Lessons from lockdown - keeping primary industry students engaged with online learning

Delivering education and training in primary sector subjects is especially challenging in a lockdown. Moving courses and classes online is no small feat, let alone keeping students interested and participating once you've got them into an online classroom.

Try these 10 tips compiled from research and tutors who work in the primary industry.

10 tips for maintaining learner engagement

1 **Breakout rooms** offer an alternative to the group discussion aspect of in-person learning, which is often lacking in technology-enabled learning. Breakout rooms are great for maintaining engagement as they facilitate interaction and relationship building between learners.

2 **Stand and deliver your lectures** to mimic an in-person lecture as closely as possible. Learners retain information easier when elements of body language, facial expression and cultural nuance are present in online classes.

3 **Real time and relaxed schedule options** for your students. Synchronous classes run in real time, with students and instructors attending together from different locations. Asynchronous classes run on a more relaxed schedule, with students accessing class materials during different hours and from different locations. Some learners prefer to learn synchronously, whereas others find it hard to stare at a screen for too long. Record all synchronous sessions for those that are unable to attend and/or prefer to engage asynchronously.

4 **Flipped classroom teaching.** This method mean lectures are shared outside of class time for individual review as homework, and classroom time is reserved for class discussion and interactive projects. Students engage with online learning better when levels of cognitive load are higher in class and lower at home. More about flipped classrooms

5 **A consistent online presence outside of lectures** to make your learners feel that you are there with them to support them. Provide them with routine opportunities for drop-in question sessions, as well as using the chat function to send messages and reminders, as well as informal material such as memes.

6 **Quizzes and polls** as both a reenergiser and a facilitator of knowledge transfer. Zoom and Teams have built-in polling and quiz capabilities, but you can also use third-party websites (e.g. Quizlet and Kahoot!) and share your screen with the class.

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> **...had some success with learner - to - learner connections – doing some training in the morning, getting learners working together with each other during the day, then reporting back.**
>
> **Tutor**

7 **Whiteboarding -** Teams and Zoom have a built-in whiteboarding tool that both you and your students can use to collaborate and brainstorm during a lecture or breakout room. Anything your learners can interact with during a lesson will increase their engagement.

8 **Feedback, feedback, feedback!** This is one of the most important aspects to maintain learner engagement – provide consistent, positive feedback to encourage in-lesson participation (even when an answer is incorrect). Ask for feedback too; use Google Forms to create a quick survey where your learners can submit anonymous suggestions for making your lectures more engaging.

9 **Visual media** such as YouTube videos throughout your lectures will keep your learners engaged, as the brain retains visual content better than words. Interactive exercises (such as quizzes, whiteboarding, breakout rooms, polls) are highly effective in promoting reflection and knowledge retention after watching videos.

10 **Real-world examples.** Showing your learners how certain topics and/or skills could apply in a real-world context will maintain their engagement with, and motivation to complete your course. Online learning can sometimes feel too detached from reality.

Things to watch out for

1 **Long, content - heavy lectures -** shorter and more frequent sessions are more engaging than one long lesson. If you don't have the option of shorter, frequent sessions, make sure to break up your lessons with re-energisers such as interactive activities and opportunities to stand up and move around.

2 **Videos and microphones turned off** - it's ok to have video turned off sometimes to reduce Zoom fatigue however, a common sign of disengaged a student is a lack of in-lesson interaction paired with disabled video and microphone. Reach out to learners showing signs of disengagement and encourage them to participate during lessons by calling on them individually

3 **Unproductive breakout rooms** - make sure breakout rooms are productive, instead of a place to take a break. You can visit and participate in breakout rooms to ensure your learners are keeping on-track – but make sure not to get locked out of your breakout rooms!

4 **Technical difficulties** - learners love interactive tools such as polls, quizzes and whiteboards, but they can be niggly. To avoid technical difficulties and/or malfunctions that cause your students switch off from learning, have any interactive resources prepared and ready to go before your lesson begins. If you're nervous about using them, give the tools a test run in a meeting with only yourself so you're confident with how to use them in an online lecture.

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> **Some tutors did Q+A drop-in sessions at a set time each week, which were really helpful.**
>
> **Learner**