



# Making Hybrid Teaching Work for Educators & Students

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The new question-of-the-week is:


## ***What are the do's and don'ts of hybrid teaching?***

In Part One, Amber Chandler, Tara C. Dale, and Holly Spinelli offer their hard-won experiences.. 

Today, Deborah Gatrell, Amy Roediger, and Carina Whiteside provide their suggestions. I also include comments from readers.

### **“We can do this!”**

*Deborah Gatrell is a national-board-certified teacher, the Social Studies Department chair, and a mentor to new teachers at Hunter High School in Utah's Granite school district. Reach out at [dgatrell@graniteschools.org](mailto:dgatrell@graniteschools.org):*

By the time the NBA shut down this spring after Utah Jazz players tested positive for COVID-19, I expected Utah schools would end up shifting online. Then my own school ended up quarantined for two weeks while the rest of the state spent two days preparing to “crisis-teach.” 

Once I could meet with my fellow geography teachers again, I proposed a simple plan to get us to the end of the year: Divide and conquer. We were expected to provide online content AND paper packets for students without reliable internet, sufficient devices, etc. Teachers who already struggled with technology felt completely overwhelmed. Creating packets from scratch was also daunting.

The plan was simple. We split the next six weeks of school among the three of us, developing shared content for the remaining geography standards. I developed a Google doc template for packets and managed digital content on Canvas by reviewing course modules once they were organized. We developed two activities and a short assessment for each after we were directed to provide no more than 30 minutes of content per day on a block schedule. I prepped the first two weeks.

It was stressful, but it worked. We made it to the end of the year.

This fall, my district is taking a different approach. All students have been issued Chromebooks. Students who want to attend school in person are in the building, and we all wear masks. Those who prefer to learn from home may do so. Teachers are expected to teach both ways at the same time. As an accommodation for the increased workload, Fridays were designated distance learning for all students so teachers have some time to prepare and give students feedback.

At first, I used Loom to prerecord lessons for my distance learning students in an effort to differentiate, but that quickly fell apart as work piled up. I've had to make more adjustments, but now I'm in a place where I will survive the year, so I offer some lessons learned.

First, some tips:

1. DO divide and conquer. We sink or sail together. Thankfully, a group of teachers met over the summer and built out a digital curriculum for 1st quarter geography. It also aligns to the new grading system we are using this year.
2. DO simplify. This is not the year to "do it all." Say no and push back unless whoever brings the shiny new thing can prove it will save you time in under five minutes. Great ideas that normally work well may not under current circumstances. Adapt what you can. Let the rest go.
3. DO try to keep your in-person and online work as seamless as possible to minimize doubling your work. Our in-person students bring their Chromebooks to school every day so everyone can complete the same work, unless the network crashes (which, maddeningly, sometimes happens). I've also started broadcasting and recording my AP classes so at-home learners can follow along. [They only see me and the screen.]
4. DO be consistent. If students know where to go to find instructions and how to complete assigned tasks every time, you'll get a lot fewer emails asking for help.
5. DO communicate. Reach out to parents and guardians when needed to ask for support. Communicate with SpEd teachers on accommodations. Communicate with counselors and paraeducators to share the workload. Make use of in-school resources, especially if paraeducators or others are designated to help with phone calls.

6. DO prioritize self-care. Be aware of your mental health and that of those around you. Encourage folks to get help when they are feeling the pressure. Take time for yourself when you need it. There is no shame in seeing a counselor!
7. DO be patient and extend yourself grace. We are all first-year pandemic teachers. None of us was trained for this. Everything takes more time. It's really hard. Most teachers I know are struggling. Some talk seriously of quitting. The fact is, the pandemic is temporary and will pass. We will get through this year and learn a lot about ourselves and what we are capable of. We have the power to come out better teachers on the other side. But in the meantime, we can't kill ourselves trying to do it all.

This leads to a few suggestions of what NOT to do:

1. DO NOT go it alone this year. There are other teachers and resources that can and will help. Reach outside your school or district if that's where you'll find needed support. Play to everyone's strengths—including your own. Share the work, share the wealth.
2. DO NOT set unreasonable expectations for yourself or your students. Yes, people are concerned about students "falling behind." Behind who? No one is doing quite what they expected this year. We will improvise, adapt, and overcome, but we will NOT be able to re-create a "normal" experience with all the trappings this year.
3. DO NOT let go of due dates and deadlines completely. Be flexible and reasonable but also realistic: We are constrained by the school calendar. The days march on whether students are working or not. Encourage, remind, and cajole as efficiently as you can, but be clear there are expectations and deadlines. I fear for students who are enjoying an extended school break. I also worry for students who are working full time to help support their families in these difficult times. Find out the situation and work with students as appropriate but help them manage their time well through deadlines, too.
4. DO NOT make yourself available to everyone all the time. In some ways, this year is a healthier one for me because, for the first time, I leave work at work. Students might send me multiple messages with questions, but I answer them first thing in the morning, throughout the school day as I'm able, and before I leave school. That's the clear expectation. Take the email off your phone. Give yourself a desperately needed break.

