

# Taking School Online

## With a Student-Centered Approach

The public health crisis posed by the COVID-19 outbreak has many schools rapidly shifting to online and distance learning. In these schools, educators are navigating new technologies and ways of teaching during an immensely challenging and uncertain time in our communities, when students' (and teachers' own) social-emotional needs are just as critical as academic goals. The resources in this packet are designed to help teachers approach online learning with a focus on sustaining community, supporting students, and creating engaging, meaningful learning experiences.

- [Teacher Checklist](#)
- [Contracting for Online Learning](#)
- [Student-Centered Approaches to Online and Distance Learning](#)

Facing History and Ourselves is here to support you. Be sure to [sign up](#) on our Current Events page to receive our weekly newsletter with resources, strategies, and helpful insights as we navigate through this uncharted territory.

# Teacher Checklist

This checklist includes various considerations as you move your teaching online. [A Letter to Educators Teaching Online for the First Time](#) also captures the values of connection and community that Facing History shares. We recommend reading this thoughtful piece by two educators as you begin your planning.

## Planning

- What guidelines, infrastructure, and support are available from your school or district? Will technology be used to support distance learning? What accommodations are available for students who don't have access to a computer, smartphone, or internet at home?
- What platform will you use to communicate with students and what is your communication plan? How comfortable are you with this platform? Do you know how to get tech support?
- Will your teaching be synchronous, asynchronous, or a combination of both? With small groups of students or a whole class? How will you balance on-screen and off-screen learning time?
- How often do you plan to post work—daily, weekly, or at another cadence? Is there a suggested daily schedule for students?
- When will you schedule time to prepare materials and assess student work?
- What is your contingency plan if you are unable to facilitate online or need to be absent from “school”?

**Suggested Resources:** [Preparing to Take School Online? Here Are 10 Tips to Make It Work](#) (EdSurge) and [Coronavirus Has Led to a Rush of Online Teaching. How Can Professors Manage?](#) (EdSurge Podcast)

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## Communication

- Will you consider using email, text messages, chat, office hours, or another medium so you can communicate with students 1:1? Do you have up-to-date contact information for your students?
- Will you also communicate with parents and caregivers about how they can support students' learning?

**Suggested Resources:** [Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for Schools](#) (from ¡Colorín colorado!) and [Communication Tools](#) (from the State Educational Technology Directors Association—SETDA)

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## Continuity

- What elements of your classroom and curriculum do you want to stay the same? Understanding that distance learning is more complex and time-consuming for both teachers and students, what curriculum, content, and skills will you prioritize and what will you let go of?

**Suggested Resource:** [Powerful Learning](#) is a useful framework for thinking through these questions (Digital Promise)

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## Connection

- What routines, strategies, and tools can help your students feel connected to you and to each other?
- What role can video, images, or social media play in helping your class feel connected to each other, to other classes in your school or community, or to schools around the world?
- How can you stay connected to colleagues and maintain a professional support system?

**Suggested Resource:** [Prioritizing Human Connection When Social Distancing Is the New Norm](#) (EdSurge)

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## Care

- How can you practice self-care as you navigate your professional responsibilities?
- What boundaries might you set around working hours and communication windows?
- What form of stress relief can you schedule into each day: e.g., exercise, outdoor time, journaling, mindfulness, or any activity that helps you feel good?

**Suggested Resource:** [How to Keep the Greater Good in Mind during the Coronavirus Outbreak](#) (Greater Good Science Center)

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*For teachers interested in digging deeper into effective online teaching and learning, Michelle Pacansky-Brock has provided free online access to much of her book [Best Practices for Teaching with Emerging Technologies](#), as well as posting a rich collection of resources on [Humanizing Online Learning](#).*

# Contracting for Online Learning

## Rationale

At Facing History and Ourselves, we recommend developing [classroom contracts](#) to create inclusive, respectful learning communities, whether they are in-person or online. With schools closing and many classrooms moving to digital spaces, contracting for online learning can mark a transition to a different kind of learning community and can help teachers and students establish new norms to meet the challenges of the moment.

## Procedure

This strategy can work in a synchronous setting, when teachers and students are together in real time on a video conferencing platform like Zoom or Google Hangouts. It can also be used asynchronously by sharing some of the prompts below on a class discussion board and inviting students to respond via a tool like [Padlet](#), [VoiceThread](#), or [Flipgrid](#).

### 1. Define *contracting*.

A contract implies that all parties have a responsibility to uphold the agreement. Students can think about what it means for a classroom to have a contract, and why a new contract might be needed as your class shifts to online learning. If you previously made a class contract, review it with the group before inviting them to think about how you might revise it for your new online learning environment.

### 2. Students reflect.

To prepare students to develop a class contract, ask them to reflect on their expectations of this new learning environment and think about other experiences they may have had with online learning. You might use one or more of these prompts and invite students to reflect in written journals, in an online chat space, or in virtual breakouts:

- a. Complete the sentence: *When I think about my school closing and shifting to online learning, I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_*. You might consider asking students to capture their feeling in one word and share it anonymously to a Word Cloud. Viewing the class Word Cloud together gives a powerful sense of the group's mood.
- b. Think about other online learning experiences you have had. What were some qualities of positive online learning experiences? How did you feel during those positive experiences? If you had negative online learning experiences, what do you think made them unsuccessful?
- c. Share [Untitled Poem by Beth Strano](#) with students. Ask them to highlight or share a word or phrase that captures something they would value in a learning community or add their own line.

