Remote Teaching Tips

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MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Remote Teaching Tips

RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER COVID-19 CLOSURES

Covid-19 has made the 2019–20 school year an unforgettable one. With no notice or preparation, educators had to pivot to synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching. Some have managed and some perhaps less so. As MEDE begins to plan the 2020–21 academic year, online learning will most likely play a prominent role whatever the scenario is.

Similar to the Digital Literacy Toolkit (bit.ly/maltatoolkit), this practical guide aims to give some suggestions. It is important to acknowledge that learners will return to school having had many different experiences. Some will have had resources and support from parents, teachers or tutors. Other students may have had difficulty finding the space, equipment or help they needed to study at home. With this in mind, teachers need to start by conducting a needs-analysis exercise before proceeding to new content and skills.

CATCHING UP AND GETTING STARTED

Finding out what students have been doing can help you understand their needs now they are back at school and allow for a smoother transition:

- Try to find out from the teacher who taught the class before you what was covered and was not
- Ask previous teacher about online attendance and record of work done to get a better picture
- Ask the students themselves and assess their level (as usually done) by assigning some diagnostic tasks allowing you to determine students' individual strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and skills prior to teaching.
- Try to assess all skills without offering any assistance. Vary task types to identify their weaknesses as well as their strengths.
- There are various diagnostic tests which you can make use of such as http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/online-english-level-test; https://www.internet4classrooms.com/tcap_2print.htm For Year 1&2, teachers might make wish to make use of the Literacy Checklists 1 & 2 respectively.
- An important aspect of online education is the inclusion of three main types of interaction (see Anderson 2013) that should exist:
    - Teacher – student
    - Content – student
    - Student – student

LESSON PLANNING

Converting face-to-face lessons to online ones can be challenging. Here's a checklist to get you started.

- Have you decided what you want the learners to achieve by the end of the lesson/course of lessons?
- Do you know how you will present the new material? What tools will you use? (PowerPoint/audio/video/images/Word doc/coursebook)
- Have you decided who your learners will interact with during the lesson, when and how?
- Do you know how you will check your learners' answers to the different activities?
- Do you know which different resources you will use? (Keep these to a minimum.)
- Have you worked out how long each section will take?
- Do you have a plan B in case the technology fails?

Here is a skeleton of what an online English lesson could look like:

The beginning of the lesson

• Have a holding slide at the beginning, welcoming learners to the class. Include instructions of what they need for the lesson. Include a note to tell learners to test their microphone and video before beginning. Add the topic of the lesson.

- Remind them the classroom rules and online etiquette

• Do a short warmer activity – A menu of ideas: https://bit.ly/RTTOnlineMenu

• Display the learning outcomes on the screen.

• Do a short lead-in to the topic:

- learners brainstorm on paper what they already know, then hold it up to camera or shout out their ideas
- poll/quiz on the topic
- jumbled word/unclear picture – guess what it is
- give a letter – learners write down as many words related to the topic beginning with that letter
- learners say what they can see around them connected to the topic
- give them a short audio / audio-visual clip to react to

The middle of the lesson

- Use a PowerPoint slide/picture/video/realia/coursebook activity to introduce the topic.

- Listening: Play video with audio off. Learners predict dialogue. Listen with audio and ask what was the same or different. Do a quiz/poll/worksheet to answer listening comprehension questions.

• Speaking: Learners discuss in breakout rooms before returning to the whole class and the rapporteur reports the group's discussion.

• Reading: Put a text on the screen. Set a timer. Learners mark where they got up to. Learners mark unknown words on screen. Learners use their own dictionary (online or paper) to look up new words. Discuss in chat/breakout rooms or nominated groups. Set comprehension questions as a quiz or worksheet. Consider Microsoft Immersive reader when adapting the work.

