Tips for Moving Your Teaching and Learning Online

Created from experience, as well as curated resources* for online teaching and learning

Are you shifting your educational activities online? Use these tips to:
1. Get familiar with the technology
2. Adapt your content and delivery to the online environment
3. Optimize the online learning experience

1. Get Familiar with the Technology

Learn about the platform

- Determine the electronic platforms (e.g. MS Teams) available to you for teaching and learning. MS Teams is the approved electronic platform for UHN. Contact UHN Digital Security to use an online platform other than MS Teams.
- Get familiar with, and practice using, the key functions available for the platform, including: chat box, breakout rooms, how to show slides and videos, and buttons for mute, video, volume, screen share, raise hand.

Consider privacy and security for learning online

- Enable password protection on your device and do not use public wi-fi.
- Use authorized and secure programs for your institution, e.g., Sharepoint, MS Teams.
- Check with Privacy and/or the Help Desk for directions regarding permission and consent for recording sessions.

Ensure you have the equipment and tools needed to facilitate online

- You will need a device (e.g., desktop computer, laptop, tablet) with a camera, speakers, a microphone and a supported browser (e.g., Google Chrome).
- Ensure your device supports your needs, e.g. a tablet may not allow the use of breakout rooms.
- You will need stable internet connection: ideally use hard-wired ethernet connection or set-up close to the router if you need to use wi-fi.

  Set-up the space: choose a quiet area; set the light source in front or slightly to the side; adjust the webcam at eye level or higher; select a plain background.

  Decrease background noise/distractions: mute cell phones and computer notifications and close all programs not needed for the session.

  Connect in advance: test the internet connection; download apps or software; test the equipment, camera, microphone, browser; troubleshoot issues.

2. Adapt your content and delivery to the online environment

Previously in-person content can be adapted to the online environment

- Apply the same educational theories and principles that informed your in-person session.
- Review your learning objectives and determine the key objectives that can be achieved in the online environment. You may need to revise objectives based on what is possible online.
- Adapt the content and activities to allow learners to achieve each objective online, e.g., interactive small group discussions can be done in virtual breakout rooms.
- Don't let the technology take over – the platform's functions need to support the objectives.

Use the online time to focus on discussion instead of content delivery

- The online environment is best used for interactivity, to solidify concepts and ask questions.
- Determine what content can be done as pre-work, e.g., read articles, review cases and view pre-recorded lectures/videos/podcasts. Refer to assigned pre-work during the session.

Break up the session to prevent online fatigue

- Keep each learning segment to 1-2 hours.
- Build in time for breaks, for example, for a 1-hour session, take a pause halfway; for sessions of 2 hours or more, take a 5-10 minute break every hour.

Create online material that is accessible

- Use large fonts, plain background and high contrast colours.
- Include descriptions of images or verbally describe images.
- Provide captions or transcripts for videos.

Engage participants online through frequent interaction with each other (see Appendix)

- Start the session with an icebreaker to create a safe space.
- Enrich the experience by providing opportunities to learn about, from and with each other (i.e., interprofessional learning) to benefit from the wisdom in the room.
- Include an online interactive activity every 15-20 minutes.
- Create opportunities for engagement and working together online, e.g., breakout rooms, polls, whiteboard exercises, co-creation of terms, contributing to a word cloud, typing key comments in chat, etc.
- Build in time for instructions/transitions, e.g., add 5 minutes to move in and out of groups.

Consider working with a co-facilitator

- Meet your co-facilitator before to coordinate the session, establish transitions and practice.
- During the session, connect with your co-facilitator outside of the platform through text or another application.

It is also helpful to have a team member to manage the session to:

Trouble shoot: help people connect, set-up cameras and microphones, etc.

Cover technical tasks: check lobby and admit people, screen share, explain technology, record, share links, etc.

Manage the group: watch for raised hands, read the chat box, answer/direct messages, explain learning activities, etc.

