who are using phones or have low Internet connectivity?

Look for apps that work on phones. Many of the ones featured here do.

As well, most smartphones have the capability of recording video so students can still get involved in content creation that way.

And provide offline options. If you were in the classroom, what would your hands-on activities look like? Try to translate those into activities students can do on their own at home with little parent supervision.

Other Resources

As you continue this transition, here are some other helpful articles we're reading.

- [5 Essential Considerations for Remote Work Video](#)
- [4 Ways District CTOs Can Support Educators During School Closures](#)
- [Teachers' Herculean Task: Moving 1.1 Million Children to Online School](#)
- [With Weeks of E-learning Ahead, Be Flexible and Forget Perfection](#)
- [Will Coronavirus Shift Online Change K-12 Forever?](#)
- [What Teachers Need to Make Remote Schooling Work](#)
- [Online Teaching: 5 Keys for Effectiveness](#)
- [Should Schools Teach Anyone Who Can Get Online – Or No One at All?](#)

Closing Words

Teachers, administrators, tech support, and parents: be mindful and be gentle to yourself. This is an unprecedented time and positive self-talk is important. It's perfectly okay to say, 'let me make a note on that,' 'I don't know how to do that yet,' or 'let me find out and get back to you.'

Challenge yourself in small chunks, just like you do for students. Now is not the time for you to learn everything out there.

Finally, you're already a superhero. Relax. Take on some learning at your own pace.

About the Contributors



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He also serves as Global Digital Marketing Manager, at Hexagon Geosystems. Previously, Lee served as Sr. Digital Marketing Director at B2B customer service software company Jacada, connecting the organization's Sales and Marketing Operations. Focused on B2B marketing for over 20 years, Lee is both a digital marketing practitioner and creative content entrepreneur. He is a leading LinkedIn video creator, Forbes Agency Council member, and engaging event speaker providing training on digital marketing, content creation, social selling, and sales enablement from the Marketing point of view.



Nicasia Anzalone Caires

*eLearning Instructional Design Expert & Senior
Implementation Specialist at Learning.com*

Nicasia has been an educator and instructional designer for over 20 years and has a passion for using technology to create authentic learning experiences. She labels herself a “lifelong learner.” She holds a master’s degree in Elementary Education as well as Instructional Technology, and a Certification in Instructional Design.

Nicasia has taught technology in grades K-12, written virtual courses in various learning management systems, and developed and lead district level professional development and technology workshops. Nicasia’s prior school district experience - beyond teaching - is as an Instructional Designer, Online Instructor and Trainer with Seminole County Public Schools, Florida, and a District Distance Learning Coordinator, Instructional Design Coach, and Instructor with Wissahickon School District, Pennsylvania. She has used Learning.com curriculum over the last five years to empower teachers with curriculum that prepares students to be future ready in a competitive and digital world.

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EXCEL IN A DIGITAL WORLD



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