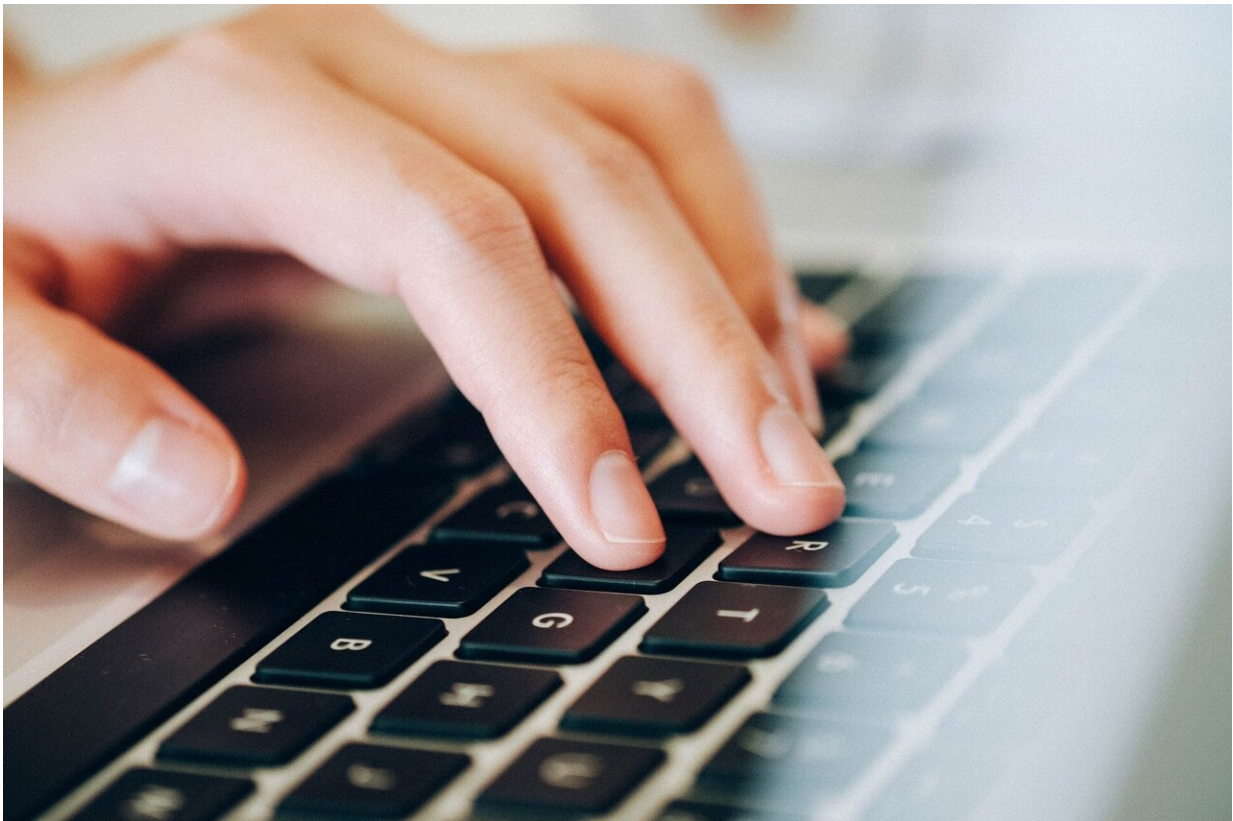


How to optimize online learning in the age of coronavirus

March 16 2020, by Andrew Martin



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Due to the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) there will be increasing reliance on online learning for school students. From my perspective as an educational psychologist, I propose five key considerations for

educators to take into account when supporting students' online learning.

1. Instruction

It is important for online instruction to be as explicit, orderly, and well-organized as possible—particularly when students are learning new or difficult subject matter. We have identified [Load Reduction Instruction](#) as a way to reduce these risks.

Following the principles of Load Reduction Instruction, online lessons must be very clear and well-structured, delivered in manageable chunks, allow good opportunity for students to practice what must be learned, and enable opportunities for the teacher to see students' work and provide feedback on time.

When the teacher is satisfied the students have the basics, they can then provide more independent and self-directed [online learning](#) activities.

2. Content

Alongside explicit instruction is the need for high-quality content that is appropriate to the learner's level of knowledge and skill. It is important that educators first do careful vetting and selection of online materials and programs to ensure that students are working on the best material possible.

Also, it is important that the content is not too difficult too soon. It must be delivered in doable chunks so the learner is not overwhelmed or confused early in the learning process.

Finally, remember that textbooks are often well targeted to the education syllabus, written by experts in the field, reviewed by other experts in the

field, and designed to incrementally raise the bar on the learner as they move through a given section or chapter. Many of these textbooks are available online—so use them.

On a related note, schools might also post hard-copy materials to the home—especially in cases where technology or online connections are unreliable.

3. Motivation

There are many parts to students' motivation—the [Motivation and Engagement Wheel](#) captures the major ones that are critical to any learning situation, including online learning. However, there is one area of motivation particularly relevant to online learning: self-regulation—represented in the Wheel by self- and task-management, planning, and persistence.

In an online environment there is vast potential for students to go off track. Poor impulse control can also be a real problem. High-quality online instruction and content that keeps the learner engaged and on track can reduce these risks (see Instruction and Content considerations above).

Setting some work that can be printed and completed in hard copy separates the [student](#) from technology for a while—and separates them from online temptations. School requests to parents to monitor students' online activity can also be helpful. Encouraging students to remove all technology from the bedroom during sleep hours is another important self-management strategy.

Other aspects of self-management include: setting more frequent due dates for small units of work, developing a schoolwork timetable for students for each school day, students maintaining bedtime and wake-up

times that align with the school day, and parents identifying a place at home where students can concentrate while they do schoolwork.

4. Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are integral to learning—particularly teacher-student relationships. Therefore, in an online environment it is advisable that teachers maintain contact with the class in numerous ways, such as via email, the school's online learning platform, video, blogs, and class chat-groups.

From a relationship perspective, ample opportunities for face-to-face online instruction is important. If in doubt, teachers should over-communicate rather than under-communicate with the class. Some of this can be pre-prepared and pre-recorded. Some can be in real-time.

As teachers maintain online contact with their class, schools will also need to ensure appropriate teacher-student boundaries and uncompromized professionalism are observed. [Connective instruction](#) has been developed to help with all this.

This approach to teaching shows how educators can connect to students on three channels: the interpersonal channel (e.g., emotionally supporting students), the content channel (e.g., delivering content that is well-matched to students' ability and interests), and the instruction channel (e.g., supporting students through Load Reduction Instruction).

5. Mental Health

Good mental health is not only a vital outcome in itself, it is a means to other vital outcomes—such as learning. If [mental health](#) suffers, learning usually suffers. During periods of online education, schools will be

aware of some students with whom they must maintain closer contact (including students with additional educational needs, such as those with dyslexia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, etc.). But it is important that all students are clearly informed of who to contact inside or outside the school if they are struggling.

In this time of COVID-19 it is also likely students will be anxious and some may also lose loved ones or have family and friends who are seriously ill. As soon as a school is aware of this, it is important they immediately reach out to the student (probably via the [school's](#) counseling support unit, or similar) and provide the appropriate support and professional referrals needed.

To conclude, the five considerations presented here provide a means by which schools and teachers can develop and deliver online learning to optimize their students' learning.

I wish all educators and students the very best.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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