

Teaching More Accessibly: Five easy improvements to our practice

Transcript

Introduction

(Trevor)

Jay and myself, so like a conversation about things that work for Jay's practice. This is kind of a series of webinars in which we focus on things that faculty members do that help them and you'll see that you know there may be some things you can adapt or maybe some things that you can steal directly and Jay will have some more opening comments about that.

I just wanted to say that I'm excited to be here in my role as CTE Associate Director, but also as a teacher in the Gender and Social Justice Program. I typically am an instructor for GSJ 101 each fall. So I'm thinking about this stuff myself at the same time as you are. We have participants from all over the place today, so we're using Google Docs as a note taking feature and we'll explain a bit about that after we introduce ourselves. Anyway, Trevor Holmes, any pronouns. Jay, I'll let you introduce yourself now.

(Jay)

Sure, so yeah, thanks everybody for coming. The other piece I would say is that some of you may also have some suggestions and ideas for things that you do in your own teaching. My name is Jay Dolmage and I use he/him pronouns. I work in the Department of English here at Waterloo. I generally teach first year writing courses. Smaller classes, courses that usually students don't really want to take and I love teaching them in fall.

This fall is going to be a challenge. I think that's important to say. This webinar today is about discussing some of the smaller things we can do to make our teaching more accessible this fall, and the hope is that this is not seen as labour over top of already stressful work that we're doing in having to shift to online when many of us are not familiar with it. But hopefully this is productive and useful for you all as we make that transition.

The other thing I think I want to say is my background is in disability studies and thinking about higher education and how we make higher education more accessible. And so these ideas they're separate from, in a way, the accommodations process, the fact that our students are going to need accommodations this fall and always and they have the legal right to those accommodations. This is a way of expanding beyond a bit the accommodation model that just accommodates our teaching to one student and says, "what happens if we took some of those accommodations and applied them to all students?"

So, we're going to talk about five different things. We're only gonna take an hour maximum. We're gonna share some of this stuff afterwards, so there will be a transcript of the talk. There's going to be shared notes, and that's what you're seeing on the screen right now. This is just simply a Google doc. We're gonna talk a little more about this. This is part of one of the suggestions we have is that as we're teaching, we can empower students, give students some agency in recording what we do by having something like a Google Doc or a shared folder for student notes.

Trevor, did you wanna do the territorial acknowledgement?

(Trevor)

I do, I'd like to introduce Brianna as well, our host today. If you want to, Brianna, introduce yourself.

(Brianna)

Awesome, yeah. Hi everyone! I'm Brianna Bennett. I work with the Centre for Teaching Excellence as well. I use the pronouns she/her and I will be the host. So any questions that you have you can see there's a chat function in WebEx and you can send your questions directly to the host and that will be myself. We'll be fielding questions I think every section we go through, and there'll be lots of time for questions at the end as well. Just to note, we are recording the session and your questions will be visible in the recording when you send them to myself. Trevor, if you have anything to add, feel free.

(Trevor)

Thanks, Brianna. Not at the moment, I just hope that people will be OK with staying muted while the presentation's going on and sending questions to Brianna who will manage those questions towards me and Jay. The other thing I should mention is that there is no captioning in WebEx meetings, which is one of the ironies of doing an accessible presentation non-accessibly. However, we have transcription happening immediately afterwards, so we'll talk a bit about that later.

So, the thing about running workshops on land that is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, the Neutral, and the Anishinaabeg peoples is that a lot of the time these kinds of territorial acknowledgements are like a checklist and then we just say it and then move on. I wanted to, instead of that, kind of connect today's topic to the work that we need to do as an institution of higher education. Jay and I share a background in English literature and one of the jobs of English literature was to colonize. The canon of English literature and the ways of teaching English literature was about domesticating and so-called "civilizing" the whole world outside of England, right? So I think that it's on us to undo that work that still happens in our classrooms and in our syllabi, and I think it's not just in English literature.

So when Jay talks about going beyond accommodations models, we're in a field where we're thinking about disability. But let's think about intercultural learning, and let's think about lots of different ways of including everyone who wants to learn. So I think for when we're thinking about accessibility, let's not limit it to forms of visible and invisible disability, but also to various systemic reasons that not everyone can participate in our particular version of higher ed. So yeah, that's sort of what I'd like to be having at top of mind as we work through accessibility

In terms of how the webinar is going to take shape, it'll be mostly Jay sharing his thoughts, and I'll probably have a couple of questions or additional pieces around what what Jay is saying. But we also hope you, as Jay said, will add your ideas. So when we're going through each topic, there's a spot on the Google Doc for your ideas and another place to ask questions. So there's more than one way to ask questions today. If we don't get to your questions during particular question periods for reasons of time, we will do our best to answer them afterwards and post them publicly. So that's how things will work. You'll see the chat window should have the Google Doc link live and I'll just do it again so that you

should all be able to see that Google Doc and actually actively edit it. This is something I do in my classes with my students as well. They collaboratively take notes, which means we don't need a specific note taker from AccessAbility Services. So, Jay, maybe you want to start getting into some of that topic.

