

# CTC Online Learning & Teaching: A Practical Guide

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This document reflects the collective voices and contributions of the CTC Core and Collective from our founding in 2008 as an incubator for the research and development of new theatrical works.

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## Introduction

*We, Convergences Theatre Collective, acknowledge:*

- **Access to technology is a privilege.**
- **Not all of our students have the same privilege and access to technology.**
- **Access to technology should not be assumed.**
- **A back-up plan for non-digital instruction should be made along with a plan for online learning.**

The intention of this guide is to quickly support teachers making the sudden and abrupt transition from teaching in the classrooms, studios, and laboratories to leading learning within a virtual space. This is a guide, not a manual. We hope it will guide you in your thinking, planning, preparing, and hosting of online learning experiences.

We must translate our teaching from in-person to online. It is not the same. There are different rules of engagement. There are different barriers. **AND we can continue to create learning and artistic outcomes from online learning.** But, it is a very different process.

The first 15 minutes of your online class is completely different from your in-person class. Please plan for the first 15 minutes of your online session to address the following:

- Connecting & testing technology
- Technology introduction
- Acknowledgement

Before we go further, please review the 4-Step Process for Online Learning. Additional support can be found further in the document.

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## 4-steps for Online Learning

This is a 4-step process to support you in hosting an online learning experience for your students. It is a guide to support your process of transitioning from in-person to virtual learning.

### 1. Planning

#### Platforms & Technology:

- Which platform will you use to host the online classroom?
- Will additional platforms be used within the online classroom?
- Will additional platforms be used for students to access advanced materials to prepare for the class?
- What technology do I need to lead the class?
- What technology do students need to prepare and participate in the class?
  - **Tip from Jennifer Edwards:** I often lead day 1 of an in-person (or remotely taught) course w/ a tech survey for my students to gage their familiarity w/ various platforms -- BIG questions for these folks should be what needs to be taught to on-board students to the chosen platform(s). DO NOT ASSUME digital natives can / know how to organize info online or use tech well!

Platform Recommendations:

- [Google Hangouts](#) (free)
- [Zoom](#) (subscription fee) \*\*Zoom has just made its services free to Educational Institutions during the Coronavirus Pandemic

#### Communications:

- How many emails need to be sent to students in advance to support their preparation and learning prior to the class meeting?
  - **TIP: more than 1, less than 5! We all get a lot of email. 1 email message is not enough. CTC typically sends 2-3 emails in advance of an online session**
    1. Introduction (5-6 days in advance)
    2. Reminder (1-2 days in advance)
    3. See you online soon! (day of)

- What materials can I provide in advance of the class meeting?
  - PDFs
  - Links to videos or articles
  - Assignments/exercises
  - Written instructions
  - Files on a cloud (i.e. Google Drive, Dropbox, iCloud)
  - Link to a Prezi w/ embedded video / podcast / historical / etc. content
  - How will students communicate with me about technology issues during the online class meeting?
  - TIP: do not use your email to respond to tech issues; that will take you away from the platform. Most platforms have a built-in tool for participants to be in communication with the instructor/host.
- What happens if there are major tech/platform issues?
  - How will you communicate with your class if you cannot logon to the platform?
  - TIP: have an email drafted, including student's email addresses, and ready to send with the backup plan.
  - TIP: conference lines are old, but they still work to support voice-to-voice conversation; we use them as a backup, have the #s ready in the email.

### Content:

We cannot teach the same content online in the same ways we teach in person. We have to ask the following questions to discover the best content for an online learning experience:

- What can be taught?
- What experiences can be shared in this setting?
- How can the students engage with the materials?
- How can I model the learning for my students?
- How can the students practice and work with the material?

Note: a studio course in the performing arts is radically different online. For more information, please attend the upcoming webinar. The link to register is below.

TIP: Content needs to be broken down into bite-sized units.

- 10 minutes is about as long as a student can listen and take-in information in an online presentation.
- Content should be engaging and paired with the engagement tools [ie: Chats, polls, Q&A, screen share, etc] available on the host platform.

## Structure:

- Make a plan, write it down, follow it
  - TIP: don't "wing it". No matter how many years of experience in a classroom setting, the ability to "wing it" online is a skill unto itself.
- Break-up content into smaller units
  - 1 primary idea, or learning goal, for the session.
  - Subdivide your available time to create smaller topics/themes from the primary idea.
- Include Q&A after each unit
  - TIP: engage students along the way, don't wait until the end of the session for conversation with your students.
- Let engagement drive the design of your structure
  - How can the students be actively engaged?
  - What tools [ie: chat, short quizzes, interactive in-presentation reaction emojis, etc]are included in the host platform that I can leverage to increase student engagement?

