

Going Online in a Hurry: What to Do and Where to Start

1. Begin by going over your course assignments for the coming weeks.

Are they accessible online, so that students can find the instructions and materials that they need? Is it clear how students will be turning in their work? Have deadlines changed, and are all of those deadlines prominently posted?

2. Consider how will you give feedback on their progress.

Consider how students will be able to practice the key skills and objectives you want them to get out of the course — things they would normally do in class. How will you give them opportunities for practice and feedback, for both small-stakes and high-stakes assignments? Undoubtedly those opportunities will be different from what they were before you moved the class online. Just be sure that it's very clear how students can access those opportunities.

And if you don't spend much class time having students practice and get feedback, now is a good time to increase that aspect of your course — given that you won't be presenting content in person. For example:

- If students would have been developing their skills in analyzing and synthesizing assigned readings via in-class discussion, perhaps they could do that online using collaborative annotation of the text. (Perusall is one such tool to do that.)
- Or, if you'd normally have students practice by attempting to answer questions in an interactive in-person lecture, present a version of those questions in online discussion forums or quizzes, and offer feedback on their responses.

3. Move on to the in-class experience.

What do you normally use your in-class time for? Try to define what you do in class at a higher, more goal-oriented level (e.g., presentation of content, checking for understanding, collaborative project work — instead of just saying "lecture," "quiz," "discussion"). If you keep those goals in mind, you will have a better idea of how to achieve them online, as well as what aspects of the in-class experience you ought to focus on simulating.

In particular, this mini-reflection should help you decide whether to go with a synchronous means of engagement (e.g., a real-time Zoom meeting), an asynchronous one (e.g., VoiceThread decks or narrated videos), or some combination of the two.

4. Decide what you're going to do about any high-stakes assessments, particularly exams.

There are no easy answers here, especially if you planned to have a good chunk of a student's grade hinge on what would have been a proctored, in-person test. Perhaps you could take another route to summative assessment for the course, such as replacing a big supervised test with some type of project that is easier to personalize and less dependent on proctoring.

You also could explore online proctoring, but there are potentially objectionable aspects to this kind of test surveillance. Such concerns — along with the time required to research, select, and put into practice an online proctoring system — are significant hurdles. But it may be worth a look, depending on your situation.

5. Consider the course materials.

In all likelihood, your readings and other materials exist in digital form, and you may have posted them already. But you'll need to double-check that any readings, videos, problem sets, quizzes, and the like are accessible, along with key documents such as the course syllabus and calendar.

6. Once you've dealt with those things, the name of the game is communication.

In the face of all this uncertainty, you need to explain — as clearly as you can and in a variety of places — what students can expect about the course in the next few weeks. Be sure to cover what it is that students are responsible for doing, how they can find the things they need to meet those responsibilities, and what they should do first. Make sure the lines of communication are two-way, as well. When in doubt, offer more ways to get in touch with you (text, messaging app, email, video call), not fewer.

Adapted from Michelle D. Miller "Going Online in a Hurry: What to Do and Where to Start"

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Going-Online-in-a-Hurry-What/248207>