Easy Improvement 1: Redundancy

(Trevor)

First topic, redundancy.

(Jay)

Yeah, so, and that's what we're trying to model here. Again, my apologies as well about the captioning. We went through all the different possible formats for this, but maybe, Trevor, if I could pass it back to you for a second, captioning is going to be really important as we teach. Can you just talk about the captioning options we have for Waterloo instructors and the formats that we have? Because we were stuck with this format for a webinar. This is not the format we'd be using to teach in.

(Trevor)

Right, so as far as I understand it, WebEx Meetings is much better than WebEx Training at this stuff. And the other thing that I'm aware of is that Microsoft Teams has some pretty good live captioning that you don't need someone to be typing for. Teams, though, is not recommended yet for teaching at Waterloo at least ... So we recommend using Virtual Classroom, which itself also doesn't have live captioning as far as I understand it. I've used a lot of these different platforms now and I'm beginning to get confused about which one is which, so we'll have a better answer for you later. But this comes up a lot and it's very important that we either have a way to transcribe quickly or to live caption.

(Jay)

So the first idea here, I'll rewind for a second. The first tip is just redundancy and basically it just means repeating ourselves. So captioning is one of the best and most straightforward ways that we can do that. A transcript is another way, and the idea is the more ways that we give students to access information the better.

I'll give you a kind of metaphor here. An example, so whether you're joining us today as a Waterloo student or faculty or staff member, or on another campus. The example that I often use around redundancy is about signage. So at the University of Waterloo there never used to be signs on buildings. It's really hard to find which building you were actually in. And they did finally have a sign project that took many years to build. And then they did put signs on buildings, but ... So there are not signs at every entrance. There are not signs when you're in an actual building, ... and they're almost all interconnected, that tells you "you are now passing between this part of Hagey Hall and this part of Modern Languages", or whatever it is. So the idea of redundancy would be that there are signs everywhere so that you cannot be confused about which building you're in, so it's easy to find an office or a classroom in that building. And even though we don't necessarily have that on our physical campus, there are ways to build that into our teaching.

Simply by telling students what we're going to do and then doing it, and then repeating ourselves. That's one of the easiest ways that we can build in that redundancy. And if we think about our students as

coming to us through laptops or computers, they're not going to be able to be there live. So we're moving away from most of the synchronous teaching that we do. And we don't know what the context is in which they're gonna be getting the information or the conversation that we're having with them. So redundancy, the idea of having multiple ways for students to access information, is really important. Videos, captions, transcripts, shared notes.

If you're creating some video content for your courses, the online learning assistants that Waterloo's been employing through the summer, they're all being trained, and a lot of them are doing the work of helping people to caption that content. And that's one of the best things that you can do for accessibility moving into the fall is offering transcripts and captions for any of the content that you're kind of canning right now.

The other thing I would say is it's not just about content right. Thinking about teaching isn't just about lecturing, necessarily. That positive redundancy, or repeating ourselves, I think it's important to allow students a variety of different ways to show us what they know as well. If the goal is for them to help shape the conversation in the classroom, then we shouldn't have a situation where they need to just raise their hand to ask a question. Can they ask a question a variety of different ways through email, through a chat? How do we remove these barriers so that students can participate in the ways that work best for them?

And then I think the final thing I think about redundancy is that it allows students to have time to think about the process, what we've been teaching, if we make it so that they can go back later and look at a transcript. So for instance, in this chat, I hope that some people who might have been approaching this webinar with a pen and paper to take notes or with a Microsoft Word document open to take notes, when they saw that there were gonna be notes created for them, it allowed them to relax a little bit and perhaps take in the webinar in a different way where they could perhaps pay a little bit more attention in one way because they knew that there would be notes that they could go back to later. In classes where we might have really difficult concepts, providing those notes and transcripts allows students to go back later and take the time they need to try to make sense of what was being said. Processing things in a video or something that's live can be really difficult.

So that's that first concept and, Trevor, you have so much experience with teaching, you probably have some examples of your own, or questions, or we may have questions from attendees.

(Trevor)

Hi Jay, yeah, we probably will have already some questions from attendees, so I'll defer to Brianna on that in a second. I wanted to ask you about multiple ways of accessing information. Now, for some people, it's good to be able to slow down and go back and find things, but if we put things in too many places or in too many formats, how do we achieve or how do we mitigate overwhelm-osis? That is to say, for some students it becomes almost inaccessible to have things in so many places and have the same thing in so many places. It's confusing and anxiety-creating. So what do you say to that?

(Jay)

Yeah, I think the other piece that I would say is when I walk into a physical classroom, the first thing I do is I write on the whiteboard what I'm going to do that day, and the last thing that I do is I go back to the whiteboard and I talk about what we should be taking out of that day. And so that kind of redundancy that really is saying, "Here's what we're gonna do, here's what the goals are, and here's what you should take away" is also really kind of just clarity. So to me, I think it's not about more information. It's about simplicity and the idea that we need to say what we're doing and we need to return to saying what we're doing because students are going to be overwhelmed in the fall. They are going to be for the very first time taking on five, some of them more than that, courses, all of which are going to have a variety of different demands.

