Engaging students in online and hybrid learning environments

Poll Everywhere

Introduction

The way that we work, live, connect, and learn has drastically changed over the last few months. Although no one can predict the long-term impacts of COVID-19, it's safe to say that online engagement, to some extent, is here to stay. As the details of how online interaction fits into our current lives evolve, there is one thing we can all do to prepare: be flexible and remote-ready.

As students and educators adapt to online learning environments, the challenges and benefits of remote classes are quickly observed.

Blended learning systems should be the new normal. No more primary in-person school. Online learning should not be an emergency response. School districts need to create an integrated system of online learning and in-person learning. Events like the pandemic will happen again, and schools need to be prepared for that."

Mary Burns, Senior Learning Technologist at the Education Development Center.

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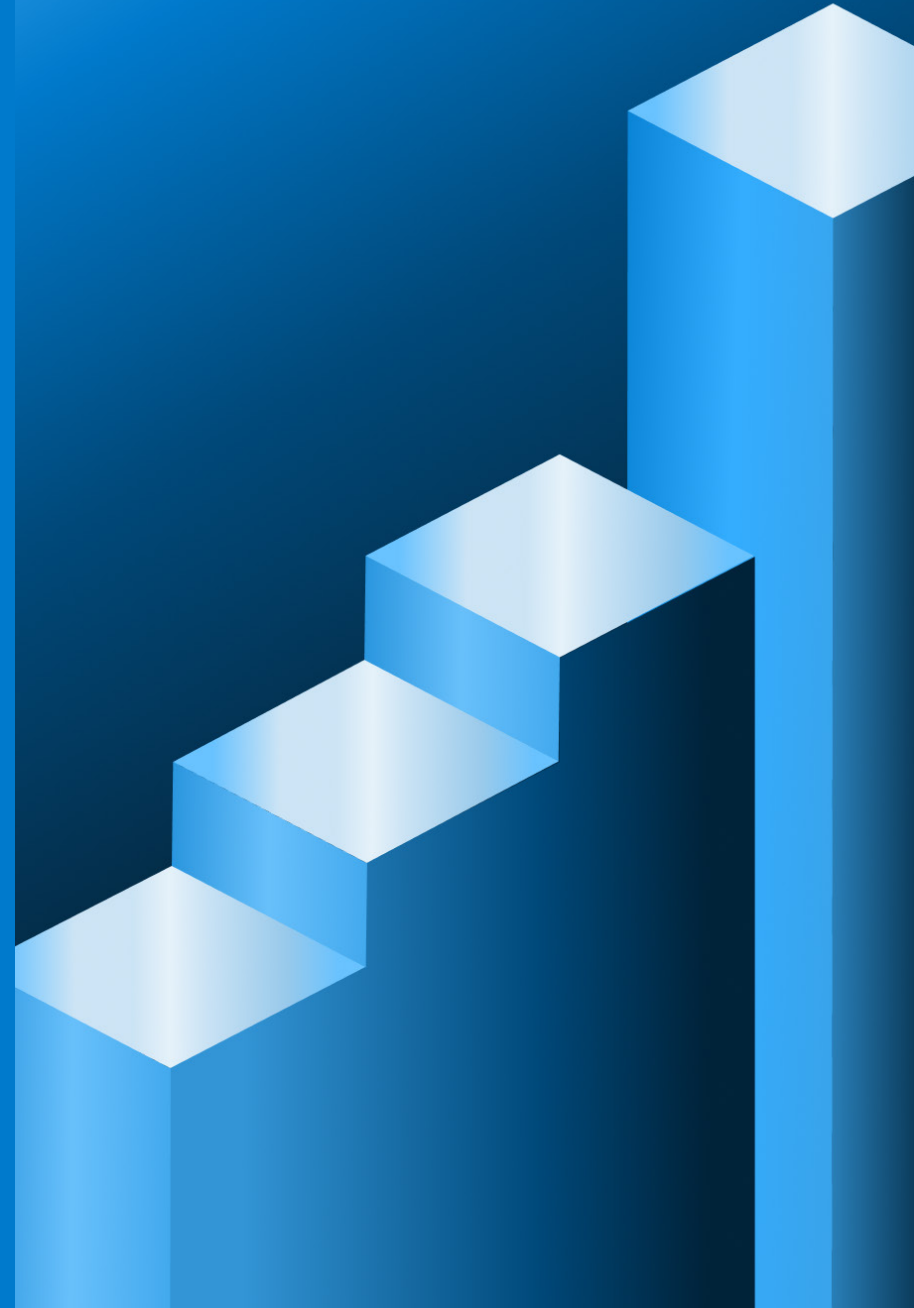
Maintaining student engagement

Even when colocated in a classroom, managing students' cell phone use, attention span, and engagement with the learning material is a challenge. A remote environment is clouded with even *more* digital distractions. It's all too simple for students to 'tune out' of video conferencing classes by turning off their camera, muting themselves, and leaving their browser open for the length of the lesson. We've put together a few ideas for how you can implement gamification strategies into your online classes to assess comprehension *and* engage students, from anywhere.

Pulse checks:

