

# Teaching in the time of COVID-19:

Taking Stock and Planning Ahead

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do we **define** online teaching, distance teaching, and hybrid teaching scenarios—and what are the differences between them? From the student perspective, what will be different about online, distance, and hybrid learning scenarios?

Distance education refers to programmes and courses that can be completed without attending classes physically. Traditionally, prior to the pervasive use of digital technology, distance education took place through correspondence. Today, the majority of such programmes and courses are offered online, and are *designed* with the view that access to on campus resources are limited. They are usually tailored for self-paced learning.

There are four scenarios in which teaching and learning could happen next semester:

Scenario 1: Face-to-face	Scenario 2: Blended	Scenario 3: Hybrid	Scenario 4: Online
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•face-to-face classes, delivered on campus</li><li>•classes &lt;50 students</li><li>•most applicable to lab-based or studio-based classes</li><li>•must have an online component, e.g. complemented by e-resources (asynchronous)</li><li>•assessments may be a combination of face-to-face and online</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•parts of classes are delivered face-to-face (on campus), while other parts are delivered remotely online (off campus)</li><li>•may be complemented by e-resources (asynchronous)</li><li>•assessments may be a combination of face-to-face and online</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•classes delivered in two modes: simultaneously face-to-face (on campus) and remotely online (off campus)</li><li>•may be complemented by e-resources (asynchronous)</li><li>•assessments may be a combination of face-to-face and online</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•delivery entirely online (off campus), synchronously or asynchronously, with online resources</li><li>•classes &gt;50 students</li><li>•all assessments are online or make use of alternative approaches</li></ul>

2. How do we **design** classes to accommodate or combine different teaching scenarios and modes – f2f, online, and hybrid?

It is important to keep things simple. Although we have been exposed to many different technologies in recent months, limiting the number of technology platforms will help students who are grappling with how to learn in the current environment. A combination of synchronous and asynchronous teaching is likely to be better than using only a single approach. Combining both approaches enables a mix of different ways of teaching while allowing for flexibility in meeting students' differentiated needs. Some classes may be small enough that face-to-face components can be included, but it will be vital that these are both live streamed and recorded so that students who are unable to attend can participate. A simple approach might include pre-recorded lectures, a discussion forum for dialogue, use of Zoom for tutorials, and maybe weekly quizzes to check student understanding.

[Find out more from [NUS Quick guide to online teaching](#)]

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### 3. What are some **strategies** for effective online teaching?

There are two main approaches to going online with teaching: asynchronous recorded video presentations and synchronous live streaming. Each of these involves putting into action plans made before class and needs to consider the assessments for following up afterwards.

The first and most flexible approach to online teaching is asynchronous, in which there is no live or real-time interaction among students and the teacher, and no 'live' meetings are scheduled. This might consist of posting resources such as presentation slides and PDFs on a class website, for example on LumiNUS. It would further likely involve posting recordings on the LumiNUS module Learning Flow and Web Lectures tools. Lectures can be self-recorded with software such as Panopto, ideally broken up into shorter 5–10 minute segments of video. Uploaded slides and notes as well as recordings can then be made available to students on a weekly basis. If students have questions, they can email the teacher. However, because the query may be relevant to other students, it is preferable to use Discussion Forums on LumiNUS.

The second approach attempts to replicate the experience of face-to-face classroom teaching. Webinars are synchronous or 'live' sessions that consist of a lecture or seminar conducted online, supported by presentation slides with opportunities for live online chat. These live sessions have the advantage of being more active and interactive than the asynchronous alternative, but the disadvantage is that they offer less flexibility as students and teacher need to meet at scheduled times. It is a good practice to record webinars and make them available for offline access at a later time, so students can review the session.

For greater flexibility, it is further possible to use a combination of recorded lectures and live, synchronous class meetings.

[Find out more from [NUS Quick guide to online teaching](#)]

### 4. How do we **support** and engage students in an online environment?

Keeping it simple is key to supporting our students. Re-think the format of classes by using synchronous online time for engagement and interaction with students and having learning resources available asynchronously for self-paced learning.

A simple approach might include pre-recorded lectures, a discussion forum for dialogue, use of Zoom for tutorials, and perhaps weekly quizzes to check student understanding. Think about limiting the number of different technology platforms.

Engage students and get to know them through frequent communications, varying the types of activities (synchronous and asynchronous; peer-to-peer in addition to student-to-teacher), scaffolding / supporting their learning, and being present when they need support.

[Find out more from [NUS Quick guide to online teaching](#)]

### 5. How do we **get students ready** for online or hybrid learning in the new semester? How do we help students to make the most of their learning experience?