We'll get to this a little bit later, but I think one of the biggest pieces of advice that I have is not to add more, but actually to do less in fall. Do less and reinforce it more for the fall because I think students are going to have a kind of cognitive overload effect from just how much information they're being given in a series of pretty foreign ways.

One thing I'll tell you is that the folks who develop our online courses at Centre for Extended Learning, they do a good job with accessibility and one thing that they're able to see... I developed a course with them and I had video lectures. And they're able to see that students accessed the transcripts to my lectures more than they watched the lectures. That may be because they just don't want to look at me and if that's the case, I understand. I don't like looking at myself either. But, it was quicker and easier and maybe there was more clarity to them just clicking on the transcript. So that's more of what I mean here. It's not that they're gonna watch the video and the transcript and go to the notes. They're probably only going to go to one, but it's good to give them a choice of which one they can go to, not demand that they max everything out, max all these channels out.

(Trevor)

OK thanks so on the note of watching yourself, I notice that you don't have a video showing. Is that on purpose?

(Jay)

I don't have a video showing? I'm so sorry.

(Trevor)

I can't see you. Did you want a video showing?

(Jay)

I really did want a video. I wanted to be able to look at everybody. I'm wearing a hat because I couldn't look at my hair. I'm so sorry that was going to be one of the most important things I was going to say was that I think it's important to see somebody's face...

(Trevor)

Now we have the experience of having the voice only and it's like an experiment. So alright, are there any questions from the audience through the chat to Brianna? I see none on the Google Docs.

(Brianna)

Nothing yet, but then again you can always just message to the host. We just have a participant say "I find voice only works fine if I already know the person and it's harder when I don't".

(Trevor)

Interesting, right. And we'll talk a bit about that around connection and social interaction later I think. So there may be other people who want to add ideas for this positive redundancy idea. Things they do in their own classroom or in their own online classroom. So we'll keep that in mind. Remember you can add your own ideas. You can contribute to this note taking. We've offered you two different ways to input questions. One is straight to Brianna as the host in the chat feature of WebEx Training and the other is right on the Google Doc. So that sort of reflects the idea of redundancy. I'm not sure if people are experiencing it positively. So we'll move on, I guess to the second easy improvement. Instead of positive redundancy we'll now talk about ease of use.

(Brianna)

We did have a question actually just come in, Trevor. This might relate quite closely. "What if I'm not able to record all my lectures and have them transcribed beforehand? What is the best system for captioning quickly throughout the semester?"

(Jay)

So, in a way, I defer to Trevor on this and to the CTE folks. So, maybe Trevor I'll let you answer that first, but I have my own ideas, too.

(Trevor)

It depends on how you are doing your lecturing, whether you are using something like, you could narrate PowerPoint slides and then you'd have text as well as voice happening at the same time in snippets of 10 minutes or something of mini chunked lectures. There are many ways to do this, like YouTube even has some good live captioning, right?

(Jay)

You can go back and fix YouTube captions, but they can get you started.

(Trevor)

So it depends on what platform you're using to produce any mini-lecture or lecture content. And we have more technically-minded people than myself who can help with that. If you're at Waterloo and you have questions of this nature, like "which platform should I choose?" We have things like charts that compare the different video software for either live streaming with captioning or with transcription, or for producing things like narrated PowerPoint, right? So you would contact your liaison. If you're in Arts, you have an Arts liaison. If you're in Science, you have a Science liaison from CTE. Or you can just write to remoteteaching@uwaterloo.ca and that generates a ticket that a bunch of different support units will see, including CTE, the Centre for Extended Learning, Instructional Technology and Media Services, and the Library. So somebody will answer your question real quickly if you have a question of that nature.

(Brianna)

Awesome, one of our liaisons is actually here, Victoria, and she mentioned in Virtual Classroom, which is Bongo, you can assign a participant to do it live and then that generates a caption file with the recording. You can also use MS Teams to produce captions or MS Stream to produce captions, which is similar to how YouTube would do it.

(Trevor)

Right, OK yeah MS Stream was one I was trying to remember as well. And you know one of the things I've done in my class participation includes kind of "behind the scenes" participation so that people who don't want... if there's no learning outcome associated with being a noisy, loud person like myself, maybe another way to participate is taking on a weekly task like doing the live captioning and rotating that through different students, right? We'll talk a bit about that later, I think, Jay.

Easy Improvement 2: Ease of Use

(Jay)

Yeah, well, that's actually a perfect segue because ease of use is part of, the example that I wanted to use for ease of use was around participation and attendance. So ease of use comes from universal design, from the history of disability design, and it's this idea that good technology, whether that technology is a can opener or a phone, is easy to use and that you remove the barriers to being able to learn how to use it so that everybody can have access.

