

## How to Keep Your Students Engaged and Reduce Anxiety in the Online Classroom

Let's face it, we have been thrown for a loop! COVID-19 has caused face-to-face classes to transition to the virtual world. With this transition comes stress and anxiety for many students, especially those in labs and clinicals. My radiology students are used to being in physical contact with their instructors as they learn, their peers as they practice, and their patients as they give care. Now, we must learn together how to create an engaging online classroom that fosters student success.

### Best Practices

Here are some tips for reducing separation anxiety and keeping students motivated during this difficult time:

1. Open class with a motivational video or song. This is an excellent way to set a tone of positivity for the class period. My students guess what song or video I will choose for each online period, which adds another fun element to the practice.
2. Set aside a few moments for students to talk about their anxiety. Making space for anxiety discussions and demonstrating that you are there to listen lets students know they are not alone.
3. Remember that students who feel uncomfortable speaking up in class may also struggle to speak up in the virtual classroom. Allow students to answer questions verbally or in the platform's chat box. If you plan to call on students, inform them ahead of time so they are prepared.
4. When students give presentations, allow them to share their screens. Letting them run the show makes the presentation experience feel more "real."
5. Games can still be an important part of the virtual classroom! Kahoot, *Jeopardy*, Battleship, *Password*, Spaceship, Mystery Squares, and *Concentration* can be leveraged to create fun learning experiences.
6. Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself. This encourages students to do the same when they struggle. Creating a relaxed environment where students and instructor feel comfortable laughing at their mistakes gives everyone a break from the stress we are all feeling.

## Keeping Anxiety and Disconnect at Bay

It is important to realize that students may be going through even more than we know. Not only are they adapting to the online classroom and keeping track of their virtual meetings, they also may be keeping up with their children's virtual meetings, worrying about a family member, or anxious about their job. Several of my students came to me with fears that they could not finish the term because of these stressors. Give patience and grace to your students. Set up a time to speak to them about their difficulties. Send encouraging emails or videos. Be sure to discuss resources your college offers to help students cope with anxiety and online learning.

Remember that everyone reacts differently to this situation. Take cues from students' interaction in your class. If you're worried about a student's engagement level, reach out sooner rather than later. Even an email or virtual call can make all the difference in the world.

Estelle Alston, Assistant Professor, Health Sciences

For more information, contact the author at Wake Technical Community College, [emalston3@waketech.edu](mailto:emalston3@waketech.edu).