Final comment: Pace yourself. We can do this!

**“Establishing boundaries is an important part of surviving the pandemic”**

*Amy Roediger teaches Honors Chemistry and AP Chemistry and serves as an instructional coach at Mentor High School in Ohio:*

My district returned to school the week before Labor Day with an online option for families who wanted that and a hybrid model for everyone else. Our hybrid model brings students with last names beginning with A-L to school on Monday and Tuesday and students with last names beginning with M-Z to school on Thursday and Friday. When students are not in the school building, they are participating in synchronous lessons from home following our daily class schedule. All students and staff are remote on Wednesdays and follow an abbreviated schedule while the building is deep cleaned. I have joked a lot this fall that while teaching, I feel like I am working in the NASA control room with all the technology tools and muting and unmuting and trying to divide my attention between the kids in the room and the kids in the Zoom. As we wind up our seventh week of school, I do not feel like I have mastered hybrid teaching, but I have reflected on things that have made a positive impact on my teaching.

First, it is important to have a digital classroom, a home base where all students can acquire assignments and resources for daily lessons. My school uses Schoology, but you might also use Google Classroom, Canvas, Seesaw, Blackboard, or Edmodo. If you can't use a formalized learning-management system, you can create a digital

classroom with free Google slides. Whether you start with a clean slate or use the amazing templates like those available at [slidesmania.com](https://www.slidesmania.com), you can create a deck of slides that serve as a landing page for students and house links to your activities and resources.

I try to design this space with the 100 percent online student in mind. Be descriptive. Add thorough instructions and video resources where possible so students can revisit materials. If I would say it to the students in the room, I try to make a record of it for the kids in the Zoom. Once the digital classroom is established, it's important to consider digital classroom routines. What do students do when they enter your classroom? Where do they find an agenda? How do they turn in homework? How do they ask for help? In the same way that we have created classroom routines, it is important to establish and teach the digital routines.

Second, my physical classroom has been a fast-paced, cooperatively grouped, interactive environment. How do I replicate that for learners when some are remote and the others are socially distanced? I am leaning heavily on a handful of technology tools to interact with my students. When presenting new content or managing lab work, Nearpod gives me the option for teacher-paced or student-paced lessons with quick activities to gauge student progress. With the robust Nearpod lesson library and the ability to share presentations among teachers, Nearpod saves me time, too.

Classkick and Formative allow me to see my students working in real time and provide on-the-spot feedback when they need it during a lesson. Both tools make it easy to create an assignment from scratch or to import existing files. Classkick also provides a mechanism for students to help each other anonymously, so they can interact with one another and build community. My favorite way to quickly administer an entrance or exit ticket is to use The Answer Pad. With a Quick-Connect five-letter code, I can send my students a task that they complete and send back. I can offer feedback and/or share their work with the class. All of these tools offer free and premium plans to fit a variety of budgets. One piece of advice that I wish I would have given myself in September: Before using a tool like this for learning, give students a chance to use the tool just to try it out and explore the features. In my classroom, I teach students to light a Bunsen burner before we can do a lab with the Bunsen burner; digital tools require the same front-loading in order to maximize their effectiveness.

In a hybrid model, where students are remote more often than they are in person, extra attention must be paid to engagement. In a classroom, it's easier to cajole students into learning something that they may not want to learn than it is when students are online. While remote, if it is easy to opt out of lessons, students will.

Using Classkick and Formative for fast feedback can encourage my students and keep them engaged when chemistry content becomes difficult. Games can make lessons more fun. Badges can give students something to strive for or feel proud of. Including social-emotional check-ins with entrance and exit tickets or as part of lessons can increase student buy-in. Not sure what will engage students? Ask them! In my third-week survey, students told me they would appreciate practice quizzes to help them self-assess before our quizzes. Quizizz to the rescue! Quizizz has an incredible shared library of quizzes and questions that users can copy in their lesson and quizzing platform. Plus, they have the option of fun (and customizable) memes for right and wrong answers. When surrounded by the stress and worry of the pandemic, it's more important than ever to find your fun.

Finally, a word about something that indirectly affects the hybrid classroom: boundaries. The NASA control-room model of hybrid teaching is exhausting, mentally and physically. One cannot operate the control room when sleep-deprived and professionally depleted. Because teachers are a selfless lot in ordinary times, it is easy to overextend, to try to do everything for everyone and forget to do anything for ourselves. Technology makes it easier to stay connected 24 hours a day, but that means we might stay connected 24 hours a day.