Most important is to keep things simple and to *communicate*. Impress upon students that learning in the context of higher education need not be a solitary experience, but can be a collaborative endeavour. At the same time, it is also about taking responsibility for their own learning and being independent. Therefore, it is worth taking into

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consideration the following four broad principles when designing class activities, tasks, interactions, and assessments in order to help students prepare for and make the most of their learning at NUS, especially in the case of online environments.

Productive beliefs	Mindset and habits	Learning approach	Collaborative and positive relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•make learning relevant</li><li>•take risks and explore</li><li>•focus on learning, not grades</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•balance studying, student life, and social life</li><li>•cultivate self discipline in order to manage distractions</li><li>•be inquisitive in seeking opportunities, including beyond the classroom learning (e.g., forums, talks)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•develop a stance that is informed by evidence</li><li>•read not only for understanding, but to synthesize and evaluate</li><li>•encourage students to be surprised and to question what they are learning, as well as their own assumptions</li><li>•articulate what is learned: engage in dialogues and debates</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•develop a collaborative stance which values diversity, respect and teamwork</li><li>•enhance communication skills</li><li>•build or be part of a learning community</li></ul>

[Find out more from [NUS Quick guide to online teaching](#)]

6. How do we build **rapport**—both ‘student-student’ and ‘teacher-students’—and **community**, especially at the start of the semester?

Learning involves not only individual cognitive work, but also social activity. Building and participating in a community can support learning. In live sessions, breakout rooms can support dialogue and collaboration (consider the lively interactions that occur on social media). Suitable topics will encourage such sustained online conversations on discussion forums, as will establishing presence as a teacher and providing timely and responsive feedback.

Pro-actively building in activities at the beginning of the semester helps with getting to know students (and vice versa), but also to allow the students to get to know one another. A pre-semester survey can provide insight into the learning environment students are dealing with. Students can introduce themselves to one another with a short video by making use of software such as FlipGrid.

An *inclusive environment* also helps students to develop a sense of belonging. It ensures that students can access module resources to support them in achieving learning outcomes and a meaningful learning experience. It is important to bear in mind that not all students will have access to a high bandwidth internet connection and may not be able to engage in real time.

[Find out more from [NUS Quick guide to online teaching](#)]

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7. What are some good practices and resources for **designing a whole online module**? How can it be done in a way that is truly participatory and engaging for students? |

Following is a set of principles which can be used as a guide in designing and engaging students in an online module (Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2013):

1. Design for open communication and trust
2. Design for systematic inquiry, discourse and critical reflection
3. Create and sustain a sense of community
4. Support purposeful inquiry
5. Ensure students sustain collaboration
6. Ensure that inquiry moves to resolution
7. Ensure assessment is congruent with intended learning outcomes

Reference:

Vaughan, N. D., Cleveland-Innes, M., & Garrison, D. R. (2013). *Teaching in blended learning environments: Creating and sustaining communities of inquiry*. Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University Press.

[Find out more from [Resource Guide on Facilitating effective online discussions](#)]

8. How do we **change our assessments** when we teach online or in hybrid f2f/online mode?

It is important to emphasise that when teaching is moved online, it is necessary to review assessment practices and approaches to in-class feedback to see if they are suitable for an online setting. When re-thinking the purposes of assessment, be it summative (assessments that serve the purpose of evaluating students' learning at the end of a learning period) or formative (assessment that aims to identify aspects of learning as it is developing in order to deepen and shape subsequent learning through feedback), it is important to give students the opportunity to show their best knowledge and performance.

Flexibility and choice in assessments can be helpful during this time. For example, high stakes midterm and final examinations may not be suitable for online delivery. It is better to use assessments associated with small weightings throughout the semester for online modules. This allows for timely feedback and monitoring of learning progress.

Formative assessment approaches work well in the online environment as they support the continuous need for interaction, feedback and evaluation. Involving students more actively in assessment and feedback processes has the benefit that they learn to self-evaluate and at the same time, develop assessment literacy skills (e.g. academic judgement, academic integrity, feedback skills). This could include creating opportunities for online peer assessment, students' self-generated assessment tasks or questions and peer reviews of one another's work.

[Find out more from [Resource Guide on Designing effective online assessments](#) and [Online assessment activities](#)]

9. What **e-proctoring** tools or services are available to us? |

E-proctoring tools and services are available on the NUS' Digital Assessment System ExamSoft and LumiNUS Quiz. To find out more about these, one could email CIT HelpDesk at CIT Services <https://cithelp.nus.edu.sg/servicedesk/customer/portal/4> or Digital Assessments <https://cithelp.nus.edu.sg/servicedesk/customer/portal/6>.