Provide students a way to ask questions and engage with the lesson in real-time. Poll Everywhere's Q&A feature allows students to upvote and downvote their classmates responses, allowing you to see which topics are most and least understood.
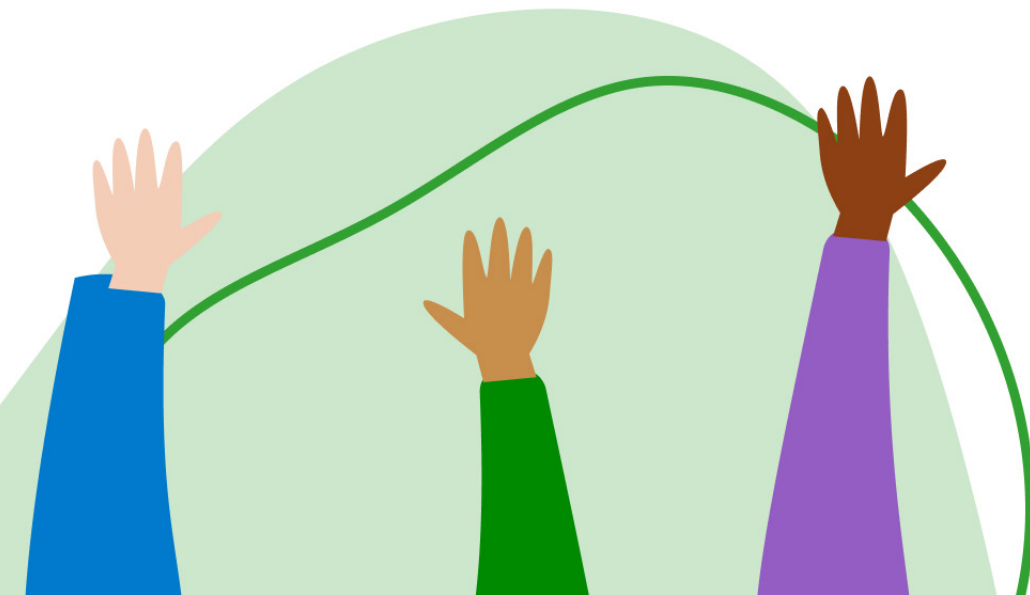
Competitions:

Gamify your online lessons, test students' knowledge, and create a fun learning experience all with Poll Everywhere Competitions. Customize the questions to fit your unique needs and subject matter.

Pro tip: *Take your Competition to the next level with prizes!*

Icebreakers:

Spark insightful class conversations that engage and bond students. Including icebreakers at the beginning of class can also help students transition from 'home' mode to 'class' mode; something that typically took place during the commute from home to school.

- What's your most hilarious quarantine moment?
- What's your hidden talent?
- You're stranded on a desert island. What are your top three must-have items?
- What's your favorite season?
- Desired superpower?
- Worst show on Netflix?
- If you could time travel where would you 'go'?
- What is your favorite book?
- What book have you learned from the most?
- What animal would you be and why?
- What are you grateful for this week?
- What is your spirit animal?

Assign group and pair work:

To help your students stay connected to their peers, assign small group projects or partner projects.

The classroom is built on two-way conversations, and it takes strategic planning to get students talking. By incorporating a variety of thoughtful activities into your course material, you can challenge students not only to gauge comprehension but to get to know their unique personalities. Once you've built real interaction into your curriculum, keeping students engaged and focused is as simple as sharing your screen. When you can't read the room at a glance and while students are adjusting to the change of pace that comes with distance learning, use Poll Everywhere to spark open discussions and promote honest dialogue.

Building dynamic lesson plans

Your classroom is dynamic. Your software needs to be too. Poll Everywhere allows you to incorporate a variety of activity types (Clickable image, Q&A, Competitions, and many more) to break up your course material with interactive, engaging questions that get students to participate and think critically. With students already joining virtual classrooms on their devices, turn computers and smartphones into tools for interactive, gamified learning. No matter what device they're using, Poll Everywhere is available to respond via the browser, mobile and desktop apps, and SMS.
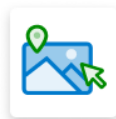
Create classes that stand out with activities you can customize to your unique teaching style. With custom configuration settings and formatting, you can integrate Poll Everywhere seamlessly at every step of your lesson plan.

Before class:

• Import students directly from your LMS to identify who's responding to your activities and track engagement over time.

• Upload images, use LaTex, and adjust default visual settings to craft memorable activities.

• Embed live activities directly into your slideware to access all your course material in one place.

During class:

• Allow students to participate on any device with your unique Poll Everywhere username and custom response keywords.

• Advance to the next slide in your deck to activate your questions and start collecting responses.

• Moderate and filter submissions before they appear on the shared screen.

After class:

• Run reports to measure student engagement, participation, and correctness.

• Export results directly to your LMS and assign grades in your gradebook.

• Discover key takeaways, action items, and follow-up opportunities before your next class.

Student accessibility

Most of us assume that everyone in the younger generations is an online wizard and will adapt flawlessly to a remote learning situation. That isn't true for every student. The FCC found that roughly 19 million Americans do not have internet access, which includes many low income and homeless students.

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a spotlight on the inequalities many students face at home. Don't assume all of your students can get online on a consistent basis. Fortunately, many internet companies and outside organizations have stepped up to try and provide more coverage to help students learn. This guide from Highspeedinternet.com provides a list of resources to help students maintain or find internet access.

Getting all your students into a video conference for live lectures and discussions is great, but not every student will have the ability to participate. Maybe their internet can't handle streaming video. Maybe they need to share the computer with siblings in different grade levels. Professor Viji Sathy from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recommends offering low-tech alternatives like submitting assignments through text.

> **"Giving [students] more than one way to participate in discussions and complete assignments will allow them to figure out what works best for their situation."**
>
> Beth McMurtrie, *The Chronicle of Higher of Education*

