# EFFECTIVE DIGITALLY SUPPORTED REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

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Victoria University is (VU) working quickly to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, where social distancing is increasingly recommended, partial or full shutdowns of institutions are being discussed and uncertainty and anxiety are prevalent. Preparing to enable effective digitally supported remote teaching and learning is important. Providing education this way in these circumstances is sensible and responsible.

This short guide has been prepared to assist those who are not accustomed to teaching in digitally supported remote ways to begin to prepare for this mode of teaching. The guide is deliberately free of jargon or complex theories. It is based on research evidence and experience, including VU's successful VU Online business.

Critical to effective digitally supported remote teaching is to continue to offer student-centred learning experiences that facilitate deep, engaged and active learning, while also facilitating students' sense of belonging at VU. Drawing on the success of VU Online's accelerated postgraduate block model, this document offers recommendations for academics and teachers to facilitate a smooth transition into digitally supported remote teaching in vocational and higher education. The goal is to provide the best learning experience possible for all of our students.

Digitally supported remote teaching and learning should not be viewed as a form of independent learning where students simply download .pdfs or .ppts and perhaps respond to content on discussion or message boards. Rather, to be equivalent in standards and outcomes to effective face-to-face teaching, effective digitally supported remote teaching and learning should be viewed as a highly engaging and communicative endeavour where academics and students come together to learn and foster their enterprise skills (e.g. communication, working with others, problem solving, critical thinking, listening, persuasion, and the like).

## TEN ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE DIGITALLY SUPPORTED REMOTE TEACHING AND LEARNING

**The following 10 recommendations are offered to those new to digitally supported remote teaching and learning.**

### 1.Schedule regular and structured online classes using Zoom the same time you would usually run on-campus classes

**Continuity and teacher-presence play a central role in building a sense of belonging in a digitally supported remote unit**. They also improve students' attendance at regularly scheduled synchronous classes where academics meet and interact with students in 'real time', just like they do on campus. VU uses Zoom video conferencing which is specifically designed for digitally supported remote teaching and learning. VU Online has used Zoom successfully for over 18 months and students love it, and more importantly both academics and students find it easy to use. Shortly Zoom will be available via VU Collaborate.

**Zoom works really well with VU's small class sizes in block mode**. Similar to teaching face to face, you can design a PowerPoint presentation that has structured activities for the duration of the digitally supported remote class, similar to a lesson plan. Using Zoom, you can simply click on 'Share Screen' (at the bottom of your Zoom screen) to share your PowerPoint presentation with students.

If you are new to Zoom, it is easy to use and it will not take you long to understand and use its functions. Students often quickly figure out how to use the software, so asking students for their help to facilitate learning remotely can create a nice opportunity to learn together. **Make sure your camera is on, and ask students to also turn on their cameras, as this increases personalisation, communication and engagement**.

### 2. Use Zoom Breakout rooms

Zoom's break out rooms are easy to use and provide a space for students to have discussions in small groups, just like they would do in a face-to-face setting. **Breakout rooms are one of the best functions of Zoom to support deep and engaged digitally supported remote learning**. This short Managing Video Breakout Rooms tutorial explains how to create Breakout rooms, assign participants to rooms and manage Breakout rooms when they are running.

If your lesson plan has activities that require students to work together to make a presentation or solve a problem and report the results, the Breakout room is ideal for this purpose. **Facilitating peer interaction helps foster experiential learning where students learn through doing via scenarios, case studies and reflecting on content that is highly relevant to them**.

## 3. Focus on what is most important, supporting students to acheive the unit's learning objectives

Just like on-campus teaching, **digitally supported remote teaching must support students in achieving the unit's course learning outcomes**. It is important to remember that online teaching will likely be as unfamiliar to some academics and teachers as digitally supported remote learning will be to some of our students. With Zoom, you can teach something the same way you do in a face-to face setting. For example, you can provide an overview of a topic via Powerpoint, then ask students to undertake a task in groups, break them into these groups in Breakout rooms to work together to solve/discuss the task, and then bring them back to the larger group for a whole-class discussion. As students are meeting in their groups, you can even 'drop in' to each group to participate and provide feedback. **This approach fosters student-centred and active learning that can be explicitly tied to the unit's learning outcomes.**

## 4. Decide what teaching and learning activities need to be synchronous and asynchronous

When teaching in a digitally supported remote mode, it is important to review your unit's content and decide to what extent you will deliver content in synchronous or asynchronous formats.