And one of the examples is a doorknob, like a regular turning knob for a door is actually pretty terrible technology. It means you have to stop. It only turns one way. You have to pull it to get in the door. Much better doors have the kind of knobs where you can hit it with your elbow or you can hit it with your hip or it even opens up for you because the whole goal of the door is that you'd be able to get through it, right, that it open and close.

So what can we do in our teaching that removes those barriers, that builds a kind of better door knob so that students can participate so they can take part in the class without added difficulty? And the example that I wanted to give around that was participation.

And I'm gonna admit something here. For probably 15 years, I taught classes where I gave a participation grade that I didn't think very much about. It was really "Who spoke in class?" And to be honest, there's only so much space for people to speak in class, and when you're rewarding that with a grade, you actually reward the kind of students who will speak over other students. Or who maybe aren't even listening that carefully. They're just trying to look for their opportunity to talk and that was just not a good way to be teaching participation. It was creating a lot of barriers for students to be able to take part.

When I began teaching online and I moved to message boards, what I realized was a lot of the students who weren't saying anything in class actually had a lot to say when I moved the conversation out of class. They just needed a little bit more time to think about it or they were not going to put their hand up in a classroom situation. But I was creating a barrier to them being able to show how much they knew and to them being able to kind of shape the conversation in the classroom.

Online in the fall, one of the pieces of advice that I have is share some agency. The way that I do participation now is I give students a longer kind of laundry list of valuable ways to participate, and that can include taking notes for other people. That can include finding contemporary cultural examples that illustrate a concept in the class. That can be peer reviewing with other students. It can be emailing with another group of students who might have missed a part of the class. There's just a variety of ways to do it, and the students write a reflection where they tell me the different ways they participated. Every semester I learn new ways that students can valuably participate in class. It also is redundancy because a lot of those ways of participating are forms of note taking or they're even access things like transcribing or creating kind of minutes for the class. So that sort of gets to what Trevor was saying, I think, hopefully, and I think it's one of those things that removes barriers to participation and attendance.

In the fall, it's not going to be fair to grade participation based on quantity. Because we just don't know the context that students are learning in. So if we can shift towards giving students some options to tell us different ways that they can contribute in a valuable way, but also moving more to quality rather than quantity. Not counting up the number of times they show up for class or the number of things they say, but shifting it away from just doing that counting.

(Trevor)

Yeah, thanks Jay. I would add to that that it's very important that students know how they can achieve that quality. So I have what I call my engagement rubric. I have a version that is for in class, but I have also a version that is for online engagement from week to week. Students always ask "how many times do I need to post to get this grade?" I always say well, you know there's sort of a minimum of regular engagement across the semester. And by regular, I mean x, y, or z, right. By regular, I mean at least once a week you're checking in, say, and posting something or responding to something, but for my class it's not about how many times you say I agree with, you know, Joe or whatever. It's about the kinds of ways that you interact with content or with each other. I have a few different structures in my online - I teach hybrid courses, so it's not really all online or all in class. But I have a few different structures for how to engage online, and they include a topic area called "help each other out". So questions that come in for me and the TAs, people can actually often answer those for themselves or their peers answer them, and that itself is part of the engagement rubric. So I can share that rubric through the site afterwards where you found this webinar.

(Jay)

And I'll share the participation bit out of my syllabus, too. We'll share both those things. I'd love to see that rubric as well.

(Brianna)

I'm just adding in here. One of CEL, so the Centre for Extended Learning, the folks that develop our online courses, is joining us in the chat here and they mentioned that it might be a good time to just say that in the fall we are discouraging instructors from grading participation in virtual classes.

(Trevor)

Thank you. OK, so when I say engagement, what I'm talking about is those ways that people can participate on their own time asynchronously, and I think that we should think about ways as Jay is

saying that we can show what we know as students, right? And so, there will be a number of different ways of thinking about that.

(Jay)

This is all asynchronous, basically. It's moving away from that model where the only way to grade participation is in the synchronous way where students are contributing or asking questions, putting their hand up. It's moving away from that completely. And maybe we can get a little bit of clarity from CEL because I'm not sure whether there's a misunderstanding there. I hadn't heard that participation itself was completely being discouraged. I think I'm guessing that the distinction is between synchronous and asynchronous participation. And it may be that we shouldn't call it participation at all. Because that's not really what it is.

(Trevor)

Like there's lots of folks, as you say, who will not be able to access material.

(Brianna)

Just a comment. "As a TA for a Master's class, I grade discussion posts on the quality and not the quantity, but I think one of the most important things is setting that expectation from the beginning. Otherwise students assume posts like 'I agree with this' are the standard."

(Trevor)

I feel like with anything else, if you are going to do it, it should be tied to the goals of the course and not be just a thing out of habit that we have to have participation. You don't have to have participation. But if you're going to do it for good quality reasons, then explain what it looks like really clearly.

Easy Improvement 3: Tone

(Trevor)

Yeah, so given the time, let's carry on to the third thing, tone.