• Writing: Show a model. Use annotate to mark points of interest in the model. The model might contain gaps which students need to complete. Learners create their own draft. Encourage them to ask each other for help. Remember to consider learners with different needs. See Inclusion in remote teaching contexts: https://bit.ly/RTTInclusiveteaching

The end of the lesson

- Use the shared whiteboard for a collaborative ending.
- Use the chat for favourite words or new sentences.
- Get learners to summarise the lesson.
- Classroom Assessment Techniques e.g. Padlet (https://padlet.com/), Exit tickets, Poll Everywhere (https://www.polleverywhere.com/)

ONLINE RESOURCES

Here are some other helpful resources which are more skills-specific:

LISTENING

- Lyrcicstraining: https://lyricstraining.com/ (offers levelled fill-in-the blanks tasks using songs)
- http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/general-english/podcasts?_ga=2.113904199.1965521408.1592154078-707694695.1591271353
- TED audio podcasts (Why not set a particular talk (or part of a talk) for homework and use it as springboards for debates and discussions in class the next day?)
- Podcastsinenglish.com (This website has a range of podcasts at all levels covering interesting and real-life topics.)
- Downtobusinessenglish.com (This offers students a way to learn English on the go while covering real-life current events. Each podcast deals with recent international news headlines, with presenters discussing and debating the issues, and introducing vocabulary and phrases related to

the topic throughout. This is a great podcast for learners at higher levels to improve their listening skills while keeping abreast of business trends and international industry.

- https://www.allthingstopics.com/
- https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/ks2-english/zbrwnrd
- https://eslgold.com/practice-listening/resources-by-level/
- http://triproenglish.com/category/b1/
- YouTube for audiovisual content

READING

- http://www.onestopenglish.com/
- https://breakingnewsenglish.com/
- https://en.islcollective.com/
- https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/
- https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/
- https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach
- Kids Discover: https://online.kidsdiscover.com/home
- ReadWorks: https://www.readworks.org/
- National Geographic for Kids: http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/#.html
- Smithsonian : http://www.si.edu/kids/
- Sports Illustrated for Kids: https://www.sikids.com/
- Dogo News: http://www.dogonews.com/

LITERATURE

- Oxford Owl
- Literacy Pro
- https://www.poetry4kids.com/poems/
- https://www.michaelrosen.co.uk/
- https://www.teachitenglish.co.uk/
- https://www.enotes.com/
- ReadWorks: https://www.readworks.org/
- Apples for the Teacher: http://www.apples4theteacher.com/short-stories.html
- Short Kid Stories: http://www.shortkidstories.com/
- Bedtime.com
- Bedtime Stories: http://freestoriesforkids.com/short-stories
- American Literature: http://americanliterature.com/childrens-library
- Storyline Online: http://www.storylineonline.net/a-to-z-book-directory/?sort=titleb

SPEAKING

Developing speaking skills in online lessons is different from face-to-face lessons, but it is still possible. With all the activities shared below, it is important to be clear about what specific language (vocabulary or grammar points) you want the learners to practise when you do each one. Think about how you can tailor the different ideas to suit different types of focus.

- Consider what tools you have access to – do you use a platform which has breakout rooms? If so, you can use these to do small-group speaking activities.
- Think about how you will give feedback on the speaking activities – are there certain criteria you can use each time? Do you need to give feedback to all students every lesson or can you focus on a few each time?
- When planning a speaking activity, think about how long the activity will take. What preparation do students need in terms of language input and thinking time? If one student is speaking, what are the others doing?
- Plan a task for everyone as this will make the pace faster and motivation higher.

Some ideas for Synchronous Learning:

- Story starters: Teacher starts a story with a word that suggests how the story can continue, for example 'Fortunately …', 'Unfortunately …' or 'Suddenly …'. Nominate a learner to continue the sentence. This learner nominates the next person to continue.
- Speak for a minute: Choose topics and put them on the board. Learners choose a topic to talk about. Give some preparation time. Learners take it in turns to talk for a minute on that topic. Give the other learners a task, e.g. listen for specific words/phrases and make a note of them. Note: this needs to be something positive rather than looking for errors.
- What's changed?: Tell learners to observe each other for a moment or two. Tell learners you will turn off everyone's videos. They have to change one thing about themselves. Turn off videos for 30 seconds. Turn videos back on. Learners describe what has changed about each other. Repeat, but this time learners make two changes. Alternatively, turn your video off and change something about you or your surroundings.
- Personalised descriptions: Learners describe where they are, the view from outside, what they did yesterday, their dream house, their dream job, etc.
- Puppets: Get learners to bring a puppet or draw a face on each thumb. This creates a second person for each learner. Practise a dialogue as a whole class. Turn the audio off and learners practise their dialogues using their puppets or thumbs.
- Debate 4 3 2 1: Choose a debate topic. Divide the class into two halves and assign a position (for or against). Give groups four minutes to decide their points, using breakout rooms or chat (participants can usually send messages to specific people and not the whole group). Groups choose

a spokesperson, who has three minutes to present their ideas, followed by the other side. While listening to the presenters, the others make notes for their response. They have three minutes to prepare and two minutes to respond. Finally: two minutes to prepare points and a one-minute final summary.

- Polls: Create a poll of a few questions (e.g. a list of options of what learners had for breakfast/ hobbies/what they did yesterday). Learners answer the questions. Display the results for learners to describe. Turn the audio off while learners practise their sentences on their own. Nominate learners to say their sentences.
- Information-gap activities in breakout rooms

Here are some tools that might help:

- Microphone / Recorder
- Flipgrid: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLzX13jw7bw
- Audacity
- Balabolka

Ideas for asynchronous speaking activities

These activities are useful when practising speaking as a class, online or otherwise, isn't possible. Learners can do these activities at home with family or alone.

- Describe my room: Learners make a short video to describe their room using prepositions of place. This can be adapted to different situations such as describing their daily routine or what they did yesterday. Alternatively, this can be an audio recording to send to the teacher. Note: consent is needed if any other person is in the video, so make sure learners understand not to show anyone else in their video.
- An interview: Learners interview someone in their family and record the interview. The recording can then be used for listening practice with some comprehension questions.
- A short radio drama: Ask your learners to think of situations where there is a lot of drama and emotion – for example, a sinking ship, an animal needing help or a celebration. Ask the learners to write a short three-minute dialogue with at least four characters. They then record the dialogue doing different voices for each character and adding sound effects if possible. They write comprehension questions and share the recordings with the other students.

WRITING

Teachers might encourage students to write authentic tasks using basic (online) tools such as:

- Emails
- Reviews e.g. https://www.tripadvisor.com/UserReview;
- Blog posts
- Text messages / Chat
- Posts on social media
- Filling in forms
- Sending e-invites
- Sending e-cards
- Writing captions on social media
- Writing adverts using Canva: https://www.canva.com/
- Creating comic strips using ComicStripIT: http://www.comicstripit.com/
- Using Wordable (https://www.wordable.io/) or Wordart (https://wordart.com/)
- Writing diary entries on apps available (https://www.androidauthority.com/best-diary-apps-journal-apps-android-892375/)
- Writing stories: Book Creator https://bookcreator.com/
- J2E Tool Suite is a collection of online tools specifically designed to engage learners to create, share, and safely blog their work at school and at home.
- Brainstorming using Padlet (https://padlet.com/)
- Mindmapping (Simplemindmap or http://popplet.com/)
- Grammarly (a free browser extension developed by linguists)

COLLABORATIVE WORK

Collaborative work is critical in language teaching and in teaching in general. Social constructivist approaches as well as communicative language teaching encourage contexts where students learn with and from each other.

