

FLEXIBILITY

CHOICE: Students are more likely to engage when they have some choice in their learning. Where possible, give students options in terms of content, process, or product. Bonus: choice is naturally differentiating. Students will often choose what is appropriate for their levels.

MODULARITY: Learning plans that can be contained to a week or less are ideal right now when student participation is waxing and waning with no clear patterns.

FORMATS: Students can present in the format of their choice, however low or high the tech. You can allow students freedom to demonstrate their knowledge through talk or writing or drawing. It could also mean you organize and structure your teaching flexibly, like having small groups instead of whole class meetings.

SIMPLICITY

DIRECTIONS: Now more than ever, these must be simple and crystal clear. Run your assignments and instructions by a colleague or instructional coach to make sure. Distance learning demands independence from students. They have to be able to make sense of your directions without you there to help them.

DESIGN: Use white space, bullet points, images, steps. Your assignments and directions will be easier to follow if your design and formatting are easy to navigate. Stick to dyslexia-friendly fonts (sans serif).

LESS IS MORE: You're likely already giving students less to do in a typical week. Same goes for instructions. If you're making screencasts or youtube videos, keep them short and actually build in pauses, e.g., "Stop the video here and write down a prediction..."

INTEREST

PERSONAL RELEVANCE: This is especially important right now. Students are more likely to engage in a task or assignment if they feel that connection, and meeting students on their "turf" will get more participation.

"LOW FLOOR, HIGH CEILING": You want to give all students the chance to engage by making it simple enough for anyone to engage while leaving the upper boundaries high so students don't reach a limit if they are really excited. Open-ended tasks that encourage divergent or creative thinking, analysis and reflection are great for this.

HIGH INTEREST CONTENT: Push yourself to use content that is as authentically engaging as possible. It will help to bring out genuine curiosity and propel meaningful inquiry.

CONSISTENCY

STRUCTURE: Even as you build in flexibility, you want to keep a healthy structure that students can rely on. Now is the time to leverage those routines students are already used to. For example, if you always have a three step close reading process, try to mirror that as best you can.

ROUTINE: Keep your schedule, communication and other aspects of your virtual teaching consistent. If possible, keep your new virtual class time the same every week, so students aren't wondering, "what time today?"

ORGANIZATION: When setting up your platforms (Google Classroom, for example) make sure students know where to go, what to look for, and how to share it with you. Keep platforms user-friendly and organized so students don't get overwhelmed or frustrated.

CONNECTION

TEACHER - STUDENT: The most important thing you can offer students is to keep checking in with them. They need your empathy, support and compassion.

STUDENT - STUDENT: As you work on engaging students in different lessons or assignments, make sure to build in the peer-to-peer interaction that students are missing. Whether it's in the "live" moments within a video conference or off-line, you can structure in and create opportunities for students to interact with each other.

RELATIONSHIP-CENTERED ASSIGNMENTS: All learning needs that interpersonal element. Assignments and lessons will be more meaningful to students if interaction and communication are intentionally woven throughout.