(Jay)

Great, so tone. I think one of the best examples of tone was that I didn't have my camera on. I think we need to look for ways to frame what we're doing and asking of students with a kind of openness, and kind of kindness. I may be only speaking for myself, but other people could tell me whether they agree. Every email that I get since the quarantine began is like 55% more stressful than any email I got before it started. And if I get a long email, it's even more stressful. And if the tone of the email is demanding, it's even more stressful.

It gets back to what we were talking about earlier in terms of the kind of cognitive and emotional and affective load that students are going to be experiencing in the fall. I think it's going to be very stressful for them, and so thinking about communicating with them in smaller pieces, being very careful and re-reading the messages that we're sending to them, and trying to personalize things and frame them not as demands I think is going to be really important...

Yeah, I mean that's basically it. It's not a big thing. I read student writing and one of the main ways I interact with students is giving them feedback on how to improve their writing, revise their writing, and I learned early on that anything I wrote on their papers, anything I wrote to them, no matter how much praise was in it, was interpreted as criticism. Or was taken to them as extra work, more work they were going to have to do. So, it made me pull back and say I can't give that much feedback. I need to be more selective in the feedback that I give and I need to find the right wording so that it doesn't come across as highly critical as students might think it is. So it's just about trying to think through this fall about the stress students are experiencing and kind of adjust our tone when we can.

(Trevor)

So one tool, Jay, that I found out about a couple of weeks ago during a session that we were doing for Arts First professors is video note in Desire2Learn. So for those of you who are at Waterloo or who use Desire2Learn at other institutions, 'cause I know there's a lot of people from around other institutions here too, that particular platform has this cool tool that the instructors can use and I believe TA Level 4 can also use at Waterloo and it is video note. You can do these short couple of minutes feedback through video. For those students who can see or hear, you can do this short note. It personalizes things, and it can show how you're giving a kind of generous in spirit kind of feedback rather than them just seeing like red ink, so to speak. Lots of people have found that really useful to personalize and give the kind of tone they're looking for in feedback on work.

(Jay)

The other thing I would say is, and I hope that people are getting this, what we're talking about today, hopefully, it shouldn't be a lot more work. That same flexibility and ease of use could be applied to us, too. Sometimes, for me, I find when I can simply speak with a student or send them a direct note, it is easier for me at times than if I have to sit and compose something that's more formal. So that informality that might be good for students can sometimes also be good for us.

And as we move along, we'll be talking about belonging as the final point that we're going to be talking about. I think if we prioritize that kind of sense of building a community in our classes and connecting with students, personalizing the experience, then we should subtract some other things. What's the number one goal? And are there other things we can pull back on? That's what I'm kind of advocating for. That's my perspective is not to try to do every single thing that I'm able to do in an on campus class. But maybe pull back on some of those expectations, knowing that it's going to be worth reinvesting that time and energy that we only have so much of into some of these things that I want to prioritize in the fall as bigger goals.

(Trevor)

Thanks, Jay. Brianna, are there any questions from the chat?

(Brianna)

Yes, there is a question for Jay. "Do you think that there are differences in tone depending on the class context, being undergrad versus graduate or first year versus fourth year, etc.?"

(Jay)

Yeah, I definitely think so. I mean yes and no. I don't think for me personally my tone ever really changes. I think sometimes we have classes that are building on one another, where what we do in one class, there's an expectation that we're getting a student to a certain point because they need to be able to do something to get to the next class. Other times we see classes as like, unfortunately, places where we weed out the students who are ready for University and the students who aren't. And I think that's gonna be really difficult this fall because I think the vast majority of students are not ready for what they're going to be seeing this fall.

And that idea of kind of - we already know that there's going to be a lot of inequity just based on the fact that we're delivering these classes online. Some students have more and better access than other people. Some students have more demands on them in their living context. Some people are more ready for online learning than other students. And so to me, I actually feel like we should be pulling back a little bit on rigour this fall and trying to give more opportunity for students to access the material. That may mean having conversations in our departments and with our colleagues about those kind of goals that we have in terms of building or in terms of weeding students out. That's probably not what the person meant by their question, but I don't know, Trevor. Do you have any thoughts about that?

(Trevor)

Well, you know, I find the whole question of tone kind of interesting because email, for example, is notoriously bad for reading tone. But there are people for whom reading tone in voice or in facial expressions is very difficult, and it's easy to misread cues or miss cues or whatever. So I don't think we should assume that just because you're doing a video note or using a casual diction as a like kind of friendly white guy or whatever means everybody's gonna take it that way, right? So I think we should be very conscious of the fact that there are differences in social presence and social distance and things like that. I don't mean COVID social distance. I mean like intercultural norms and things like that, as well as ways of reading faces.

So I think that we should not assume a particular effort on our part leads to a particular result in terms of tone, either in a class context like undergrad, grad, first year or fourth year, or in disciplinary contexts. We see also how people react differently to people who are variously gendered or racialized or whatever, they may be saying the same thing in the same tone, but it may land differently for different students, right? Based on their own biases and assumptions. That's a complicated answer.