- Try setting up activities where one student is the speaker and the other responds with signals (for example, for 'Yes', 'No' or 'I don't know')
- Encourage learners to listen and use a number of brief, but suitable, responses which you teach them before they listen.
- Try some active listening tasks where the listener doesn't speak but notes down the key points of what their partner says about a topic (for example, 'Three things I liked or didn't like about staying at home'. What were the three things? Were they likes or dislikes?).
- Establish learner-friendly assessment criteria to use during Peer Assessment
- Think-pair-share activities
- Jigsaw activities

GAMIFICATION

Game-based learning (GBL), which combines subject matter with gameplay, is not only extremely motivating and fun but it allows students to learn from their mistakes. Here are some tools which incorporate this methodology:

- Kahoot
- Quizziz
- Educaplay
- Tinycards (flashcards): https://tinycards.duolingo.com/
- Anki (Flashcards)
- Hangman, Anagrams, Snap: https://www.teachitlanguages.co.uk/1410#language
- Quizzes and Trivia questions: http://www.roadtogrammar.com/fluent/
- Essential English (Oxford University Press) uses mobile technology to provide free resources for teachers and students, including flashcards, phrasebooks, lesson plans and activities: http://elt-cap-webspace.s3.amazonaws.com/OEE/html/main-menu.html
- Escape Rooms: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfZiN7IW6FD4qEN9vetxjVR70-wS0Et0T55KTyIXlk1INNz4w/viewform?fbclid=IwAR09Jj1G0mKJ2KnKZ3GjDQx1uV5x52llfWnHEcUq01Qw-kBKPAfs_GyescE

Here are some other apps students can download on their devices:

British Council apps offer a huge choice for smart phones. You can look at the options on their webpage and download the apps on Google Play, Apple's App Store or using a QR code. I particularly like 'Johnny Grammar's Word Challenge' - it's a fun way to improve grammar.

Duolingo is a wonderful app that has just won the 'Best education start-up award'. It's designed like a game and is pretty addictive. It's free, contains no adverts and is very effective.

Two min English is free, has no adverts and contains more than two hundred two-minute video lessons on a variety of topics e.g., social English, business English, travel English, common mistakes in English, idioms and phrases.

Game to learn English powowbox is a multi-level game. Once downloaded, it appears as English tracker. The first three levels are free. You have to spot the mistake - if you get it wrong, you receive a clear explanation. It's fun and easy to play.

SOME TIPS FROM OUR HODS AND TEACHERS WHO LEARNT THE HARD WAY:

- Have a testing class
- A pen and tablet might help marking
- Establish a set of classroom rules from day one. This will help control behaviour within the classroom. Remind them of the rules regularly (refer to sample rules in Appendix A)
- The benefit of MS Teams are infinite:
    - Consistency
    - Keeping a record of what students sent
    - Attendance which MSTEAMS facilitates quite effectively
    - Insights
- Engage with the technology yourself before you can start to implement it into classroom practice.
- Refer to the Digital Literacy Department for Support – digital-literacy@ilearn.edu.mt
- Blended learning – synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching can be used
- Several tasks should be assigned to keep students alert and active. These, however, should be short and easy to understand in order to prevent students from feeling overwhelmed.
- Prior to the lesson, teachers can send material via flipped learning methods, then add more information during lesson time and finish off by offering online group collaboration. Students can bring evidence of their work during the online lesson.
- The essence of flipped learning entails students tackling new material to the best of their ability, on their own, before coming into the classroom. It allows teachers more time to support learners, guide personalised learning and set up collaborative tasks or games; it gives teachers the room to promote reasoning, problem-solving, and the expression of opinions – and all the many other things good teachers do anyway.
- Teachers can also check students' engagement and understanding by asking questions during the live sessions and students can answer either verbally or by writing in the chat section or by raising their hands virtually if it is a simple yes/no answer.
- A teacher may also ask students to send in a photo of their work at the end of each lesson for evidence of engagement.
- To make sure students don't get distracted by social media, set clear learning objectives. Find creative ways to use social media within lesson plans. Consider how mobile technology can be used for extension activities. 'Why don't you post an image of your work on our Facebook page?'
- Make eye contact by looking at the camera lens – don't just be a talking head
- Use procedures to organise the class. Children at this stage need to know what to do before activities begin. Remember that instructions need to be straightforward, and activities should be demonstrated (modelled) in advance.