## 2. Preparation

### Student Prep

Students need time to prepare for your class meeting. Provided enough time between class meetings for students to prepare. Think about what students can do in advance.

- TIP: it is better for students to watch video or engage with other digital materials in advance of a class meeting; it is a real challenge to stream a video during a class meeting; every student's experience of the video quality will be different based on their individual bandwidth.

### Teacher Prep

Dual Roles: instructor & facilitator

### Instructor Prep First:

#### 1. Learning Goals

- Create 1-2 learning goals for each session.
- Write down and share the learning goals with your students.
- Reflect on your goals after the class meeting to see if they were met.

#### 2. Content Planning

- Our attention span is shorter in online settings, plan for this
- Lectures are not as powerful online, conversations are
- Experiential learning is best, how can you help your students have an experience from their computer?
- Practice together: it can be very disorienting for students to leave an online session without having practiced together. Build this into your content planning.

### 3. Prepare your students

- Collect all resources students need in advance of the class meeting.
- Craft an informational email with instructions for prep and how you expect students to participate in the online session.
- Include any advance assignments that should be completed prior to the class meeting.
- Include which platforms will be used and what technology is needed.

### Facilitator Prep Second:

- Review class plan to make sure it is complete
  - Pay attention to when different engagement tools and/or technical elements are used
  - Highlight changes in platforms/technology
- Make space for Q&A and discussion
  - And then be prepared for more time take up by Q&A and discussion
- Define time for each section.
- Decide upon your style/process for hosting discussions.

## 3. Hosting

### 30 minutes before...

- On your computer, close all applications and browser windows that will not be used in the session.
- Login to the host platform.
- Test your webcam, audio, and additional tech components such as screenshare, slides, etc.
- Use the restroom and have a beverage at your desk.

### 15 minutes before...

- Take 3 deep breaths.
- Be online and ready to greet your students.
- Help students connect, test technology, etc. as they arrive.
- Include light, casual conversation as you can to support a relaxed and receptive learning environment
  - **TIP: if you are stressed, your students will see it and feel it without understanding why you are stressed.**

### Start time...

1. **Inhale, wiggle your toes, exhale, smile, then speak**
2. Test technology
  - Make sure all students can both see & hear you.
  - Make sure all students are connected with the appropriate tools.
3. Technology Introduction
  - Introduce the different ways students can and should engage during the online session.
  - During Instruction sections, students should keep their mics muted.

## Acknowledgement:

Say this, or something like this, to your students:

- Technology is magical, wonderful, & also has limitations.
- Technology can be frustrating when it doesn't work the way we expect it to work.
- Technology is not stable, things change, we do our best to roll with bumps, glitches, and breakdowns.
- This is not a replacement for in-person learning; it is an adequate option to continue our learning journey together when we cannot physically be together.
- We will do our best to work with the limitations of technology.

## Content Delivery & Facilitation:

- Introduce the plan for the session, including times for each section.
- Ask for questions and respond to students before beginning your first content section.
- Following your first content section, offer a Q&A before moving on.
- For Q&A with video and/or audio, call on students by name when possible to encourage direct person-to-person communication.
- Pause: do not be in a rush to move to the next section; embrace silence.
  - Give more time than you normally would when asking the group if there are any questions; students' response time is slower online.
  - Be comfortable sitting in silence for 1-2 minutes while students type in their questions or adjust their mic from "mute" to "live."
- **Timing is everything!**
  - Stay on schedule as best as possible.
    - TIP: print your class plan and include timestamps for each section; have this separate from your digital tools to refer to throughout the class.
  - Change your plans if Q&A goes long.
    - TIP: Keep the engagement going! If conversation sparks online, fan the flames!! You can circle back to content later. Support engaged and experiential learning.
  - Set time limits for student response.
    - Students often self-monitor how much class time they are taking when making an extended point or asking a layered question.
    - In an online setting, students, and instructors, cannot "read the room" and often get lost in time.
    - **Keep time, mark time, honor time.**

## 4. Follow-up

Follow up with an email to your students with a recap of the session as well as instructions for their next steps for the course.

- Include the option to follow-up individually via virtual office hours.
- Post any follow-up content on your hosting platforms to support students moving forward with the next steps quickly and with ease.

