

## Developing a Plan B to Take Your Courses Online

At this point we don't know if we will have to switch instruction online for some period of time, but it's useful to start thinking about the pedagogical adjustments we may have to make if that situation occurs. This brief handout offers a few practical suggestions for developing such a Plan B.

**1. Make sure your students have access.** Remind them to take their books and laptops home over Break, in case our return date gets extended. This is their part of the responsibility here—they have to keep their materials close at hand. And also find out what kind of access they have at home. Do they have Internet at home? Do they live in the mountains where reception is spotty and they have to drive to McDonald's to upload a paper on the free wifi? Do they have phones, tablets, laptops, etc? (If many of your students are accessing the Internet via their phones, you'll want to record in low band width with lower quality images so that the phones can handle the uploads, etc.) Take the time to ask the questions now, while they are still here. Once they're out of reach, you won't have the opportunity to get this information. Also, remember that some of our students are financially challenged. Many of our students are Pell Grant-Eligible and may be using the textbook reserve collection at Dacus to do their work. Suggest that before they go home for Break, they make PDFs of the readings for the first few weeks after Break and take them home with them, so that they can keep up if they're not able to get to Dacus.

**2. Look at your SLOs and what you really NEED to accomplish to achieve them, as opposed to what you had PLANNED to accomplish or WANTED to accomplish.** Be realistic. Dial back. You may not be able to have students do a group presentation; what other ways could they accomplish the goals of that assignment? You may want them to have the opportunity for peer review or workshopping; how can you deliver that opportunity online, as opposed to face-to-face? You want robust discussion—how can you set that up? Teaching online is like taking an alternate route on Google maps—you want to get to the same endpoint, but you have to use a different road and means of travel. This is sometimes intimidating to us if we're not used to it. So take Thoreau's advice and "Simplify, simplify." Less is more in online instruction. If they don't read every single thing you'd intended for them to read, the sun will still come up. Don't expect perfection.

**3. Look ahead and plan for what you need. Online teaching takes time, and we may not get much lead time to make this change.** Make PDFs of articles or readings now, so that you can upload them if needed. Look for YouTube videos, TED talks, etc., that may provide support for content instruction. (There are MANY videos on the Interwebs about things like developing a thesis, documentation, historical contexts, "book sells," etc.—take advantage of those, because students can usually access them from low-level technology.) Check and see if your textbook has online materials you can access (Norton Anthologies, for instance, have tons of online slides, timelines, additional readings, terminology lists, and quizzes you can access.) No need to reinvent the wheel if someone else has invested the time for you.

**4. Be realistic about the differences in instructional delivery and student performance.** You already have plans to cope when the computer isn't working in your classroom; but when you, or students, are working totally online, you have to be both anticipatory and flexible. Remember that instruction will probably have to be *asynchronous* (students access materials at different times) rather than *synchronous* (all students doing the same thing at the same time) because of access issues. Set time frames for work to take place ("You have from Friday at 5 PM till Sunday at 11:59 PM to turn in your test") and enable Blackboard to allow students two tries for submission, in case their internet service fades out while they're working on the test. Remind students to draft longer postings in their word processing program and then copy and paste them into Blackboard; Blackboard is carnivorous, and loves

to chew up longer postings before students have saved them. And remind them that your class isn't Netflix; they can't binge three weeks' worth of work in a night. (They will be convinced they can...)

**4. Deliver Content through Recorded Narrations in PowerPoint.** One of the easiest ways to deliver content online is to create PowerPoint shows that present your instructional materials, then add narration to them. A very easy guide to doing this is found in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZp3jumnWUg>. Here's where it helps to know what tech your students have at home; you can save your narrations at the phone bandwidth level if that's your least common denominator, up to the high-quality bandwidth level. (And save your narrations IN your PowerPoint if students will be accessing by phone; that will help them.) I recommend keeping your narration for each slide fairly short, and breaking the PowerPoints down into manageable sizes (probably 15 minutes tops) so that files can be easily accessed on portable devices. If you type out your narration before you record it, you can also attach that document to your PowerPoint for students who have accessibility issues (screen readers, etc.). You don't need a fancy microphone to record if your laptop or computer HAS a microphone, but if you have an inexpensive gaming headset with microphone, that may improve sound quality. Once you have created your PowerPoint and saved it with its narrations, you can upload the PowerPoint to Blackboard for students to access. **Updated: You can also shoot brief (under 5 min) videos and upload to YouTube, which will transcribe them for you. I haven't tried this but am told it's not hard. This Twitter thread discusses in more detail:** <https://twitter.com/learnteachwin/status/1237365019278544897>