### 3. Discuss classroom norms.

Facing History teachers have found that useful class contracts typically include several clearly defined rules or expectations, as well as consequences for those who do not fulfill their obligations as members of the classroom community. There are many ways to proceed with developing a classroom contract. View the Word Cloud or simply invite students to share some of the feelings from their initial reflection and then ask, *“Given this range of feelings, what do you think we collectively need from our learning community, and what does it need from each of us?”*

You can divide students into smaller groups and ask them to draft norms and expectations on a Google Doc or [Padlet](#) that can be shared and discussed with the group. Alternatively, you can share a list of suggested norms with students and invite discussion either orally, in a chat space, or by annotating a Google Doc using the “comment” or “suggest” functions. While the process is inclusive of students’ input, ultimately it is the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that the ideas that make it into the final contract are those that will best nurture a safe learning environment.

### *Alternatively...*

### 4. Reflect on scenarios.

Another way to help students develop a classroom contract is to have them envision what they would like to have happen during certain scenarios. Scenarios could be drawn from students’ previous experiences of online learning. They might include situations such as:

- When we get frustrated or need help with our tech tools, we can. . .
- When we want to feel connected with classmates, we can. . .
- When we notice ourselves or a classmate getting distracted during small-group work online, we can. . .
- When something is happening at home that makes it hard for us to engage in online learning, we can. . .
- When someone says something that might be confusing or offensive in our online discussion, we can. . .
- When we need time to talk about topics outside of our normal curriculum, we can. . .
- To show appreciation or respect for the ideas of others, we can. . .

### 5. Initiate the contract.

After the class has completed its contract, reaching consensus about rules, norms, and expectations, it is important for each student to signal agreement. Students can do so by adding their names to a Google Doc or Padlet. If possible, add a copy of the contract to the resources available in your online learning space for students to review and revisit.

# Student-Centered Approaches to Online and Distance Learning

It can be challenging to create a student-centered learning experience when we're not physically present in the classroom. Yet students facing the challenges of living and learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic can benefit from a relational, supportive approach that offers them connection, community, and agency in their own learning.

This grid offers ideas, strategies, and resources to help you and your students connect, reflect, inquire, and discuss in both synchronous and asynchronous digital spaces. We also suggest offering students opportunities to work offline, away from screens. While there are a plethora of different tools, apps, and platforms to try, we recommend sticking to just a few familiar and easy-to-use tools, reserving more of your time for responding to student work or scheduling 1:1 check-ins.

If you want students to . . .	Try this . . .
<p><b>Connect</b>  <i>Choose tools that allow both video and audio. The combination has a humanizing effect and helps participants feel connected.</i></p>	<p><i>Synchronous:</i> Virtual Community Meeting with a connection prompt on Zoom or Google Hangouts.  <i>Asynchronous:</i> Students write and share six-word memoirs on Flipgrid.  <i>Offline:</i> 1:1 phone or text check-ins (teacher:student).</p>
<p><b>Reflect</b>  <i>Allow multiple entry points for student reflection, including words and images. Reflections can be private or shared.</i></p>	<p><i>Synchronous:</i> Students share reflections on a <a href="#">Graffiti board</a> in Google Docs or <a href="#">Padlet</a>.  <i>Asynchronous:</i> Students create <a href="#">Color, Symbol, Image</a> documents, then photograph and share to a class social media stream.  <i>Offline:</i> <a href="#">Journaling</a>, daily or weekly, with prompts provided by teacher.</p>
<p><b>Inquire</b>  <i>Students can engage with a common text, then annotate and interpret collectively. Offline, they can have agency to define their learning goals.</i></p>	<p><i>Synchronous:</i> <a href="#">Close Viewing Protocol</a>: Watch a short streaming video together, pausing for discussion either on audio or in the chat.  <i>Asynchronous:</i> Read a shared text and process with a <a href="#">Connect, Extend, Challenge</a> strategy, sharing responses on Padlet.  <i>Offline:</i> Encourage students to <a href="#">create their own learning agenda</a>.</p>
<p><b>Discuss</b>  <i>Learning is social. Use audio, video, and text tools that help students exchange ideas and extend their thinking.</i></p>	<p><i>Synchronous:</i> Use <a href="#">Think, Pair, Share</a> with small groups of students in Zoom breakout rooms.  <i>Asynchronous:</i> Over a defined period (1–2 days), students engage in <a href="#">Big Paper/Silent Conversation</a> using the “comment” feature on Google Docs, responding to a stimulus text and to each other’s ideas. <a href="#">Flipgrid</a> or <a href="#">Voicethread</a> allows students to record audio/video comments and build a discussion over time.  <i>Offline:</i> 1:1 phone call with a classmate.</p>