# A Checklist for Developing and Implementing Effective Remote Teaching Courses

Recent instructor and student surveys at the University of Waterloo have highlighted what is working well and what measures could improve online and remote courses. The Keep Learning Team have produced this tip sheet at the request of the Associate Deans, Academic that shares successful practices to date and addresses specific areas of concern in a manner that aims to be manageable for instructors.

## Assess your overall course workload and organization

- ❑ **Use a "workload estimator" to calculate student workload for your courses**. Undergraduate students should spend approximately 8-10 hours of total effort per week on each .5 credit course: this includes listening to lectures, doing reading and assignments, and studying for tests. Many have reported spending much more time on their remote courses.
- ❑ **Reduce lecture or instruction time accordingly when you add activities**.
- ❑ Use the **Templates for Remote Teaching** to assist with overall course organization.

## Maintain a teaching presence

- ❑ Students are eager to hear and learn from their course instructors. **Include some form of original lecture material** (e.g., pre-recorded video, narrated PowerPoints, or lecture notes) and/or **guidance** (e.g., blog posts, short audio/video segments, worked examples, etc.) See these tips on Transitioning to Online Lectures.
- ❑ Aim to **make 5- to 15-minute mini-lectures** (less than 500 MB) that focus on individual concepts (and labelled appropriately when posted so students can find them easily for study purposes); this duration fits with attention span, connectivity limits, and variability of students' viewing time. If video is longer, listing sub-topics with timestamps may be helpful. Also, keep in mind that a typical **50-minute period does not equate to 50 minutes of instruction**.
- ❑ **Make connections clear** between course learning outcomes, topics and approaches presented in lectures to help students structure their attention.
- ❑ Remember to also include lecture or written material or an activity to **help students see how the various course concepts fit together**: they may miss those connections when learning from short, discrete chunks.
- ❑ **Highlight good work habits for students**, e.g., taking breaks when listening to lectures to summarize their notes and identify questions to ask or post.

## Plan activities and assessments to support students

- ❑ **Plan for one assessment per week or module** – enough to help keep students on track and receive timely feedback without overloading them. While students benefit from regularly engaging with their online courses, too many small assessments add to student stress if/when they fall behind, and do not allow for the assessment of larger concepts.
- ❑ **Give students agency and flexibility** by letting them complete a subset of assignments during the course (e.g., 4 of 5) and/or drop a set number of the lowest grades.
- ❑ **Coordinate deadlines and assessment plans with colleagues** if you teach in a program with student cohorts to help prevent students from becoming overwhelmed with multiple deadlines.
- ❑ **Provide a short activity or reflection prompt** after teaching key concepts to let students apply their learning and gauge their understanding. Factor the time needed to do these activities into the workload estimate.
- ❑ **Let course material remain available once posted**, so students can review materials before an exam, or check their understanding when new concepts build on previous knowledge.

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## Help students maintain a schedule
- ❑ **Post learning materials on a consistent day** and time so students can plan ahead.
- ❑ Give students sufficient time between posting materials and deadlines for deliverables.
- ❑ Provide organizers beyond due dates, like reminders, guidance on how to work through the course materials, and strategies for keeping track of questions. Use tools like the calendar feature in LEARN.

## Connect regularly with your students
- ❑ **Offer regular office hours and/or tutorials**, either synchronously or asynchronously
- ❑ **Use video or audio** in your course so students can see/hear you and thus feel more connected.
- ❑ let students know In your course outline **when they can expect to reach you or a TA** and the anticipated turnaround time for responses to questions (e.g., 24-48 hours).

## Connect your students to increase motivation and learning
- ❑ **Use a forum** that allows all students to interact, engage in discussion, and/or see responses to questions from peers, but start with low-stakes activities to help students increase comfort.
- ❑ If you are holding any kind of live session, **encourage everyone to sign on 5-10 minutes early** to allow for social interaction before the session begins.
- ❑ **Encourage/facilitate study groups** for students to connect them with their course peers. Bear in mind that groupwork may be extra difficult for students to do in the remote environment, so provide suggestions on how to accomplish groupwork asynchronously.
- ❑ Consider using OLAs to help support students with basic issues related to remote learning.

## Optimize live lectures and tutorials
- ❑ **Use slide decks** (or a tablet, if you are already comfortable with one) for legibility and review rather than recording yourself at a physical blackboard or whiteboard.
- ❑ **Limit duration** to 50 minutes or less.
- ❑ **Consider using live sessions for Q&A, demonstrating solutions, and interaction**. Remember these activities often take longer in the online environment.
- ❑ **Ensure that those that can't participate can access the learning through asynchronous means**.
- ❑ **Allow questions via class chat or even private messages** to you or your TA to enable students to participate without having to use video or audio.

## Help students harness the benefits of technology
- ❑ **Use or enable closed captioning or transcripts** whenever possible to give students more access to and control over how they engage with the learning materials.
- ❑ **consider providing the scripts** of video or audio you've recorded if you cannot provide closed captioning.
- ❑ **If possible, use a platform that allows the user to control video playback speed**. This feature helps to accommodate various disabilities, but also allows for quick review.

## Expand Students' Conceptions of Teaching
- ❑ **Share your teaching philosophy** up front via video or in the course outline ("I see my role as x, y, z, and your role as learners is to a, b, c"). Highlight how these responsibilities and expectations may be different in the remote learning environment.
- ❑ **Be transparent about your course and assessment design process** so students can see that teaching involves more than lecture delivery.