(Jay)

No, Trevor, that's such a wonderful and important answer. I think that that's the key. Is that a lot of what we have to admit is that we don't have control over those things, and I'm not trying to say about tone that we have control. I'm just trying to say how important it is for all the reasons that you just mentioned, so there's no solution here necessarily.

One thing I would suggest is there just need to be more opportunities for students to clarify. The redundancy piece helps with that because we can try and be more direct, but we can also give students a variety of different ways to seek clarity, if not from us, then from their peers perhaps. And it's OK to pull back on some of the other goals if we know that it's simply just going to be more confusing for a variety of reasons in the fall. So then how can you build space into your teaching so that students get

more of an opportunity to seek clarity and understanding? This is not going to happen the first way, right? It's not going to happen through one channel.

(Trevor)

Thanks and I appreciate it, Jay, that you want to make sure that the message here is also for faculty members, instructors and TAs, for example, who themselves will be facing a great deal of stress and hardship in trying to teach remotely, right? So there's the learning remotely and the teaching remotely, and these tips are meant to be directed towards ourselves as well as towards our learners... So how about timing?

Easy Improvement 4: Timing

(Jay)

Timing is sort of a theme that we've already seen across all of this. I think one simple thing to say is that the reason we designed this webinar the way it was, as a one-hour webinar, is because it takes a lot out of us to spend a lot of time on screens. That's one of the things about timing is "how many hours are our students already going to be on a screen in a given day?" And can we seek to understand that the time they spend on screens is perhaps can be more fatiguing or difficult? And that they only have a certain amount of attention that they can give to us, right?

So the timing piece could be about breaking what we do into small pieces. One of the goals is to take this hour video and break it down into five or six little one- or two-minute segments that show or illustrate the concept that we're creating because those small pieces are more likely to be the kind of thing people can handle right now rather than taking on a whole other hour webinar. Although, we definitely appreciate that people are here and giving their time to this.

Timing is also about giving people enough time to think and digest. So not giving students information and then immediately testing them. Giving them the opportunity to even, you know, several days later kind of come back to something. I think you know the soapbox issue for me is around timed tests and exams and quizzes because I think there will be a real appeal to giving these timed tests and quizzes and exams online just like instructors may do in person. I really want to advocate for, if possible, looking for ways to not make these timed assessments, to try to replace them with something else.

And I have some ideas for how they could do that, but I also want to admit I have a luxury in that my classes are usually 40 students or less. So, I can find alternatives perhaps more easily than somebody who has to teach a really large lecture. I want to put this back to the audience as well a little bit and also back to you, Trevor, 'cause you've seen so many ways of doing this. What are some alternatives that you've come up with in large classes, alternatives to timed tests, quizzes, and exams? I have examples for small classes.

(Trevor)

I can kick us off. The largest class I've taught, I taught fairly regularly like 200 to 250 students, and I managed to do something other than a timed final. What I did was I harvested some reflective prompts from them using a quiz tool, in whatever learning platform I was using. This sort of has been something I've done for a couple of decades. So I harvest through the quiz tool, the long answer quiz tool, answers

to reflective prompts. They're like prime the pump type questions before people do the readings or if they've done the readings, they can tie it to the readings. Very short short things.

But at the end of the course, the exam is a take home exam that requires them to go back through all their responses and chart the learning that they did tied to the lectures, tied to the material, tied to the readings. It's really interesting. It's also kind of cheat-proof because they're using their own reflective prompts as the data to make assertions about where they've come, even if it's only to confirm what they already knew, they have to prove that they are confirming what they already knew. They don't have to totally change their minds or whatever, but if they have, they need to prove that they did.

I give them a week to do that, the take home exam. So they use their own data and it's a really interesting reflective journey for them, and that's an assessment that I find a pleasure to read at the end of the term, even if I have to read, you know, 200 or whatever. And in fact, even when I have TAs, I read them all 'cause they're so exciting. Which is weird, right? Wanting to read exams?

(Jay)

Yeah, there's something to that, too. I think the idea of personalizing it also makes it a lot easier and more enjoyable to assess. It might not make it less time to assess, but it can make it more enjoyable.

(Trevor)

So it's a week or something that I give them. The other thing I do in terms of timing, I think learning new things is challenging enough... What we're trying to do is remove the unnecessary barriers. It's a barrier enough to learn a new discipline, right? So, the unnecessary barriers are sometimes the arbitrary nature of deadlines, and I know that in the webinar that Skid was doing at the very beginning of the lockdowns and stuff, he talked about having a week long, no questions asked extension for anybody without having to write to him.