Pro tip: *Consider including audio recordings of lectures, jumping on home calls, and emailing assignments.*
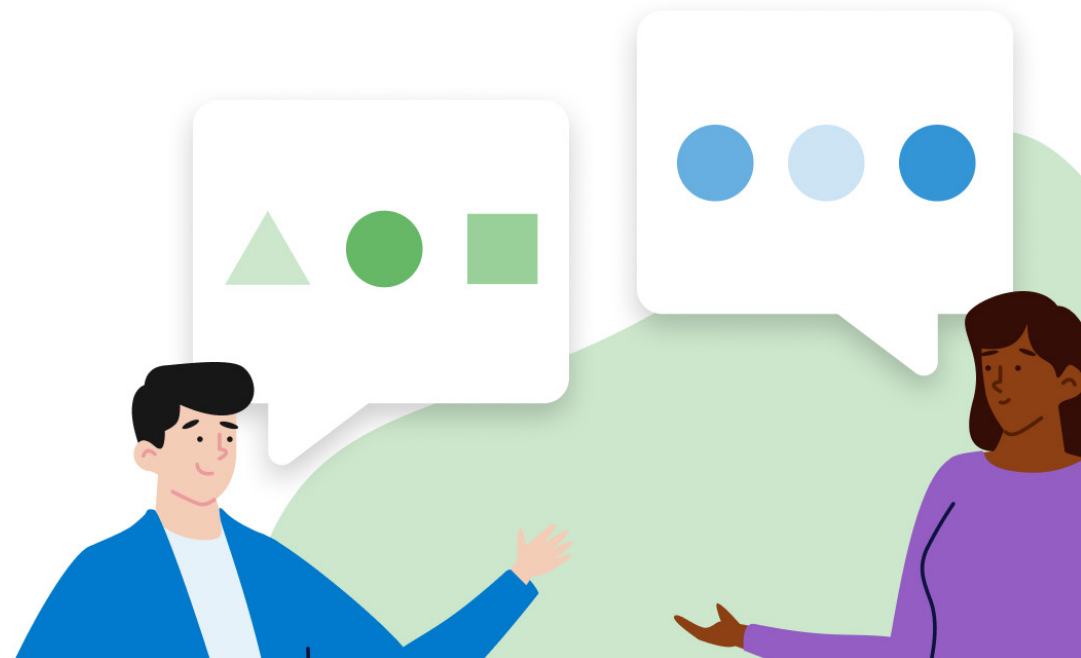
Keeping track of students' questions

One major drawback to an online learning environment is being able to answer students' questions as they raise their hands. If you've experienced Zoom's 'raise hand' feature, you probably know that it leaves much to be desired. With a pinned Q&A activity in Poll Everywhere, you can create a 'parking lot' for questions that can be answered at an appropriate time in the lesson or when time permits. This ensures that no question goes unanswered and provides a channel for real, anonymous feedback where students can upvote or downvote each other's contributions without the pressure that comes with speaking up. Pin a Q&A activity in your account settings to collect questions and feedback on a separate tab even as you activate other questions, and review the top voted submissions at the end of the session.
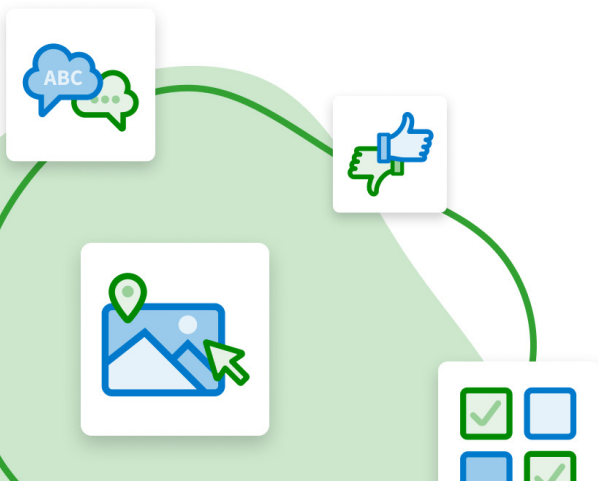
Zoom fatigue

Zoom fatigue is a real thing. It's completely normal for you and your students to feel drained and exhausted after a class on Zoom. Pair that with the mental effort it takes to learn something new, and it's completely understandable why students may have lower energy levels than normal. Here are a few tips to combat Zoom fatigue in your online classroom:

- Don't turn on your camera all the time. Allow for a break from constant eye contact.
- Dedicate the first few minutes of the class to checking-in and getting a sense of your students' energy levels.
- Avoid multitasking. Keep your focus on the lesson plan, and not on opening other browser windows.
- Build in breaks during classes to rest your eyes, get some water, or go to the bathroom.
- Reduce onscreen stimuli:
  - Put yourself out of view
  - Ask everyone to use plain backgrounds
  - Enable 'speaker view' instead of 'gallery view' to avoid looking at everyone the whole time.
- After class, do a stretch or grab some water to decompress.

Varied learning environments

Learning at home can be difficult for many students, especially with siblings and other family members at home. (Not to mention the distractions of television, video games, and phones.) Here are a few ways you can adapt your lesson plans to engage students in varied learning environments:

Create lessons that are short and sweet

Think about how you can break down lectures into bite-sized pieces and find short worksheets, videos, or crafty assignments that students can complete quickly.

Find a quiet home teaching environment

Young minds get distracted easily, so don't start off on the wrong foot when preparing your home teaching environment. Find a quiet, secluded area in your home, especially if you are preparing recordings or videos or doing live presentations. Bonni Stachowiak, Director of Teaching Excellence and Digital Pedagogy at Vanguard University, points out that online teaching [rookie mistakes](#) include putting a light source behind your head and setting up the camera so that it cuts off the top of your head.

Design individual learning plans

Since every student's situation is different, your expectations must match each student's current capability. Create individual learning plans so that you can adapt your teaching and expectations to the abilities of the students. This is especially true for students with learning disabilities who may struggle even more when learning in a remote environment.

Ask for feedback

Online learning is a whole new realm for most teachers and students. The majority of teachers had little time to plan or prepare before their schools were closed and their students were sent home. Use online surveys to assess how your students are responding to your online teaching. This is a good opportunity to ask about specific struggles and to solicit ideas and suggestions.

Engaging introverted students

Experts suggest that a quarter to half of your students could be introverts. Just because they don't speak up doesn't mean they aren't listening or that they don't care about learning. As a teacher, how can you implement online classroom engagement strategies to reach your introverted students? Here are a few tips:

Institute "Think Time":
Educator Patricia Clendening Buzzerio explains that adding "think time" into her classroom is one of her favorite strategies for engaging her introverted students. As Buzzerio explains, "Ask a question, but ask for a minute of quiet (think time) before answering the question." Think time allows introverted students to gather their thoughts and also prevents extroverted students from immediately answering the first thing that comes to mind.

Offer different paths to complete an assignment:
Consider outlining a general assignment—create an alternative ending to the novel—and then allowing your students to take that concept and run with it any way they wish. Your extroverted students may love teaming up and creating a fun, entertaining video while your introverted students may prefer to work with a partner or alone. You may be surprised by what they come up with, possibly offering an animated video they drew, a short story they wrote, or an interactive slideshow to complete the assignment.

