Stanford
Online High School

Summary of Video: *Essentials for Online Classes.*
Presented by Stanford Online High School Staff.

Since 2006, Stanford Online High School has been educating students successfully online through an innovative virtual classroom model. This year, as a global pandemic closed in-person school operations across the nation, Stanford OHS instructors and staff created a series of webinars and accompanying webpage[1] with free resources for educators implementing emergency online learning plans. This Brief summarizes the recommendations from *Essentials for Online Classes*[2], the first webinar in a series of videos housed on the webpage, related to online learning and student engagement. Stanford Online High School staff are the moderators and presenters.

This webinar emphasizes that teachers should think confidently about what has worked for them in the classroom, and then plan to replicate and adapt their pedagogical and social practices to an online environment. They should be patient with themselves and their students, and let their students be part of this online experiment. As in the physical classroom, students need to be engaged and active in the virtual classroom.

The presenters discuss: 1) the importance of student well-being and engagement outside of school; 2) preparation for online learning including technology, lesson planning, and communication; and 3) running an online classroom.

Recommendations for student well-being and maintaining student engagement outside of school:

- Check in with students individually to assess student well-being.
- Help students build a time management system to normalize their experience outside of school and reduce their stress and feelings of uncertainty.
- Encourage physical activity and socializing with friends.
- Allow some time right before or after class for students to socialize in the classroom.
- Bring students together virtually by hosting homerooms, clubs, and student assemblies online.

Recommendations for technological tools for online learning:
There are two components of online instruction: 1) *synchronous* – real-time, in-person, online environment; and 2) *asynchronous* – students reading and completing assignments on their own. Zoom and Google Meet are examples of technological tools for synchronous instruction. These systems include functions such as text chat, cameras, microphones, screen sharing, polls and surveys, and breakout rooms. Tools for asynchronous instruction include Learning Management Systems, such as Canvas and Blackboard, which are comprehensive systems for document and assignment sharing. Google Classroom also offers many features of an LMS. Other less comprehensive but useful tools include Google Docs and discussion platforms, such as Slack.

Training and connectivity are essential to the successful use of technology.

- Teachers know the technological tools that are available to them.
- Practice sessions are conducted with teachers and students to test and learn the technology before school begins.
- Teachers communicate early with families so they understand what technology is required for online learning.
- Teachers assess students' internet connectivity and available devices. The school makes efforts to provide devices and/or internet hotspots to students in need.
- Technical assistance teams are available to help students and instructors log into classes and solve other internet issues. This is particularly important in the beginning of the school year.

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1 Website: Stanford Online High School: Creating an Online Classroom: https://ohs.stanford.edu/how-create-online-classroom
2 Stanford Online High School: (2020, March 13). *Essentials for Online Classes.* [Video]. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pD5BS_XVG0rna3i8ynXOCKnMZDhXbmP-/view. Video series available at https://continuingstudies.stanford.edu/teaching-your-class-online

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Recommendations for successful communication:
- Systems are in place to communicate with the community, students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and technical support.
- Students and parents know how to attend class, be prepared for class, and get technical assistance.
- Communications systems are tested; for example, email lists successfully reach all intended recipients.
- There is one central place students and families can go to for the day's agenda, assignments, links, etc. (for example, a course homepage on an LMS).
- Teachers hold regular drop-in office hours, where students can get help on their asynchronous work.

Recommendations for lesson planning:
- Assume the first class meeting will include trouble-shooting and getting acquainted with the technology. Refer serious issues to tech support.
- Plan for students to be active and engaged through virtual breakouts, discussions, debates, and whiteboards.
- Plan for what students need at home beyond technology, including books and handouts. Develop procedures for sharing documents such as scanning and emailing or uploading to an LMS, screen sharing, visual aids, slide presentations, and Google docs.
- Wherever possible, reduce the number of log-ins a student must use to access school systems, apps, etc.

Recommendations for running an online classroom:
- When online together, the teachers and students should be viewing the same screen and communicating in real time. This re-creates what happens in a physical classroom.
- Specific content:
  - *TEXT*: Slides and other visual aids should be prepared ahead of time so that teachers can mark them up during a lesson. Short texts, that fit on a screen, are best. Students should discuss the text through microphones and/or chat. Longer texts should be shared with students ahead of time. Scroll through the text in class as a group. Longer texts work better for older students, students who are more advanced, and students who do not have problems focusing.
  - *VIDEO:* Videos are easy to share in an online environment. Students should watch together and respond to the video together in chat so it is a shared experience.
  - STEM: Have visual aids prepared ahead of time along with a system to write in real time. Students should be able to write and verbally respond to questions. Students can do homework off-line and share their work online with their classmates.
- Promote student activity and engagement:
  - If students have microphones, have a clear system for raising hands to speak.
  - The chat function keeps students engaged and provides opportunities to ask questions. Have rules for what is allowed in chat. Respond frequently to chat comments, especially to students who do not have microphones or are having internet bandwidth issues that make speaking difficult.
  - Offer multiple means of student input beyond microphone and chat, such as shared whiteboards, slides, Google docs, discussion boards, and polls and surveys.
  - Communicate expectations of how students will participate in class. The more students know they are expected to participate, the more engaged they will be.
  - Keep track of who has and has not participated, and reach out to those students.
- Implement breakout rooms for small-group work and monitor progress of groups. Zoom has this capacity, but lower-tech solutions exist, such as Skype and Google Hangouts. Progress on group work can be monitored through a group Google doc, Google slide set, etc. This allows a teacher to intervene if a group is having trouble getting started, or stalls out.

The presenters reiterate that teachers can teach a good class online with both and high- and low-tech tools. Teachers should trust themselves and their teaching.

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