

Interactive Socially-Distanced Learning and Teaching in the Classroom

Introduction

This guide aims to help teaching staff ensure positive student engagement in on-site sessions. Below are a series of suggestions: how you facilitate learning will also depend on the room, discipline, group size, etc. We would urge you to co-create your classroom “contracts” and ways of working with your students and to encourage them to make suggestions through the duration of the module: we are all learning together how to interact in a socially distanced environment, and students themselves may have ideas to improve the on-site sessions.

This guide is for standard classrooms only, although some sections will still be relevant to those teaching in specialist rooms. The guide assumes that the following Health & Safety (H&S) measures are in place (this information is also available on the [H&S Project 2020/21 pages](#) and in all teaching spaces):

1. face covering by all at all times whilst indoors (visor for staff, so students can see their face, but still issues with audibility for students with hearing impairments), with some [exemptions](#).
2. students cannot move position and furniture cannot be moved
3. 1m+ separation between individuals, and 2m wherever possible
4. no sharing of paper/pens, etc.

In order to balance the H&S requirements of social distancing and good pre-emptive accessibility practice, you will likely need to replace larger group work with pair work to ensure that all group members can hear their peers.

Key principles:

- Follow the **University’s latest H&S guidelines**
- **Clear communication:** written clarity before and after sessions and written and spoken clarity during sessions is essential to minimise students’ anxiety and promote their engagement with tasks
- **Structure and signpost the learning journey** explicitly: provide clear guidance on your Blackboard area and echo it in sessions to show the progression towards final outcomes

1. Setting the ‘rules of engagement’

- a. Expect that students will be more than usually prone to feeling anxious or physically uncomfortable while trying to learn wearing face covering and distancing. Acknowledging these challenges compassionately while also opening a positive opportunity for students to shape their learning environment will help with this

- b. In the first hour of your first session on-site (or the first synchronous online session prior to on-site class, depending on how your module is organised), discuss with students how the sessions on-site can be made more efficient. This can be done by setting together the “rules of engagement” with them, or discussing a “contract” that everyone will engage with to make the sessions work
- c. The nature of your classroom contract will be specific to your context (discipline, nature of the space, size of the room, length of the session) but will likely include the following issues: (1) what equipment you expect students to bring to sessions, including face covering; (2) number and duration of breaks during sessions; (3) how pair work will be arranged (pairs to change every week or not, depending on nature of assessment, activities); (4) how you will keep a track of classroom discussions (e.g. Padlets that students use, note-taking by some students, etc); (5) nature of activities (see point below); (6) how you will seek and respond to feedback and suggestions from students about sustaining safe, varied, interactive learning across the course of the module
- a. Publish on your Blackboard area how you plan to adjust your sessions for interactive learning, and repeat this in class. For example, explain that all activity instructions will be on slides/whiteboard so that everyone can follow; clarify that co-created online documents will be used instead of flipcharts/paper, that there will be no distribution of printed handouts.
- b. You could ask students to use their phones/laptops/tablets to exchange information and make lists using Padlet/OneDrive/Shared docs. Not all students have devices so if you do this, form pairs in which one student has a device and can take notes that can be shared with the whole class. Or you could use activities which do not require students to write things down but to debate/discuss with an elected notetaker (this can be the tutor, or a rotating student role)

2. Pre-session – preparation and communication

- a. Socially distanced sessions on-site require staff and students to prepare in advance of the session to ensure that it runs smoothly. In addition to any academic preparation that you would consider in blended or fully digital delivery, you will need to help students prepare logistically for their engagement with learning on campus.
- b. Be clear about what you need students to read/watch/post on discussion boards or other in advance to make the “live” session work; distinguish clearly between essential and optional/additional preparation work – use the essential prep work in sessions to honour students’ time
- c. Let students know your planned logistics for how they’ll learn effectively and what equipment they’ll need to bring for each session (e.g. do they need to bring a mobile/tablet; do you want to arrange the pairing they’ll be in for the session in advance; invite students to share any questions or concerns with you in advance)
- d. Share all documents that students would need to refer to in the session at least 24 hours in advance so that students can bring their own copies if they want
- e. Write clear instructions for the session’s activities in advance; share them with students at least 24 hours before the session to minimise confusion on the day

3. In the room – safe interactive learning

- a. There cannot be as much spontaneity as in pre-Covid-19 face-to-face sessions, so you will need to adapt your movements and actions and ensure students are aware of their own too.
- b. If you use ReCap to record the session or part of it, try to talk while close to the podium with the mic for better recording. As per the [University Blended Learning Guidance](#), elements of “knowledge transmission” or “lecture” are best “flipped”, and recorded outside the on-site sessions, so that students can engage with them in their own time
- c. Remain in the “2m zone” at the front of the room where you can move freely, and avoid roaming the room unless absolutely necessary
- d. Model good practice by respecting the social distancing rules in place and remind students to wear face covering
- e. Make sure you give full-group instructions front facing so that student can see your lips and aim to provide written instructions for any activities on your slides
- f. As much as possible, have the instructions ready on the screen/whiteboard, or write them down/type them up as you go along
- g. Seek quick gesture or verbal feedback (e.g. raise hands/speaking/polling on Mentimeter, etc.) because you will not be able to read facial expressions effectively while students are wearing face covering.
- h. Ensure you finish the session a bit earlier than usual, to allow cleaning staff to clean the room before the next session (if applicable).

4. Post-session – reflecting on and developing the learning environment

- a. Offer anonymous opportunities for feedback on the accessibility and quality of the learning experience. Respond to student feedback and make adjustments in discussion with colleagues
- b. Reflect with students (e.g. on a discussion board) on what the best use of the space could be in keeping with CCCU’s commitment to partnership in learning with students
- c. Check guidance on using Mentimeter and on setting up and using Padlet with your students to allow pairs to share ideas and create a written resource which students can use to revise
- d. If you need further support from the LTE team on how to use technologies in the classroom, join the [Lunchtime Surgery](#) – every weekday from 1-2pm.
- e. You can also consult your Faculty Director of Learning and Teaching if you have further questions.