ASSESSMENT

As soon as remote teaching was introduced, making sure students were focusing and learning through became a concern. Keeping track of what learners know and can do might seem more difficult, but it is possible. It can also be an opportunity to develop critical skills such as trust and autonomy in our learners. We all agree that having an ongoing record helps all stakeholders (including teacher, students, parents, SLT members) see how learners are progressing over time.

Here are some techniques:

• thumbs up/thumbs down
• traffic lights where learners show green/yellow/red signs or objects to show how much they understand
• mini-whiteboards (learners write and hold up answers)
• learners use private chat to send answers to you. This way learners aren't influenced by others. Note: you may need to save the chat or ask someone to assist you such as an LSE.

Self-checking

• Learners check their own answers against a key, and report back on the answers they need more clarification on. This builds learner autonomy.
• Teacher shows the answers, but one answer is wrong. Students say which one. This is a way to focus on what the learners need rather than spending time on what learners already know.
• Use an error correction code for learners to correct themselves and report back on areas that need more work. Remember to explain the code to learners.
• Peer assessment. Learners exchange answers by chat functions or email and correct each other's work. Again, learners report back on areas of strength and areas that need more work. Using peers means that the pressure is taken off individuals.
• Rubrics, Assessment Criteria, Checklists and Can do statements can be used for self-assessment to identify areas of strength and development. Learners can use can do statements to identify any areas they need more help with and then feed this back to you at the end of the week.

Online polls/quizzes

Using polls and quizzes is a useful way to assess your learners without having to spend lots of time marking. Using an online poll or quiz can also be anonymous, which can encourage less confident learners to engage in the task.

Here are some tools you can use:

- Google Forms / Microsoft Forms – this can be used for true/false, multiple choice, tick boxes, drop-down answers, short answers or longer answers. You can also have a scale (useful for can do statements). You can upload pictures, video, audio or text and ask questions about the activity. You can set which answer is correct so that the computer does all the marking for you.
- Quizlet – this is an online tool to make quizzes using images or words. It is often used for flashcard or matching activities. These quizzes can be used for homework or in class.
- Kahoot – this tool helps you create quizzes that can be played on individual devices or as a team.
- Learning Apps
- Quizziz
- Flubaroo
- https://web.seesaw.me/
- Edulastic
- J2E

CONCLUSION

We are sure that your online teaching career has set you on a journey of discovery. It's important to bear in mind that cultivating an engaging distance learning experience is hard. It takes time and an incredible amount of patience. If you are new to the experience, you're probably going to feel like a first-year teacher again. That's OK! Tackle the challenges step by step, keep your students updated on your progress, and stay positive. You can do this!

Further reading:

https://tefltastic.wordpress.com/worksheets/vocabulary/classroom/classroom-language-for-zoom/
https://infocus.eltngl.com/2020/06/04/five-practical-ideas-for-starting-english-lessons-with-zoom/?fbclid=IwAR21Exi2p5a25utqot1d2iaoP-s76Lwf8cgge8G6R2YLQpPzraN2ddf4In0
https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/remote-teaching-how-keep-learners-attention?utm_source=TE_Facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=bc-teachingenglish&fbclid=IwAR2-D2PqYn04OeWgS5TMakZaAUhQMC4vzbdpWHrUW1ocyctbHSAWT4-3pgI
https://infocus.eltngl.com/2020/06/04/five-practical-ideas-for-starting-english-lessons-with-zoom/?fbclid=IwAR21Exi2p5a25utqot1d2iaoP-s76Lwf8cgge8G6R2YLQpPzraN2ddf4In0
https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Online_lessons_menu_FINAL.pdf

Rules for online video lessons for English

Please mute all microphones [to avoid glitching & jamming]

- Unmute mikes only when asked to.
- When asked to speak, please use English
- Any questions are to be typed in the chat.
- Blur background or change background [to respect family's privacy]
- You can opt to switch on video or not to.
- Find a place which is quiet and not busy.
- Wear decent clothes, any clothes you would wear to school.
- Lesson is recorded so please obey rules.
- Breaking rules can lead to students being blocked and reported.

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