**5. Encourage Collaboration to Keep Students Connected to the Course and To Each Other--Use Google Docs for Peer Review.** Many students have access to Google Docs on their portable devices or laptops. This app has a powerful collaboration feature that lets you set up groups of students to share a document for peer review online. The best guide I know for doing this is this one: [https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/www.google.com/en//educators/learning\\_materials/WR\\_revisingguide.pdf](https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/www.google.com/en//educators/learning_materials/WR_revisingguide.pdf). There is also a good video on this at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAxBHuyuq3ow> that shows how to do this in a literary analysis exercise. The advantage of editing in Google Docs is that students don't all have to be online at the same time, so that students at home who don't have access can go to a Starbucks or McDonalds and catch up (even if they sit in the parking lot to use their laptops). **Alternatively, you can use the "PeerMark" tool in Turnitin to create peer-review opportunities. That process is described here:** <https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/turnitin-website/instructor/peermark/about-peermark-assignments.htm>. **Please note that this requires more bandwidth than Google Docs, so if you have a lot of students working from their phones, Google Docs may be a preferable tool. This video shows you how to create a PeerMark assignment:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKOHxQZ2V\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKOHxQZ2V_8).

**6. Be Present with Each Other--Use Blackboard Discussion Boards for Office Hours or Discussion Chats.** You can set up threads in Blackboard discussions so that you and students can discuss—for instance, you might say "I'll be online on the Discussion Board from 7-9 PM on Tuesday night to answer questions in real time; if you can't be available then, post your questions in the thread and I'll answer them for you so you can check them when you get off work," etc. Or you can assign students to different parts of a collection of assigned readings, and have them start a thread about their assigned chapters or sections, and have the rest of the class respond to three out of five, or something like that. You can assign "grades" to the discussions (I usually do it out of 5 points) so that the responses will show up in the Blackboard gradebook and you can keep track of who has responded. The University of Toledo has a great online primer for using Blackboard discussion boards here: <https://utlv.screenstepslive.com/s/faculty/m/BlackboardLearn/l/227305-discussion-board-introduction>. I highly recommend it. (Also, you and students can "subscribe" to threads so that you can keep up with

new posts. Again, easy and helpful.) The videoconferencing tool Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)) is free and easy to use; a good primer is here: <https://blink.ucsd.edu/technology/file-sharing/zoom/guide/index.html>

### **Some Really Good Online Resources:**

*Chronicle of Higher Education* quick and dirty list: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Going-Online-in-a-Hurry-What/248207>

University of Toledo online instruction guide to Blackboard:  
<https://utlv.screenstepslive.com/s/faculty/m/BlackboardLearn>

**Western Washington University Guide for Adapting Courses Due to Coronavirus** (Thanks to Marshall Jones for this link). They use Canvas, not Blackboard, but the links are very good.

[https://atus.wvu.edu/keep-teaching-learning-working?fbclid=IwAR3v2\\_bkQbOR\\_fMy4m7EWjxz8rB6xFvmNWJ\\_gR\\_7wiW8QhGHxUJO16wojbo](https://atus.wvu.edu/keep-teaching-learning-working?fbclid=IwAR3v2_bkQbOR_fMy4m7EWjxz8rB6xFvmNWJ_gR_7wiW8QhGHxUJO16wojbo)

Ongoing Google Doc for University Resources for “Business Continuity” (What other campuses around the country are doing):

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1VT9oiNYPyiEsGHBoDKlwLIWAsWP58sGV7A3oIuEUG3k/htmlview?sle=true&fbclid=IwAR2Wps3CpMbQoqTyaCLLafh9K6c5nEv7\\_uhISERWMJAYM2YFH13\\_2KFHgnw#gid=1552188977](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1VT9oiNYPyiEsGHBoDKlwLIWAsWP58sGV7A3oIuEUG3k/htmlview?sle=true&fbclid=IwAR2Wps3CpMbQoqTyaCLLafh9K6c5nEv7_uhISERWMJAYM2YFH13_2KFHgnw#gid=1552188977)