Perform anonymous polling:
Anonymous polling is the perfect way to engage your introverted students. Ask questions and have your students answer anonymously through their phones or laptops. The answers will aggregate on the screen, so everyone has a chance to participate. Ask multiple choice questions, have students vote on several options, or ask open-ended questions. With Poll Everywhere, all of your students—extroverts and introverts—can participate in the discussion and be heard!
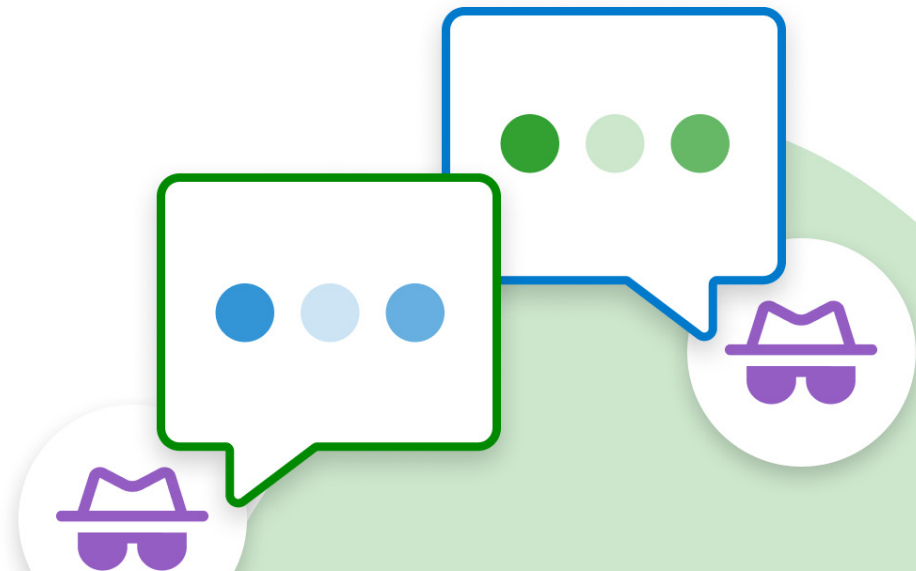
Academic dishonesty & attendance accuracy

Academic dishonesty is a valid concern in any learning environment. With the transition to online classes, it is even more difficult to monitor. Here are a few tips you can use Poll Everywhere to track attendance accurately and combat cheating in online classes:

• Start a poll at random times, setting it to 'timed' (for 30 seconds or less) and asking a question only students IN class would know. A multiple choice question with a marked response works best.

• Hide activity titles so only students actually attending class will know the question.

• Customize response settings to prevent students from being able to change their answers.

• Restrict responses to SMS only. This way, students can only respond with the letter of the answer choice (a,b,c,d) without seeing what the letter stands for.

• Mix up when you present your attendance question. It's easy for students to pop in at the start of class, respond to your question, and then leave. Checking for attendance closer to the middle of class is a simple way to ensure genuine results.

• Improve your attendance taking accuracy by setting one response as correct by clicking the checkmark icon on the poll editing screen.

• Include a lot of responses to decrease the likelihood of someone guessing the right answer.

• Customize response settings to prevent students from being able to change their answers.

• Set a response timer of 30-45 seconds. When that timer runs out, the activity automatically locks.

• Several names and responses may appear in a Gradebook if you've used the same attendance activity multiple times. Filter out what you don't need by clicking 'Participants' on the left side and using the drop-down menu next to 'group'. This also shows you who did not respond.

Privacy concerns

[Zoom hackers](#) have graced the internet with their covert presence, creating some [valid concern](#) over the privacy of online meetings or classes and leading Zoom and other video conferencing tools to launch new security features. We've outlined a few ways you can keep your online classes secure:

Make meetings private:

One of the most important precautions to take when considering meeting security is to restrict the participants who can enter. Using your video conferencing settings, you can require meeting passwords or enable a waiting room where you can screen everyone who attempts to join before they're granted access. Then, in Poll Everywhere, import students in advance and restrict activity responses to only those individuals. Even if you choose not to collect names for certain anonymous questions, present with peace of mind knowing that only your pre-approved attendees are submitting responses.

Keep software up to date:

It's easy to ignore update notifications, but they can help you address security issues even before they arise. Don't forget to check for new updates when using web conferencing tools, Poll Everywhere, and any other software your department relies on for online meetings.

Limit link sharing:

When sharing the meeting invitation with students, make sure not to post the link on any publicly accessible forum like social media. Use your established communication channels to provide instructions on joining the call, along with your agenda and goals. Not only will you be limiting access to the meeting, but you'll be providing students with everything they need to prepare. Depending on your software, you can also restrict meeting access to those who are logged in, and even to users whose email addresses include a specific domain. Once you're confident that students have joined the virtual classroom, send *your unique pollev.com response link* for easy access to Poll Everywhere activities directly from the meeting chat. Then, present results live during your presentation.

Configure screen sharing permissions:

Sharing your entire desktop screen is an especially important step of presenting Poll Everywhere activities in online classes. If you're not expecting to hand over controls to other participants during the session, make sure to set screen sharing settings to "Host only". This will avoid confusion and potential accidents during your presentation.

Benefits of online learning

Easily shared lesson plans & recorded lectures

As we continue to adapt to online learning, educators have found that learning extends beyond the designated class period. With students spread out around the world, making educational resources available is key to ensure everyone is on the same page. Allow students to participate in activities at any time by distributing Shareable response links in your discussion boards. Then, even after the live session, insert screenshots from Poll Everywhere activities into post-class materials to give students the chance to see how classmates responded and what conclusions everyone came to as a group.

> **"We're going to be seeing the integration of more tech to create a more robust learning experience for students. At the same time, there is the argument to leave tech out of the classroom, so it's about incorporating it in a way that's meaningful without forcing it on students."**
>
> *Charlene Lobo Soriano, Academic Success Coach and Associate Dean of Persistence and Retention at University of San Francisco*

Integrations

Integrate Poll Everywhere into your overall teaching strategy with department-wide collaboration. Use Teams to share pre-built activities, premium features, and management responsibilities. With colleagues, TAs, and other faculty on one central account, you can configure account-wide settings to streamline everyone's workflow and align on strategy across the department. Then, share activities and templates in advance to set every presenter up with the tools they need to engage students in a meaningful way.

