



Tips for Transitioning to Online Classes (Unexpectedly)

Even the best instructors will struggle to turn online classes into a perfect substitute for the in-person class they already prepared. As a student, do not expect everything to remain the same! Be sure to know:

1. If and how the syllabus will be changing

- a. This is highly likely!
- b. It may be continually updated through some trial and error throughout the semester too, so know if and when it changes
- c. Read the new syllabus carefully so that you know what has changed and what will remain the same

2. How your instructor will be assessing learning outcomes and evaluating your performance in the class

- a. Assignments, projects, presentations, exams, etc. might all be different, so know what your new evaluation criteria will be

3. The plan for “attending class”

- a. Figure out if it is the same day/time as your usual class, but via a different format (e.g., video conferencing)
- b. Determine whether the time or number of times you meet has changed
- c. Find out if you will still “attend” class, or whether you will watch videos or read content on your own to learn

4. How you will be taught new content

- a. Will the instructor be presenting over a video conference call in real time?
- b. Will lectures be pre-recorded for you to watch on your own time?
- c. Are you expected to read additional materials and “teach yourself” certain concepts?
- d. Are there study groups or break-out sessions you can attend virtually to reinforce concepts?
- e. Will classes be conducted via a video call and then recorded and posted for reference later?

5. How will exams be administered

- a. Are you still having exams?
- b. Will they be online?
- c. What are the expectations with regard to academic honesty and how can you make sure you follow those guidelines appropriately?
- d. Will exams be similar in format to previous ones, or will the types of questions/exercises/etc. change?

6. The plan for your instructor’s office hours

- a. Will these be held virtually or over the phone?
- b. When are office hours scheduled?
- c. Can you make an appointment with your instructor for office hours?

7. If your class will be conducted by video conferencing

- a. Which platform will you be using? Is it freely available?
- b. What do you need to do to set up the video conferencing program in advance of class?
- c. Are there resources for practicing using the platform either as a class before your transition online OR as an individual on your own time?
- d. Will you be expected to have your video on, or is audio-only okay?
- e. If you are expected to have your video on, do you have a suitable/professional place within your home where you can participate in the calls? Does your video conferencing platform offer “virtual backgrounds” that can mask your surrounding environment with a professional image?

- f. Once you find a suitable/professional place for the call, do you have a plan for limiting disturbances from others (e.g., pets, roommates, family members, patrons in a coffee shop, etc.)?
 - g. What are your instructor's expectations with regard to class participation and/or asking questions during the video call?
 - h. Do you have access to a computer/smartphone/headphones/webcam/etc., adequate internet speeds, a way for your laptop/phone/computer to stay plugged in and charging, and a way to take notes during the call (i.e., it might be challenging to see slides on your screen and also type your notes, so think in advance how you plan to handle this)?
- 8. Whether or not your school plans to return to in-person classes before the end of the semester**
- a. Some universities have said they are transitioning online through the end of the semester, others are still evaluating and deciding whether the end of the semester might still allow for in-person classes, so be sure to know your school's plans for this and plan accordingly
- 9. Whether group work is required during your class and if that will change as well**
- a. How will this be coordinated? Is it up to each group to decide, or is there a specified format for virtual collaboration?
 - b. How will you maintain contact with your group and hold each other accountable (especially for a group project)?
 - c. What are the deadlines for your group work and have they changed due to online instruction transitions?
- 10. How you can still take advantage of any accommodations you need (i.e., university-approved ones through your campus's disability resource center) to be successful in your classes**
- a. REMIND your instructor that you will need accommodations for classes and/or exams
 - b. Find out your instructor's plan for making sure your accommodations are still maintained with the new class format
 - c. If the online format changes what you need in terms of accommodations, speak with your disability resources center immediately to create a new plan, and then communicate that with your instructors
 - d. Figure out whether your on-campus disabilities and accommodations centers will still remain open and accessible to help you, or whether they also have to adapt their processes to virtual interactions (e.g., does your testing center still allow students to take tests there, or has that closed?)
- 11. Maintain contact with your instructors and ask for help or clarification when you need it!**
- a. Instructors are also trying their best to transition smoothly, but they might have some trial and error too as they figure out the best way to do things, so always ask questions if something seems weird or unclear
 - b. Try out technology early and often to make sure you can address technical issues, and if you are having issues, tell your instructor right away so they can help you problem-solve themselves or point you to someone who can
 - c. If possible (and your instructor is open to it), help to provide some feedback about what is going well with the new format and what you are struggling with so they know where they can try to improve the process and fix any glitches
 - d. If you have any health issues or concerns, communicate this to your instructor as soon as possible so they can help to come up with a contingency plan for assignments or exams
 - e. Take advantage of office hours to ask any questions, get advice about being successful on assignments or exams and to make sure you are still absorbing information just as well in the new format as you were before the change
- 12. Keep in contact with your fellow classmates so you still have study buddies, people that you can ask questions and social support throughout the rest of the semester**
- a. Everyone will be struggling through the transition, but your friends from class might have great suggestions for studying, learning, or even how to work technology that can help you transition more smoothly
 - b. If you have to miss a class due to health concerns or others issues, set up a time to talk with a classmate about what you missed and to get any relevant notes from the class as soon as you are able to so you don't fall behind