I do a similar thing. For me, it's only 24 hours, but I have to tell you people know that they have 24 hours. They say OK, it's due on Tuesday night at midnight, but I don't have to write to Trevor Tuesday night at 12:01 if I didn't get it in. Wednesday night at midnight is fine. No penalty or whatever, and I have to tell you it's a trick, right? And Skid described it the same way like it's a self trick like I know it's due Tuesday, but I know I have till Wednesday. I might get it in Tuesday night. Most people actually do get it in by the Tuesday and those who don't, they tell me they don't feel stressed out 'cause they don't have to write to me about it.

Other people have things like the five days you can use as you wish over the course of the term. So I think those kinds of timing issues around deadlines can be helpful. That works in the world of work a lot of the time, too, unless you've got some kind of massive project for a client or something that is a bid on something.

(Jay)

Yeah, and nobody walks into my office and says, "I'm going to come back in 60 minutes and I need a publishable article", right? And that's good, because the goal is to do really good work, right? So what are the barriers? Sometimes that arbitrariness of deadlines, I think, I'm just guessing, but I think those

deadlines will loom even more large in the fall and it will be more difficult for students to kind of be juggling some of those deadlines. So having some flexibility around that, I think is a big thing.

(Trevor)

Yeah, everybody's experienced like existential dread about the future and worried about their family members and themselves and stuff, like it's not the time to be enforcing specific types of deadlines. I can imagine deadlines around things that need peer reviewing or something, so prioritize what's important, right? Again, the question. So Brianna, is there a question from the audience? Any trends in the questions from the audience right now?

(Brianna)

Yes, we do have two quick questions here. So first of all, we talked about exam alternatives in Arts-based courses. How would exam alternatives work in STEM courses?

(Jay)

This is one of the issues, and even when we knew we were putting this webinar together, that's one of the first things I said was this is a limitation for me because I am familiar with how I want to adapt exams in Arts-based courses, but I've never taught a STEM-based course so I can only guess. For me, when I'm teaching courses that have concepts that need to be applied, which is a lot of Arts classes, then the way that I avoid a timed test or exam is that I ask students to find contemporary examples. They can have as much time as they need to do that, because I know they're not going to be able to plagiarize it. They're looking for something that happened within the last month, that's newsworthy, where they can apply an idea. I wonder whether that kind of thing could be applied in some STEM classes where they could do some research to apply a concept from the class to a particular context.

The other thing that I do in Arts-based classes is I ask students to write the questions themselves. So we have two pieces. The first is can you write it? Do you understand what we've been talking about in class, well enough that you could write really good questions about it? That's the level of understanding that's really high, and I give them all time to do it and that's part of their assessment. And then, answering those questions becomes part of the assessment as well, and they kind of reflect on what makes a good question, how they draw out unique content and individualized content in how they asked and then in how they answered those questions. And I wonder whether something like that might work in a STEM class, even a math or a physics class. Could there be a way of assessing students based on their ability to create an exam themselves? It takes away some of the pressure of timing.

The other thing I would say is really good accommodations offices that I've visited, one thing that they do is they give everybody the extension that we would get through the office of disability services, 'cause it's often a very small amount of time anyway. It's not a big deal. And what's the difference between giving that to an individual student and just giving that to everybody? If the goal is to remove some of the stress of writing the exam?

There have been experiments that are done where students who have to sit for an exam, after an hour they change the colour of their pencil or pen so that when you collect the exams, you can see how much time it actually took them to write certain questions. And it's almost always really revealing in that the

students are rushed. Some students have enough time to answer each question, but a large number of students are really rushed on particular questions. Just 'cause we haven't done a great job of estimating how long it's gonna take. So in both cases, my suggestion would be if you can't replace the exam altogether with something else, what about just extending the time for everybody?

(Trevor)

Thanks, Jay, so on the note of STEM courses, given that we're both Arts instructors, but we've both encountered other kinds of disciplinary instruction, and for the last couple of decades I've been a teaching developer, so I've sat through and I've consulted on a lot of different kinds of courses. We do have expertise at CEL and in CTE around STEM assessment, right? So we've done some webinars already about this and we have lots of tip sheets, and lots of resources and we will continue this conversation in another webinar about assessment tools later. For now, I'll just ask that people be patient and we'll answer by text the question about STEM assessments because we have lots of in-house expertise, it doesn't reside in my own brain. And we wanted to move along, so keep the questions coming, but we want to now talk about belonging for the last four or five minutes now.

Easy Improvement 5: Belonging

(Jay)

I think maybe belonging is the one thing that's been underlining a lot of what we're talking about is that we have a huge incoming class. Plus a lot of returning students, but a really really huge incoming class. And the University, you know, I'll just say this is my opinion, but the University hasn't come out and said to that class, "it's going to be different and difficult in the fall". They said, "it's going to be great". And you know what? It may not be great. Students are not on campus to be able to walk down to Health Services to get counselling. They're not going to be able to experience resources like the Student Success Office the same way that they can. They're not going to have somebody across the hall who they can chat with and work with, right? The somebody across the hall may be an older person they're caring for, not another student who is also in the same classes they're in. So to me, this sense of building belonging and community is so important.