Rather than working in individual classrooms, granting Poll Everywhere access to the whole team allows for a more cohesive learning experience. Students will come to expect a higher standard of engagement during class, with the opportunity to provide honest feedback at any time and connect not only with the educator, but with each other.
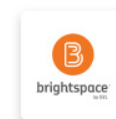
Flexibility and convenience

Online learning not only makes it easier to learn at a time and place that suits you, but it also opens participation up to a wider range of people. Many of us have work and childcare commitments that would otherwise make it impossible to sign up and commit to a course. For people in situations like these, online learning makes it possible for them to participate. They don't have to go through the rigmarole of commuting after work or fitting their work schedule around seminar and studying requirements.

Trackable engagement and comprehension

Engagement is essential to education and comprehension. There's no point in crafting an exciting lesson plan or designing a comprehensive lecture if no one is listening. Poll Everywhere makes student engagement and comprehension trackable with comprehensive reporting features that allow you to make decisions on a macro-level. You can easily track participants' responses over time by setting polls to 'registered users only' within your account. You can also grade large classes quickly with a Poll Everywhere report, saving you time and sanity.

Virtual collaboration

Collaboration is a vital skill. To get anywhere in life, you need to be able to work closely and productively with the people around you. Online learning provides a new perspective on collaboration with others. It can help to develop the kind of skills that could stand students in very good stead for their future working lives. It's a useful opportunity to hone your ability to communicate and work together via an online collaboration tool. For many children, particularly younger ones, this is likely to be their first experience of doing so.

Another important point here is that online learning opens up the possibility of studying and collaborating with people around the country or even the world. This means that it's possible to glean new and valuable insights from a far wider variety of perspectives. After all, isn't that what learning is all about? Students can use this experience to sharpen arguments, work on useful skills such as giving presentations and leading discussions, and so on.

Learning new skills

Following on from the last point, one of the most obvious benefits of online learning is that it allows you to develop new skills. The kind of abilities that'll serve learners well further along the line, whether in their career or their everyday personal life. The skills pupils learn will depend, naturally, on the stage they have reached in their educational development. Nevertheless, online learning forces us out of our comfort zone, and makes us engage with education and learning in entirely new ways.

It's also important to think about what we understand by skills. There are two principal types of skill: critical thinking skills and technical skills. Technical skills might have more direct relevance to a particular type of job. Critical thinking skills are good for encouraging people to think differently and to approach problems from new angles. Although this may seem more abstract, it can in fact leave students much better equipped to tackle the challenges they're likely to come across at work and in later life.

More self-motivation, fewer distractions

Another advantage of online learning is that it forces pupils and students to be more self-motivated. This is necessary in order to get the most out of the experience. In the current circumstances, with schools likely to be subject to continued restrictions as a result of the pandemic, pupils and students need to get accustomed to this 'new normal'. It's especially important, then, to ensure that pupils genuinely buy into remote learning. That way, they will learn to become more self-sufficient and autonomous.

One thing that worries a lot of people about online learning is the potential for distractions at home. However, our experiences with online learning during the current pandemic have suggested that there may in fact be fewer distractions involved. Everyone knows what schools and colleges can be like - they're not short of distractions themselves. Learning remotely can help to cut many of these out, leaving pupils and students freer to focus on what's in front of them.

Essential online learning tools

Here are a few must-have tools to help pupils stay engaged, and teachers to stay organized, while lessons are being conducted remotely.

• Trello - an easy-to-use project management tool, Trello is useful for keeping track of where everyone is at with their various tasks.

• Wabisabi - an online platform ideal for lesson planning and collaborative learning tasks.

• Articulate - an online learning courses resource commonly used b universities.

• A Web Whiteboard - an online whiteboard app, particularly good for brainstorming to keep classes fresh and engaging.

• Focus Booster - a pomodoro-style time tracking and productivity app, including timesheet recording and progress graphs.

None of us know for sure how long the current situation will continue on for. Hopefully, things will look brighter and we can begin returning to something approaching normal. But teachers and their students alike have proven to be remarkably resilient and innovative. With the aid of online learning they're demonstrating that there are few things that can stand in their way.

SECTION 3:

Top tech tools for facilitating a virtual or hybrid classroom
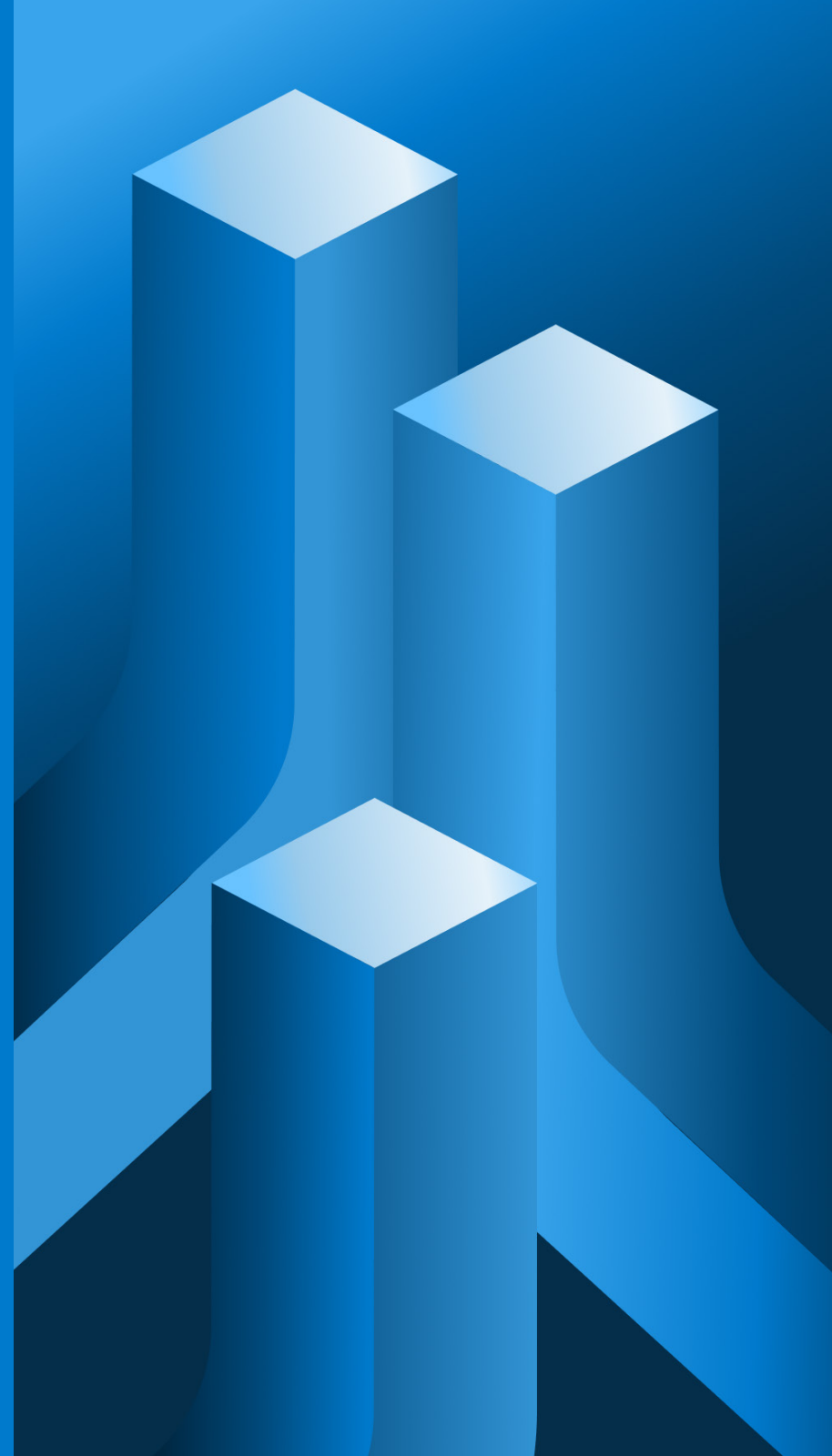
Future of the classroom

The future of the classroom is unclear due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Some schools plan to re-open in-person classes in the fall, but others are maintaining social distancing measures by offering hybrid or fully online classes for the semester. For educators, planning online lesson plans, we've collected a list of the best tech tools for facilitating a virtual or hybrid class.

> **"Students are not digital natives – they only know how to use the technology they like such as phones. Students struggle with adopting new technology and learning how to schedule their time, collaborate with students, write their papers, and more."**
>
> Mary Burns, *Senior Learning Technologist, Education Development Center*

Shared drive

One of the most vital tech tools for online learning is a shared drive on a cloud storage service. Sharing the syllabus or extra readings can easily get lost in an email chain. Consolidate all of your class materials into one easily accessible drive. Students can easily search files to review before a quiz or prepare for in-class discussions.

Shared drives are easy to moderate. If you don't want students to tamper or delete files, change their access to "view only". On the other hand, shared drives can be used as a place to drop assignments, projects, and homework. To do this, create a folder designated for that assignment and give students "edit access". This way, students can easily submit their homework and you can find it later.
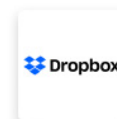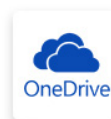
Popular cloud storage services include Google Drive, Dropbox, and Box. The best one for your classroom will depend on price and storage size. If you need a free option with limited storage, Google Drive is a good pick for you. Make sure to research different services and talk to your administrator about your class budget.

Messaging platforms

Texting in class is the biggest challenge that teachers face, but it can be used to your advantage in a virtual classroom. Without a proper classroom environment to encourage discussion between your students, communication can be difficult. We recommend using direct messaging platforms like Slack or GroupMe to streamline communication between you and your students. Send due date reminders, answer questions, or separate your students into groups to hold group discussions. Emails can easily get lost if students are rushing to find answers the night of an exam, so using a messaging platform will make you more accessible to the students in times of need and make it easier for you to sort through questions. Consider integrating the Poll Everywhere for Slack app into your Slack workspace to ask quick comprehension questions using multiple choice polls or host quick Q&A's.

Pro tip: *Before you choose to adapt these tools in your classroom: pick one or two that work best for your class. Implementing too many new tools may overwhelm your students. Be mindful of the learning curve your students must overcome before using the tools.*

Slack's education program offers an 85% discount off of their Standard or Plus plan. Other great alternatives include Google Chat or Remind. If messaging platforms are too complicated, consider creating a Google Voice – a special phone number tied to our Google account. Separate from your personal phone number, your students can text or call your Google Voice number if they have questions.
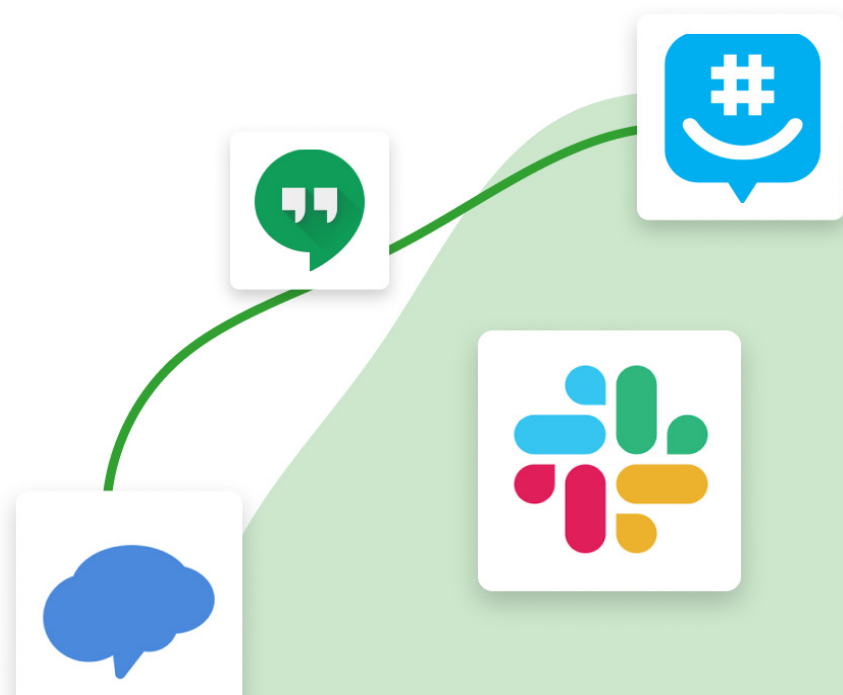
Discussion forums

Online discussion forums are a great platform for creating conversations, asking questions, and engaging with your students. Benefits of an online discussion forum include:

• Build a community between you, your teaching assistants, and your students.

