



The Ultimate Guide to Engaging Students in the Virtual Classroom

In March 2020, educators and students embarked on an unexpected experiment in online learning as COVID-19 shuttered schools around the world. But the rapid transition to virtual education left many teachers struggling to engage students the way they did in the classroom.

Instructors want to connect with their students online. But often, they don't know how – and they don't have time to retrain themselves on the best practices for online learning as they revise years' worth of lesson plans for the virtual classroom. The move online has shown us that virtual learning is the way of the future – but only if we can provide educators the tools they need to boost student engagement and embrace the capabilities of their web-conferencing platforms. In this whitepaper, we'll explain why online engagement is so important, lay out best practices for educators across disciplines, and offer key considerations for administrators and IT professionals as they empower teachers to thrive in the world of online education.

Coming from years of teaching in-person, teachers can't be expected to automatically know how to engage students online. Thankfully, there are now some established best practices for engaging students on Zoom6 and other web-conferencing platforms, including focusing on giving students a voice and adding elements of interpersonal connection. Here are five important basics for teachers to take into their virtual classrooms.



Encourage students to have a say in their online learning experience.

One of the best ways to increase student buy-in is to give them a say in what, and how, they learn. For instance, teachers might ask students to vote on how they spend free time in class, what kinds of assessments or projects they want to complete, or what books they read together.

Use break-out rooms to simulate small group discussion.

Break-out rooms are a great web-conferencing tool to get students talking. They can be used in lieu of small group discussions, with guiding questions shared via Google Docs, or in the chat to keep students focused. Similar to small group discussions, break-out rooms often encourage shy students to speak up in class and connect with their peers.

Build relationships with casual conversation.


Often in the virtual classroom students lose the opportunity for community-building that happens during transitions or while they work on independent projects. While on Zoom, educators should make space for casual conversation during attendance, in break-out groups, or in fun live polls so students can learn about each other and build community.

Invite guest visitors to shake up the classroom.

Online learning opens up a world of possibilities for classroom visitors. With no commute time or travel expenses, it's easier and cheaper to find artists, authors, scientists, or researchers who will share their experience with students. Administrators can be on the lookout for speakers who might be willing to talk to multiple classrooms.

Turn learning into a game.

There are tons of learning platforms that embrace gamification to make conquering new subjects more exciting for students. Teachers can make content more interactive and exciting with live polls and prizes or digital badges that encourage students to participate.



Perhaps the most important lesson for teachers is to remember that you can't replicate live instruction on Zoom. Web conferencing is a different platform with different capabilities, so your old lesson plans might need a reboot to keep students engaged. Don't get frustrated if old methods don't work – and reach out for help when you're stuck.

Call us: +92 42 111 300 200 Ext: 3469/3412

Email us: zarnab.shakeel@umt.edu.pk | ctl.info@umt.edu.pk

Visit us: ctl.umt.edu.pk