Our colleague Christine Logel has done studies about belonging at Waterloo and has found that students in a regular context at Waterloo don't feel a sense of belonging. The National Study of Student Engagement shows us that students everywhere, but especially Waterloo students, don't seek help. They experience more stress than students before, and they don't look for help for it. That's in a regular context. So to me, how can we remove some content and add some contact? That sounds really cheesy, but that was the phrasing I came up with.

If we know that this sense of belonging and connection is going to be really important... I think that those are almost all asynchronous avenues, right? But what are ways that we can connect with students so that they can even just have opportunities to ask for help in our classes and in general from us and from their peers?

(Trevor)

So Jay, I do know that the Student Success Office is working hard on a lot of these kind of Waterloo Ready approaches right that you can see in the different faculties and you can see overall. So certainly

there are people on campus who are quite aware that this is going to be a very challenging coming term for learners and and we're trying to be also cognizant of how challenging it is for faculty and TAs.

So I appreciate the idea of removing some content and adding some contact and so there a variety of ways to do that, and one of the things I learned very early on from someone who eventually won like a 3M National Teaching Fellowship for it, was that online teaching for her... She was a French professor who managed to find away in the like early 90s or late 80s even to have a personality that students could see mattered by text message in one way or another. It was usually email or chat rooms of various kinds, and it was before the visual web, it was before sending video around.

But there are ways that you can make sure that students feel connected to each other, connected to content, and connected to you, and whatever ways you can think of to do that are probably gonna pay off for both teacher and learner in the fall.

Closing

(Trevor)

On that note, it is 11:30 and in order to respect time, I think we're going to have to close off. Do you have a couple of longer minutes to sit around if people do choose to stay in today to ask or answer another question or two? But I'm going to say that we're now closing off the webinar and people should keep sending those questions to Brianna and we will do our best to answer them ourselves or find answers from our colleagues at our various offices, too. So thank you for joining us and thank you, Jay, for offering what works for you and that others might be able to adapt and think about it.

(Jay)

Yes, thank you all for coming and we'll look for ways to kind of recirculate more of this stuff. So just keep your heads up, look for that stuff. Thanks, Trevor.

(Brianna)

Just a quick question here, Trevor, is the Google Doc going to stay live?

(Trevor)

I was intending it to. I don't know if there's any reason that it shouldn't be. If it isn't, then the content from it will be reproduced on our website where the webinar materials are housed at the CTE website. And it's interesting, it worked almost like live transcription. So thanks to Krishian, and to anyone else who was adding their notes to this. And if anybody has any other questions, Jay and I will stick around for a couple more minutes.

(Jay)

People could throw them in the Doc, too. We could look at and answer them there.

(Brianna)

Just a question here. "Just to clarify, are we going to send an email afterwards with a way for us to access the Google Doc?"

(Trevor)

Yeah, so we can certainly if we have the emails correctly from your sign on, I don't know, Brianna, do we have that?

(Brianna)

Yep, whatever email that you used to come on to the webinar with, we'll export the list and we'll send a follow up email, maybe with the link to the Google Doc and any written answers to the questions.

(Trevor)

So thanks, everyone. I usually wait 10 full seconds in a live classroom to see if there are questions, so I'll be quiet for 10 seconds.

(Brianna)

We do have a question from earlier here, Trevor. Let me just get back to it. So Trevor, when you were talking about the quiz tool that you used in your classes, is the use of the quiz tool instead of a discussion forum just because it makes them easier to compile or so the responses remain private? Why not a discussion board?

(Trevor)

Yeah, in my case it's private. I want them to feel like they can say whatever they need without worrying about grammar or spelling or whatever and students tend to feel more ashamed in front of their peers, it turns out, than in front of their profs. According to some research, I once read that the social pressure from their peers is more prevalent for them than the fear of the prof. So I encourage them to make these like point form if they want or like, who cares about grammar, it's just their initial thoughts about the prompt. So I harvest it privately for that reason. I could use a blog tool, a journal tool, a number of different tools. I could use PebblePad in a reflective portfolio, but in this case it's like a large class thing. Quiz tool's fast, easy to harvest, they can then look at it again later if I set it up right and they can easily see what they've done.

(Brianna)

Awesome, just another quick question here. "Can other software, for example PowerPoint, generate the notes during the live session?"

(Jay)

There's something with that 'cause I remember somebody explaining that to me. There is some way of doing that. Maybe we can look it up.

(Trevor)

Yeah, let's look that up. There's also some good tips about the technical aspects of making Word and PowerPoint accessible that people in CTE and now CEL have done, spearheaded largely by Chris Zaza, who's on the call as well. So, that's under the inclusive educational or inclusive instructional practices set of documents and tip sheets at CTE's site. And there's a great, great CEL site that explains their honeycomb approach to user design and we'll put that link as well in our comments.

(Jay)

Alright, thank you everyone! Thanks, Krishian and Brianna... Thanks, Trevor.

(Trevor)

And Kristin in the background, too. And to the attendees who are still here, let us know what else we can do for you. Thanks.