• Anonymity gives all students, including introverts, an opportunity to share their thoughts.

• Students can practice articulating their opinions while learning to be open-minded to different points of views.

• Creates a safe and respectful place to empower students to speak up.

• Teacher moderation prevents spam or inappropriate posts.

Most higher education classes use their school's learning management system to host discussion forums. If your school doesn't have one, a few good options are Piazza and Reddit. If you'd like to ask questions during a synchronous lecture, use Poll Everywhere to engage your students in real-time. Students can submit anonymous questions moderated by instructors.

Create exciting visuals

With in-person classrooms, teachers can decorate their classrooms, create colorful bulletin boards, and create fun charts to help students memorize the material. Even with online classes, teachers can still have some creative liberties with arts and crafts. Tools like Canva and Venngage are great for creating infographics, bright announcement pictures, and celebration cards for the class. Here are a few examples instructors can try:

• Infographics
• Charts
• Diagrams
• Announcement flyers
• Celebration e-cards

• Superlatives
• Classroom rules/social contracts
• Class rosters
• Inspirational quotes
• Flashcards
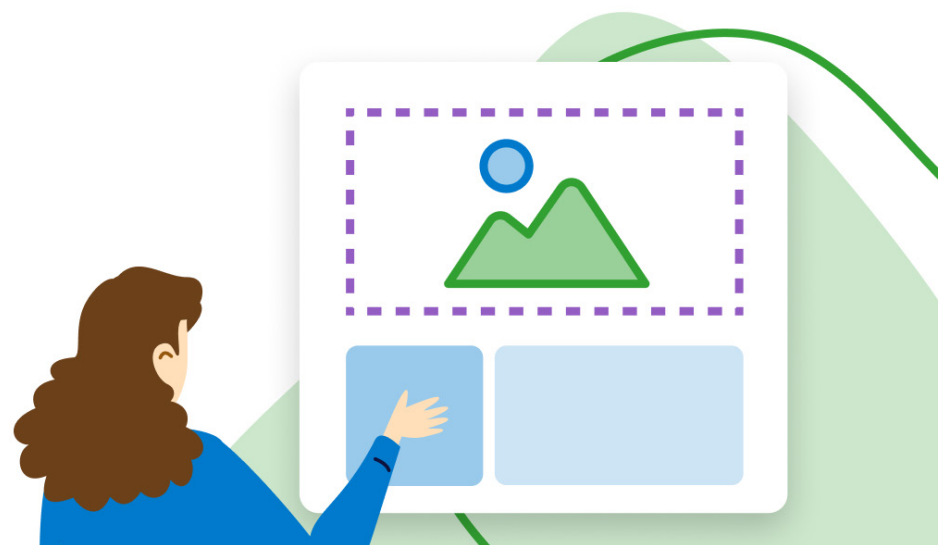
Social media

This last recommendation is one to take with caution – consider creating a dedicated Twitter or Instagram for your class. Most students may be hesitant to share their personal social media accounts with their teachers but with online classes, you must teach where the students are. About 62% of teens spend four hours of their day on screen media. If your student is going to scroll through their Twitter feed during lecture, you might as well share important due dates or exam dates with them. A few tips on how to navigate social media:

• Create a separate account for your class, separate from your personal account.

• Asking engaging questions to prompt students to respond.

• Use images and videos to catch their attention.

With these tips, we hope you have a smooth transition into online classes. Follow us on LinkedIn or Twitter (@PollEverywhere) for more back-to-school tips and recommendations.

Fun ways to gamify the online classroom

Improve student engagement

Maintaining attention from students in an in-person class is already difficult with the accessibility of social media and games on cell phones, but how do you keep their attention in an online class? With everyone's eyes glued to a screen and no one to keep an eye on them, chronic absenteeism has only gotten worse. One of the best ways to improve student engagement is to gamify your classroom. According to a Pew Research study, 90% of teens admit to playing video games on their computer, game console, or cell phone, with 56% of teens spending on average 2.5 hours a day playing games. Games are thrilling and give students the opportunity to challenge themselves. Use this to your advantage by incorporating games into your lesson plan.
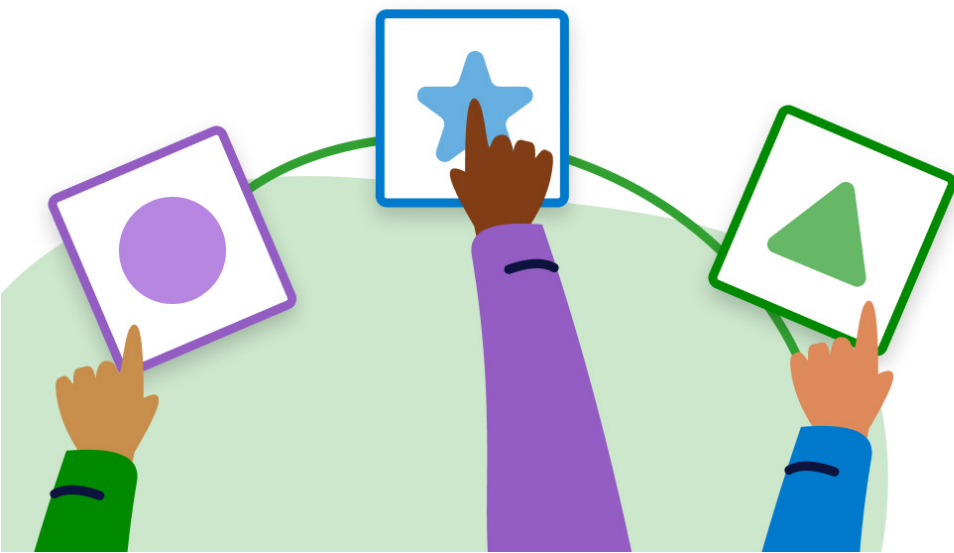
"Choose your own adventure" reading session

