

## Strategies for Teaching in a Socially Distanced Classroom

There are a few ideas for teaching face-to-face (f2f) this fall:

**Normalize Mask Usage:** Teaching in a class where everyone is wearing a mask is something that is new to all of us, for you and for your students. Part of your job this fall will be to normalize the wearing of those masks, to ensure that your students are following the necessary protocols to keep everyone as safe as possible. Help them get used to sitting six feet apart, and if someone isn't wearing a mask, or has their nose sticking out, remind them of the procedures that we should all be following.

**Encourage Students to be Prepared:** If you have a reduced amount of time with every student, their preparation for class time becomes even more important. Encourage them to do that preparation by having them prepare something to do in class. Use low-risk frequent assessment to motivate them and use light grading (formative with more group feedback than individual feedback) to keep your grading load under control.

**Make Lectures more Interactive:** Intersperse the lecture with digital polls that check student understanding. [Eric Mazur](#) at Harvard has a lot of videos available on YouTube showing his "Peer Instruction method," which takes polls during one's lectures as checks on student understanding. [Poll Everywhere](#) is a supported tool for polling at SUNY Cortland. It is already installed on some classroom desktops, particularly in Old Main, but it can also be used as a phone app. There is a [Poll Everywhere extension that works with PowerPoint](#). Two other useful apps are [Socrative](#) and [Plickers](#). In Plickers, you print out sheets of paper and distribute them to your students. Those sheets are held up in response to questions and are then scanned by a tablet or phone to take attendance, polls, and give graded quizzes. Polls can also be done by colored cards or a show of hands if you prefer.

**Extend the Conversation:** You may reduce the amount of content provided to the class if you are dividing your f2f time between two or three subsections of the class. You can move that content to Blackboard and extend student conversations there as well. Blackboard can be used for announcements, posting grades, assigning asynchronous discussions, and embedding publisher software tools. Both synchronous and asynchronous meetings have their place. Synchronous meetings are useful for building community and aiding student time management, but asynchronous work often results in deeper and more thoughtful work.

**Use a Backchannel for Student Questions:** It may also be difficult to hear students who are asking questions. You can solve some of this by using a backchannel, a synchronous tool where students can ask questions on their devices and which you can read on yours. This might be done through a shared document in OneDrive or Google Docs, or it could be done through [Whatsapp Groupme](#), or another messaging app. Of course, you should be prepared to take the time to teach the students how to use whatever software tools you will ask them to use. You should also get into the habit of repeating student questions to ensure that you heard them right and to ensure that everyone else heard them as well.

**Use Apps to Supplement Small Group Work:** Students could work in small groups using shared documents (as in OneDrive or Google Docs), on instant messaging tools (as with [Whatsapp](#) and [Groupme](#)), or in interactive online apps (like [Edpuzzle](#), [Quizlet](#), or [Kahoot](#)). Set the groups up ahead of time and assign students to them so it is easier to get students into the groups and so you will have oversight over what is happening in those groups. You could have the students share their activities and notes with the class in a shared document, and you can have them report back with instant messaging.

**Minimize the Number of New Tools:** Minimizing the number of software packages that students need to learn will reduce their stress. Support for standard software can be found through [Technology Documentation](#) and [Design Help](#). If you plan to use a tool that is not listed in either site, please contact the [Help Center](#) so they can help you ensure the use is consistent with SUNY privacy and data retention policies.

**Ensure that every Student can access the Web:** Information Resources has a pool of laptops available to students. The procedure we have in place is for the student to reach out to their dean and let them know they need a laptop. The deans have been given information on the request process, there is a form they provide the students to fill out.

## Sources:

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