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### 10. How do we ensure **integrity** in online examinations, hence fairness in assessment? How do we avoid cheating?

A significant concern about online examinations is assessment integrity. In the absence of extensive e-proctoring, all assignments, tests and examinations should be written in a manner that recognises students will have access to their notes, textbooks and the internet. These assessments will necessarily be 'open book', which can also mean that students are provided with the questions as a take-home examination.

Properly devised open-book examinations require students to answer in more critical and analytical ways. Questions in such examinations should encourage higher-order skills in students. It is important to avoid questions that require rote learning and superficial application of knowledge.

So, how should we go about designing questions for open-book examinations? Here are some suggestions:

- Devise questions that assess the interpretation and application of knowledge, comprehension skills, and critical thinking skills rather than only knowledge recall.
- Make use of case-based examination questions that require students to apply critical reasoning skills in response to a trigger scenario.
- Devise clear and unambiguous questions to limit student confusion and time spent interpreting the questions so students can spend their time making use of their notes or textbooks to effectively answer the questions.
- Devise questions that require students to apply and make use of the information from their textbooks or notes rather than simply requiring them to locate and re-write this information.
- Design questions and overall examination paper with the learning outcomes in mind, i.e., skills and knowledge to be assessed.

[Watch video clips on [Planning for open-book take-home examinations](#), [Designing MCQs for take-home examinations](#), and [Using ExamSoft for take-home examinations](#)]

Caveat: It is important that students know what is expected of them in answering questions from open-book examinations. Students can falsely assume that, because they have access to their notes and textbooks, such examinations will be easy.

Ensuring assessment integrity and developing students' knowledge and skills to use assessment responsibly (i.e., developing their assessment literacy) is equally important. Making use of digital assessment to create online opportunities for peer assessment, self-assessment and peer feedback, will encourage students to see assessment as *part of* their learning rather than something that the teacher does to them *after* their learning.

### 11. How do we reduce the **inequity** that arises from differences in access to good wi-fi and to a private space that is conducive to participating in an online class?

It is important to create an *inclusive environment* and this means recognizing that some students may not have access to good or stable wi-fi connection, or an environment that is conducive for online learning (especially synchronous). Find out from students what their situation is by asking for such information prior to or at the start of the semester. This will help with planning classes and activities, and with assisting students accordingly.

For local students in difficult situations at home, in the previous semester special arrangements were made for them to return to campus to study and sit for exams.

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12. What are some of the **resources and support** available to us, such as loaning of devices and equipment?

The [CIT website](#) has a list of education services, resources and tools that are available to staff members. The site also provides information about selected devices for content development that can be loaned.

13. How are **study abroad** or **overseas field trips** going to change?

We will resume overseas programmes (SEP, field trips, NOC) when this becomes possible in the various countries. In the future, some of these programmes may become partially overseas and partially local. We understand that the experience of spending some time overseas can hardly be substituted.

14. How do we support the **well-being** of our staff and students during the semester?

NUS has the following resources to support well-being of staff:

- i. UHC on-campus individual counselling for staff conducted by external counsellor, which is available on Wednesday afternoons (call UHC at +65 6601 5035 for appointment).
- ii. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which has a 24-hour toll-free counselling hotline 800-130-1950 with external psychologists/ counsellors (<https://share.nus.edu.sg/corporate/policies/hr2/benefits/employee-assistance-programme.pdf>).
- iii. UHC in-house psychiatrists (call UHC at +65 6601 5035 for appointment)

NUS has the following resources to support well-being of students:

- i. During office hours, walk-in to University Counselling Service, phone (Tel: +65 6516 2376) or email for an appointment with UCS ([uhc\\_counselling@nus.edu.sg](mailto:uhc_counselling@nus.edu.sg))
- ii. *Lifeline NUS* at +65 6516 7777 This service is available 24/7 including public holidays.
- iii. OSA's Student Support Services (email [OSAcare@nus.edu.sg](mailto:OSAcare@nus.edu.sg) )
- iv. Student Support Managers in the faculties and schools (<http://www.nus.edu.sg/uhc/mental-health/student/supporting-services>)
- v. Masters, resident fellows and resident advisors in the hostels.

15. What are the learning options for **international students** who are not able to return to Singapore before the start of the new semester?

International students who are unable to come to Singapore (border restrictions, lack of flights) can complete their modules via e-learning in Sem 1 of AY20/21. In some modules, these students may also be given alternative forms of assessments.

16. How will the way **teaching is evaluated** change as we move to online teaching?

We will review and adjust our student feedback and peer review systems taking into consideration the new teaching and learning context. We will make these details available in due course.