Establishing boundaries is an important part of surviving the pandemic. Maybe that means establishing certain times to work on schoolwork and certain times to take breaks. Maybe it means unplugging after a certain time every day. Maybe it means letting go of some lessons or assessments or content to provide time and space for other tasks. Maybe boundaries remind us that we have a finite amount of time in which to do as much as we can but not more. By establishing and adhering to our boundaries, we will ensure our own health and well-being.

## **“Don’t teach it all”**

*Carina Whiteside is an 8th grade U.S. history teacher in West Jordan, Utah. She is passionate about civic and social-justice education and believes social studies instruction is fundamental to preparing the future generation of engaged, contributing citizens:*

It seems that a majority of school districts in the United States have chosen to start the year with virtual learning, but here in Utah, that was not the case. If you are also in an in-person or hybrid learning situation this year, here are some tips that may help you!

### **DO**

1. Do adapt your lessons to be student self-directed. When in person, these lessons can always be quickly modified to include pair-shares and quick and distanced group work. I personally feel like it is easier to design a lesson that translates into LMS and independent work ahead of time, then add elements of collaboration while in person, than the other way around. As student absences continue to climb, you will feel less like you are teaching two groups of students if your lessons are designed ahead of time to work for remote (absent) learners.

2. Do use a daily slides template. For me, this is one set of Google slides with a slide for each day we are in class. The slide includes the date, agenda, learning goal, and homework for that day. I used to write this information on my board, but now I display this on my projector for my in-person students and also have it linked on my website and LMS home page. This provides a consistent routine for in-person students that translates well for students that are moving in and out of quarantine. (I got this idea from Megan Forbes of @toocoolformiddleschool. She has some great daily slides templates linked [here](#).)



## DON'T

1. Don't expect your best this year to be the same as your best last year. You may feel guilty that your in-person instruction looks different from in previous years. That was my main reflection of my lessons during the first few weeks of the school year. Lessons that you have loved to teach before may fall flat with desks fully spaced apart, all facing the front of the room, and everyone in masks. However, I have let go of my guilt as I remember the intentions of my instruction. My first priority is safety, my second priority is learning, and my third priority is an ease of transition back and forth from in-person to remote learning.
2. Don't teach it all. Students will feel successful when they know exactly what to learn and are taught and retaught it clearly. We will feel successful when we know students are learning. For me, a question worth reflecting on has been: "By the end of this school year, what do students absolutely need to take away from my class?" Generally, I am spending the same amount of time on each unit, but I have majorly trimmed down the amount of content taught within that unit. I am teaching only what is most essential for my students, and there is a great sense of peace knowing that I am doing what is most important *well* instead of trying to do it all poorly.



## Comments From Readers

Simplicity...opps to extend the lesson...fewer clicks...Ss should get chances to leverage lessons by reading/writing/speaking/listening-easy does it!

— AVIDjeanie (@AVIDjeanie) [October 5, 2020](#)

Give each class a weekly plan with the two cohorts color-coded. It's very hard for the students to keep track of the timing and expectations of in-person versus online versus asynchronous work- this is very helpful to them and to you.

— Kerry Dunne (@dunneteach) [September 29, 2020](#)

Create a student friendly calendar that highlights what objectives/skills you want students to take away from each lesson. Also, post one asynchronous lesson per week for students to complete on their own. [#remoteteaching](#) [#EDUC502](#) [#hybridlearning](#)

— MsMcKenzie (@orm2023) [October 5, 2020](#)

Don't take on too much! Create simpler lessons that slowly build on skill. Really align to standards to create a stronger focus since we may not have all

...really high to standards to create a stronger focus since we may not have all the “time” we are used to in order to cover all the standards.  
[#standardsbasedlearning](#)

— alicia bakey (@MsBakeyLeads) [October 5, 2020](#)

Just make it simple things as well as learning practical at home and sometimes I give opportunity to the others to teach my students like sharing story about their daily activity, so I hope student can get inspiration from there. Dont forget to upload on Youtube.

— rifqiazmi (@rifazmii) [October 5, 2020](#)

Thanks to Deborah, Amy and Carina, and to readers, for their contributions!

Please feel free to leave a comment with your reactions to the topic or directly to anything that has been said in this post.

Consider contributing a question to be answered in a future post. You can send one to me at [lferlazzo@epe.org](mailto:lferlazzo@epe.org). When you send it in, let me know if I can use your real name if it's selected or if you'd prefer remaining anonymous and have a pseudonym in mind.



You can also contact me on Twitter at [@Larryferlazzo](#).

Education Week has published a collection of posts from this blog, along with new material, in an e-book form. It's titled [Classroom Management Q&As: Expert Strategies for Teaching](#).



*Just a reminder; you can subscribe and receive updates from this blog via [email](#) or [RSS Reader](#). And if you missed any of the highlights from the first eight years of this blog, you can see a categorized list below. The list doesn't include ones from this current year, but you can find those by clicking on the “answers” category found in the sidebar.*

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***I am also creating a Twitter list including all contributors to this column.***

