- **Synchronous** refers to 'real-time' classes held online where academics and students meet at specific time together. **Synchronous online teaching allows you to immediately connect and engage with all students to foster a sense of belonging, such as through Zoom as outlined above.**
- **Asynchronous** teaching refers to preparing unit materials and content in advance of students accessing them independently on VU Collaborate. This may include self-recorded videos, digital readings accessible from VU's Library or a web address, and activities students can complete individually or with peers. **Asynchronous teaching increases students' cognitive engagement because they have more time to interact with and reflect on the unit's materials**. Discussion board and ePortfolio activities via VU Collaborate provide students with easy access to content and learning activities they can complete before or after the class runs online.

Often a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous delivery provides the richest digitally supported remote learning experience for students.

## 5. Structure assessment carefully but dont be afraid to be creative

While tests and quizzes can provide a quick and straightforward way to assess student recall of information and provide feedback to students, it's important to include other forms of assessment that provide students with the opportunities to foster their enterprise skills. **Having students spending relatively less time on routine tests and quizzes and more time with peers communicating, problem solving and engaging in team work is ideal**. Structuring assessment in this way overcomes the mismatch between the education students are receiving and the skills and capabilities required for the future of work

Creativity is also encouraged within the VU Assessment Policy and our requirements around CAMS and noting that changes to assessment are a course approvals matter. All changes, therefore, should be approved by your Dean. One example that may be considered, subject to approval, is that an assessment task can require students to film themselves while undertaking manual tasks like construction, production or customer service or even solving equations. **Inviting students to suggest ways to demonstrate their learning virtually adds a level of self-determination where students take control of their own learning**

## 6. Design materials for online consumption

**Important to successful digitally supported remote teaching and learning is to encourage students to stay online completely wherever possible**. When a student has to stop learning online and refer to a hard copy textbook, for example, going offline can be the equivalent of leaving a room in the middle of a face-to-face class. It is likely to lead to disengagement and can be disruptive. Consider selecting course texts, specifically textbooks, that are available digitally via the Library and can be embedded in VU Collaborate for easy access. Students also appreciate saving the money usually used for purchasing textbooks.

As an academic or teacher, you can produce asynchronous course content using your computer or mobile phone. This may be an introduction to an activity you have asked students to complete in their ePortfolio or in the Discussions. **Filming yourself can feel uncomfortable at first, but it can also be very rewarding when students respond positively to such a personal approach**. Experience shows students appreciate these materials as they make them feel there is contact between them and their teacher. If you have access to digitally savvy young (or older) people at home, asking for help can be a great way to build your digital literacy skills.

## 7. Become proficient with functions in VU Collaborate that support communication, teaching and learning

The quality of your digitally supported remote teaching will likely be enhanced if you spend a small amount of time and effort brushing up on your skills in using the different functions in VU Collaborate. The VU Collaborate Help resources, specifically the Extended Classroom page are your one-stop-shop to build your proficiency and improve your online teaching skill set.

## 8. Contact and communicate with students regularly

**Communication is key to effective digitally supported remote teaching and learning**. Experience shows that students often don't use their VU email, so having announcements visible via News in VU Collaborate is best practice. For example, share your Zoom meeting links with students via News on VU Collaborate.

**Providing prompt feedback (e.g. daily) to students' online activities or posts is essential to facilitating a sense of belonging and providing the best learning experience possible** especially within the short timeline of the block.

## 9. Invite industry experts to attend online classes

VU is known for its strong links to industry and we often use industry experts as part of our education programs. This is still possible in digitally supported remote modes and may even be easier than on-campus. **When you conduct teaching online, inviting an industry expert to 'Zoom' in from their office for 15 minutes is something they are more likely to agree to do than travelling to campus**. It is much easier for a busy working professional to Zoom into an online class on their lunch break or in-between meetings than it is to give up several hours to travel to a campus and back for a period of teaching. You can also ask permission to film an industry expert and then repurpose the content for a future unit.

## 10. Seek advice and help

It can be daunting to start out in digitally supported remote teaching and learning. **Fortunately, experience and expertise in this sort of teaching and learning is growing all the time and there is significant advice and help available**. Peer colleagues inside and outside your discipline, your line manager, discipline leader or other senior colleagues, VU's Connected Learning area, online resources and advice via social media platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn are all great sources of advice and help.