### Ask for feedback.

Check in with your students to see how the online learning is going for them. Be open to making changes in how instruction is being delivered as well as to different platforms and tools that could be used. Students often know more than instructors when it comes to online engagement. We, as instructors, also have a lot to learn from our students.

### Respond to feedback

- Attempt to implement the feedback you receive from students.
  - Update the students on your progress.
  - Explain to the students why their feedback is not possible to implement if there are barriers.
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## Webinars & Training

Convergences Theatre Collective hosted two webinars that we **free and open to the public**, to support the transition from in-person to online teaching. The recordings can be found on our website: [www.ConvergencesCollective.org](http://www.ConvergencesCollective.org)

### 1. Experiential Learning Online

An introduction to virtual learning for teachers of all fields and disciplines who utilize experiential learning as a teaching strategy/tool.

### 2. Performing Arts Learning Online

An introduction to virtual learning specifically for teachers of studio practices including acting, dance, movement, music, and voice.

CTC is offering **training for institutions to support your faculty** in making the transition from in-person to virtual teaching. Training will be tailored to the specific needs of your institution. We offer two general categories for faculty training:

- Online Experiential Learning: for all fields including Humanities & STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math
  - Online Experiential Learning for Performing Arts Instructors: studio practices & techniques, devising/writing performance, administration & producing
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## About Jeremy Williams & CTC

### Jeremy Williams



**Producing Director & Founder,**

Convergences Theatre Collective

**Building Demand for the Arts,** Program Manager,

Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

**Building Bridges Program,** Webinar Producer & Program  
Consultant

Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Arts

**Adjunct Faculty, MA Program in Arts Administration**

Baruch College, teaching a hybrid course:

Independent Producing

Jeremy Williams is a director, choreographer, creator, producer, and educator working in the fields of performing arts, culture, philanthropy, and higher education. He is the founder and Producing Director of **Convergences Theatre Collective**. Areas of practice include community building, audience engagement, contemplative practice, and dismantling systems of oppression. He currently shares his time between NYC and Oaxaca City, Mexico.

Jeremy is committed to excellence and innovation in the Performing Arts. He focuses on challenging and redefining the creation of new works, developing curricula and pedagogy, as well as leading professional development of educators, artists, and audiences. As a Director/Choreographer/Producer, he has led the creation of more than 50 original pieces across the country. Working with a highly theatrical sensibility, Williams creates within a large range of genres and styles through compelling storytelling, heightened sensory entertainment, and a great love for old fashioned showmanship centered around powerful physical performance. He is the Founding Director of Convergences Theatre Collective, a national network of contemporary theatre artists and teachers dedicated to creating new work and revealing the artistic process for audiences - live and online.

Williams is a consultant and currently partners with the **Doris Duke Charitable Foundation** as the program manager for the Building Demand the the Arts grantmaking program and learning community, and with the **Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art** as a program consultant and webinar/online events producer for the **Building Bridges Program**. Previously he was the associate facilitator for the **Engaging Dance Audiences** grantmaking program, a project of **Dance/USA**. As associate facilitator, Williams led the design and implementation of webinars and online learning communities to support applicants and grantees in co-learning online. These practices have become standards in the field of grantmaking in the performing arts.

As a storyteller, Jeremy builds bridges between ideas and artists, artists and projects, audiences and the creative process, and between communities through sharing stories and experiences from multiple cultures and artistic expressions - live and online. For full bio and resume, visit [www.Jeremy-Williams.org](http://www.Jeremy-Williams.org)

**Convergences Theatre Collective (CTC)** is a group of pioneering theatre artists and innovative teachers dedicated to creating original work and re-envisioning classics. Working as a collective for more than ten years with artists located not only in New York City, but around the country and internationally, CTC is well practiced in collaborating from a distance and making work together utilizing connective technology.

Hosting numerous online events over the past decade, such as learning workshops, new play readings, sharing rehearsals or studio events, creating videos, and even a podcast series as part of our ten-year celebration! CTC continually uses digital media to stay engaged with our artists and our audiences. This approach has had tremendous and rewarding results. Our experience puts us in a unique position to offer our skills not only to those within our own field, but also to the wider cohort of educators and institutions. We are happy to share our work with those looking for guidance and assistance in this time of crisis which demands fast action and flexibility. CTC continues to lead through utilizing available technology.

For more information, visit: [www.ConvergencesCollective.org](http://www.ConvergencesCollective.org)