If your class is reading a book together, consider holding a "Choose your own adventure" style discussion. While reading the book over Zoom or other video conferencing software your school uses, take pauses at critical points in the plot. Create a Poll Everywhere activity to ask your students questions about the story such as:

• What was the importance of the red apple in Chapter 4?
• Which character is suspicious to you?
• What do you think is going to happen next?
• What is the main character's hubris?
• Which two characters are purposely juxtaposed by the author?

Consider using a Q&A or open-response activity to allow students to submit their thoughts. Ask your students to discuss their answers with each other or create breakout rooms. This creates a more dynamic and engaging way to read a book with your class and keep their minds stimulated.

Try this: *After each chapter, create a Competition with 5-6 questions reviewing major plotlines, themes, and motifs in that chapter to gauge your students' comprehension.*

Virtual trivia games

After listening to an online lecture for an hour straight, students may feel bored and eager to play games on their phones. Don't lose their attention with just presentations. Engage your students in some friendly competition by playing a virtual trivia game. You can test your student's knowledge about anything! To help you get started, we created 6 ready-made Poll Everywhere Competitions that you can copy directly to your account. The trivia game will energize your students and be a much needed break from lecturing.

Here are fun themes and topics to test your students on:

• Early 2000's romantic comedy movies

• US geography

• The Marvel Cinematic Universe

• Elements on the periodic table

• The history of the internet

• Famous brands and logos

Pro tip: *Try to find themes and topics that are relevant to your students but still generic enough that everyone can participate.*

Go on a virtual trip

Create your own tour and take your students on a virtual field trip! Get your students involved first with a survey. Ask about their dream vacation spots, bucket list locations, hometowns, favorite climate, and more. Once you've collected their preferences, curate the perfect virtual field trip using a virtual tour creator. Create themed trips like tropical, historical landmarks, major cities, and more. You can choose to show the virtual trip live by sharing your screen or sending the virtual tour to your students and having them enjoy it on their own time. Either way, this is a fun and easy activity to engage your students.

Riddles and brain teasers

Break up lecture time with a quick riddle or brain teaser to challenge your students. Riddles are great to use in the classroom because they provide an opportunity for students to practice critical thinking and problem solving. Riddles and brain teasers allow students to get creative and can bring laughter to the online classroom. To help you get started, we've created a few riddles using an open-response activity type.

Copy any of these riddles directly to your Poll Everywhere account:

- You can find me in Mercury, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, but not Venus or Neptune. What am I?

- Someone's mom has four sons named North, West, and South. What is the name of the fourth son?

- What has to be broken before you can use it?

- I'm tall when I'm young, and I'm short when I'm old. What am I?

- What is always in front of you but can't be seen?

- The person who built it, sold it. The person who bought it didn't use it. The person who used it, didn't see it. What is it?

✦

Pro tip: *When sending asynchronous activities, use a response link to send a unique URL to your students and allow them to respond anytime. No need to activate the activity.*

Play "I Spy" backgrounds

Get creative with in-class activities by playing a game of I Spy with backgrounds. Students may not be comfortable showing their homes to the entire class, so consider playing I Spy with fun virtual backgrounds. Here's how you can play with your students:

1. Set a theme for the virtualbackgrounds such as dream vacation spots, movies, or states.

2. Have each student find a virtual background or create their own using Canva.

3. Have each student set their virtual background to that theme.

4. As moderator, start pointing out fun details in a student's specific background and have your students guess which background you are looking at. (Example: I spy a palm tree with 3 leaves.)

5. Take a screenshot of your video conference and create a clickable image activity type for students to submit their guesses to. Clear responses after each round to continue.

This is a fun way to get your students to turn on their webcams and fully engage with their fellow classmates and have a little fun during class. If your students are confident enough, you can pass on the "I Spy" torch and let them point out backgrounds while you guess.

Get creative

Gamifying your lesson plan doesn't have to be complicated or fancy. According to Karl Kapp, author of The Gamification of Learning and Instruction, one of the best ways to gamify your class is to simply create an interactive story. Build a narrative around your topic and your students will be invested in the outcome of the story. Additionally, if you incorporate friendly competition, students will be engaged and excited because they have a stake in the content. Be creative and have fun when building your lesson plan!

The future of education and online learning

The coronavirus pandemic has forced both teachers and students to innovate and adapt quickly, leading to changes that could revolutionize the current education system for years to come. This sudden interruption of learning environments is actually an opportunity to reevaluate technology's place in the classroom, and creatively evolve with it. Edtech and e-learning provide an unparalleled opportunity to track and measure student engagement, progress, and comprehension. With this information, educators are able to refine their teaching methods in a way that continually engages students through gamification elements and multimedia based lesson plans that are as dynamic as the technology that powers them. As we collectively move into a new normal, let's take the benefits of technology with us while keeping in mind its limitations too, and create a classroom where equitable student engagement is of highest priority, no matter where in the world they may be.

"College education has not changed in the millenia. The way that we have taught students has not evolved: it's lecture followed by Q&A, which might only happen in office hours. When you're talking about teaching remotely, you're really talking about creating an online curriculum that's engaging to students. For example, stopping the lecture to send students into breakout rooms, letting them work on whiteboards together, and then sharing with the group. That becomes a different way of teaching than a traditional chalk and talk."

[Charlene Lobo Soriano](#), Academic Success Coach and Associate Dean of Persistence and Retention at University of San Francisco

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