

# GETTING READY FOR YOUR COURSE



## **Prepare Lesson Plans**

*It is crucial to plan your lessons in advance. Trying to “wing it” in a distance learning environment is not a good idea! Keep the following guidelines in mind while you are designing your plans:*

- Organize content in block of no more than 15 minutes each. Students “zone out” easily unless the pace is frequently altered.
- Content should be interspersed with discussion and student-centered exercises
- Presenting content at a distance may be more time-consuming than presenting the same content in a traditional classroom
- Whenever possible, support what you are teaching with something visual
- Consider creating & storing your lesson plans as electronic documents. This makes them easy to store and to modify

### **Note:**

Please refer to the two sample lesson plan templates attached to this handout.

## **Prepare a Course Information Sheet / Packet**

*An information sheet (or packet) is an important communication tool; it helps fill the void caused by the physical distance between the teacher and students. It is a contract that helps explain what is expected of the students. It may include the following:*

- Classroom Rules
- Attendance & Grading Policies
- Paper Flow: How materials will be delivered to and received from remote learners
- Make-Up Work & Late Homework Policies
- Information about textbooks and other required materials
- How to contact the teacher by email or phone
- Calendar of dates when the sending school will not be in session
- SNDLC Student Contract Forms

## **Send an Orientation Letter to Parents & Students**

*Sending an orientation letter before your class actually starts provides students and their parents with information about class policies, resources and support. It helps create a positive initial impression for the student, and can help reduce anxiety and stress. The orientation letter may include:*

- Information about the distance learning classroom
- Characteristics of a successful “distance learner”
- How to contact the teacher
- Any pertinent information about websites, course management systems, etc.

### **NOTE:**

See the sample letter included in this handout. You may also wish to include the SNDLC brochure entitled “*Thinking & Learning Beyond Four Walls.*”

## **Plan for Transporting Materials Back & Forth**

- **Will you use US Mail?** Is there an interschool delivery service? How will that service affect turnaround time be for homework, quizzes and tests?
- **How often will you send or fax materials to your remote sites?** Daily? Once a week? Unit by unit?
- **Who are the contact people at each remote site** who are responsible for getting materials to your classroom and picking them up to send back to you? (Be very nice to these people!)
- **Is posting materials / information on a website a viable option?**

Even if you are not a web wizard, there are still some very viable – and free! – options available to you. Check them out at The Tech-Connected Teacher:

- Log on to [www.esu5.org/techteacher/index.htm](http://www.esu5.org/techteacher/index.htm)
- Select “*Make a Class Page*”
- Then select “*Free & Cheap Ways to Create a Class Page*”

Be sure to check out ***SchoolNotes***, ***Nicenet*** and ***EduHound Hotlists!***

- **Are you comfortable using email and electronic attachments?** If so, do all of your students have email addresses and access to a connected computer? Can students at all remote sites access email during the school day?

## **Think About What Kind of Visuals You Will Need Regularly**

**How will you use the document camera?**

- As a whiteboard for writing out problems and jotting notes
- To display photos, 3-dimensional objects and realia
- As an overhead projector to display handouts and class information

**Does your distance learning room / cart have a presentation computer?** If so, will you be using PowerPoint? Do you need to brush up on your PowerPoint skills?

**Do you have existing handouts and transparencies** that will need to be modified for use a Distance Learning environment?

**Will you be using video clips to enhance your teaching?** If so, please check into copyright considerations.

## **Practice Using the DL Equipment BEFORE the Course Starts**

- Try your visuals on the document camera to see how they appear to the other site(s). You should be able to clearly read the information on the rear monitors.
- Practice using the zoom & focus features on the document camera.
- Get used to seeing yourself on camera. (The strangeness really does go away after a short time.)
- Practice using the Equipment Panel to move the cameras and set the presets
- Use the Equipment Panel to practice switching camera views, and switching between pieces of equipment

## **Practice Good Presentation Techniques**

- **Pay attention to clothing.** The clothes you pick should use muted colors and avoid high contrast patterns, bright shades and solid white.
- **Students want to be able to see your face when you are talking.** Use a camera angle that shows the instructor from the waist up. Be careful not to turn your back on the camera.
- **Speak and gesture clearly.** Videoconferencing technology is good, but not perfect, so you must learn to speak clearly and avoid overly quick or broad gestures.
- **Smile at the camera.** Maintain “eye contact” with your students by looking directly at the camera. Pretend the camera is one of the students at your site.
- **Avoid “camera sickness.”** Excessive camera movement can distract your students, not to mention inducing nausea.
- **Watch out for distracting mannerisms:** fussing with hair, scratching face, tapping your pen, or jingling the change in your pocket.
- **If you wander when teaching,** use masking tape or another object to mark the outer limits of movement. The tape will indicate when at what point you are out of camera range.