3. Optimize the online learning experience

Before the session, prepare participants

- Check-in with participants to ensure they have the required equipment. Provide a confidential way to inform you of any needs, including accommodations.
- Send learning materials for the session, e.g., pre-work, session outline, learning objectives.
- Provide technical help instructions, orientation to key functions and contact information.
- Provide expectations for using technology, e.g., consider whether cameras should be on/off, mute yourself when not speaking, use of virtual backgrounds.
- Consider scheduling a check in with participants in advance of the session to 'test out' technology for those who may need additional support.

During the session, create a safe online learning environment

- Turn on your camera to introduce yourself. If possible, keep it on throughout.
- Be kind to yourself and others: acknowledge we are all learning in this new environment together and that technological difficulties will likely happen.
- Speak clearly and at a steady pace in a normal tone.
- Practice using the platform's functions together, e.g., how to raise hand, write in the chat box.
- For questions, allow 20 seconds for learners to think, unmute and answer.
- Check-in and summarize key points regularly, e.g., What questions do you have? What further instructions do you need?
- With the group, create group norms for interacting online.

Examples of Online Group Norms
One person speaking at a time
Mute when not speaking to avoid background noise
Refrain from using CAPITALS and sarcasm in the chat box
Everyone's voice will be heard
Be fully present

After the session, follow-up

- Send a thank you note. And provide contact information, any additional resources, a session summary and/or a reflection exercise.
- Solicit participant feedback on the session through surveys or questions, e.g., What key learnings will you put into practice? What worked well? What should we do differently next time? Other comments.
- Debrief with your co-facilitator.
- Share your learnings, tips and tricks with other educators.
- Implement your evaluation plan, e.g., learner assessment, program evaluation, facilitator evaluation.

Have fun!
Enjoy the online time with the participants, roll with the technological mishaps, be open to new learning opportunities, and give yourself kudos for shifting your educational session online.

Appendix: Interactive Activities in the Online Environment

Description

Icebreakers

Icebreakers allow participants to get to know each other and prepare for discussion. They allow the facilitator to introduce a topic and assess the needs of the group. For example, you can ask each person to share how much experience they have with online learning. What is their favourite function? What is their experience with topic X? What are they most curious about Y?, etc.

Asking open-ended questions

Asking questions facilitates discussion and helps to gauge participants' understanding of the content. Provide options for participants to respond such as voting via a poll, typing on the whiteboard or in the chat, coming off mute to speak or using the raise the hand icon to take a vote. Slido is a useful tool for participants to submit questions and vote on priorities.

Breakout into small groups

Breakout rooms allow participants to work in small groups. For breakout rooms, provide a specific task for the group. Type clear instructions into the chat, use the chat to notify when there is 1-minute left and ask the group to assign a reporter, recorder and timer (as appropriate).

Polls and/or trivia games

Polls allow participants to anonymously respond to the same question and provide the response of the group. Examples include a quiz in the platform, Poll Everywhere, and Mentimeter. Trivia games allow participants to demonstrate their understanding via playing a game. An example of an online trivia platform is Kahoot.

Writing activities

Writing activities allow participants to individually respond to or reflect on a question or statement. For example, you can ask participants to write for one minute then discuss.

Simulations

Simulations provide the opportunity to apply course content in real life scenarios. Examples include case studies and role-plays. A role-play may involve participants on camera acting out different roles followed by a discussion.

Debates

Debates promote critical thinking and provide perspective on multiple viewpoints. Online debates may involve assigning sides on a topic, time to provide the argument which can be seen and heard by the audience and large group discussion at the end.

Sharing Online Resources

Sharing online resources in the moment is a very powerful advantage of online learning, e.g., sharing key links in the chat, showing a website together in real time, etc.

*Resources found at the following links:

Centre for Faculty Development, Best Practice in Education Rounds
Centre for Faculty Development, Resources for Teaching and Learning
Guest Post – What does it Take to Move a Highly Successful Face-to-face Workshop into the Online World?
Harvard Best Practices
Leading Groups Virtually
Royal College Virtual Learning
The Michener Institute of Education at UHN, Best Practices and Etiquette for Web Conferencing
Tips for Moving Class Online Quickly
University of Toronto, Teaching Online/Remotely