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Online learning, teaching and education continuity planning for schools

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Published March 2020

Published on behalf of the International Baccalaureate Organization, a not-for-profit educational foundation of 15 Route des Morillons, 1218 Le Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland by the

International Baccalaureate Organization (UK) Ltd
Peterson House, Malthouse Avenue, Cardiff Gate
Cardiff, Wales CF23 8GL
United Kingdom
Website: ibo.org

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IB mission statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

Guidelines for online and blended learning

The guidance here is intended for staff supporting schools that are facing closures and quarantines due to the Covid-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak. It contains suggestions and guidelines for online and blended learning, with further suggestions for free apps and solutions for schools that may not have online or mobile solutions in place at the time of closing.

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Setting up

Developing an online learning plan or a continuity of learning plan

An **online learning plan** covers the teaching strategies, communication rules, devices, solutions, and policies supporting online or blended learning in the school community. Keep the plan as simple as possible, but make the expectations clear for learners, teachers and guardians as to how to learn and teach online.

An IB World School has agreed to share their online learning plan as an example of what to consider when creating one. This plan is updated regularly, as is common for schools using online learning under emergency circumstances.

- Shanghai American School Distance Learning Plan:
https://www.saschina.org/uploaded/SAS_Distance_Learning_Plan.pdf

A **continuity of learning plan** or **education continuity plan** for emergency learning and teaching is slightly different. It is focused on the transitions of students from one type of learning to another as their learning context rapidly changes. Continuity of learning plans do not only involve the technologies the school will use to continue teaching, but also considers how the students will return to campus after the emergency ends.

The Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center in the United States of America has provided information for schools facing emergency closures. These guidelines can be used internationally, though some tools are specific to the US context.

https://rems.ed.gov/docs/Supporting_Continuity_of_learning_and_education.pdf

Note: “continuity of learning” can also refer to age-based transitions in schools, especially in Australia and New Zealand. When seeking advice online, use “education continuity plan” in addition to “continuity of learning plan”.

There is also sound advice produced on general considerations during online learning preparation:

- How to check on the wellbeing of learners, teachers, and guardians during the closure. From Western Academy of Beijing: https://twitter.com/WAB_LIVE/status/1225757765550903301/photo/1
- General tips for learning online:
 - From Global Online Academy: <https://globalonlineacademy.org/insights/articles/15-strategies-for-online-learning-when-school-is-closed>
 - From International School Services: <https://www.iss.edu/community/online-learning>

Finding communities to share with

There are many schools struggling with closures, and just as many are posting strategies and solutions online. There are a number of places IB candidate schools and IB World Schools can seek help:

- **Programme communities**, accessible via a [My IB](#) login. There are several schools sharing their experiences and asking questions.
- **Podcasts**. There are schools and organizations sharing stories of school closures. Example: The International Schools Podcast https://www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-gdnw9-d548f1?utm_campaign=w_share_ep&utm_medium=dlink&utm_source=w_share
- **Facebook groups**. [International Schools Information Technology Leaders and Digital Coaches](#) has become a popular group for IB candidate and IB World Schools to seek information for countries that have access to Facebook.
- **Twitter** has many educators posting ideas, webchats, and other information online. Some schools in the IB community from affected areas have posted their experiences online.
- You can also contact **IB Answers** for information.

Specific information to supplement the IB’s FAQ on [Covid-19](#)

Some learning and teaching questions that have been posed by schools are answered in detail here.

How to manage online learning and teaching

There are two kinds of online learning and teaching that schools will need to balance based on their circumstances: *synchronous* (happening collaboratively and at the same time with a group of online learners and usually a teacher) and *asynchronous* (happening at any time, not necessarily in a group, but with teacher feedback).

Schools should not assume that synchronous teaching is required or even desirable in order to support effective learning. The goal is not to try to re-create face-to-face (F2F) classrooms, which is impossible to do. Online and blended learning provide opportunities for learners to work more independently, expand their agency, and learn to use tools and strategies that they otherwise might not have. While it is not recommended to experiment in emergency situations, innovation, creativity and resilience are required to make things work. Most schools will discover they need to be adaptive and fast-thinking in order to ensure that learning continues in a healthy way.

The chart below provides some strategies that are commonly used in online and blended learning, presented in alphabetical order:

Activity	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Blogging and vlogging (creating video blogs)		X
Collaborative writing or story-making	X	X
Content production (word processing, spreadsheets, etc)	X	X
Discussion forums or text-based chats*	X	X
E-portfolios		X
Games/gamification*	X	X
Intelligent tutoring (online teaching and assessment tools, often subject-specific)		X
Live video chats*	X	
Mapping (mind-mapping, using interactive maps and charts, etc)	X	X
Multimedia presentations	X	X
Online drawing and drafting		X
Plagiarism checking (using anti-plagiarism tools that provide feedback to writers)		X
Quizzes and surveys*		X
Video chatting and conferencing*	X	
Video creation and sharing*		X
Virtual gallery walks (there are special sites and software for these)	X	X
Virtual reality scenarios (sometimes requires special software)	X	X
Wiki building		X

An asterisk (*) denotes activities that can be easily conducted using mobile devices. All activities are *possible* on mobile devices, but some may prove very difficult to do.

Which are the easiest activities to set up and find resources for?

In order:

- **Content production and collaborative writing.** There are many free or inexpensive ways to set up a word processing document online. Examples: Google Classroom, Zoho, Dropbox Paper.

- **Multimedia presentations.** Most content production solutions also allow for multimedia presentations, but more complex infographics and interactive presentations are possible. Examples: Beautiful.ai, Slides.com, Piktochart.com.
- **Quizzes, polls and surveys.** These can be set up online in a few minutes. Examples: Easypolls, SurveyMonkey, Typeform.
- **Games and simulations.** There are many options for educational games online that can be accessed by anyone. Examples: PhET interactive simulations, National Geographic Kids, The World's Future.
- **Video chatting and conferencing** (depending on bandwidth and access). Many free or built-in applications are available for individual and group chats. Examples: FaceTime, Microsoft Teams, Zoom (also available in China).

Free interactive material and learning tools

If schools use WordPress or Drupal for their websites or blogging, then it is possible to develop a wide range of online activities and H5P interactive learning objects: <http://www.H5P.org>.

Merlot has the largest selection of free and open online learning tools. It is more focused on older learners but has some content appropriate for primary age children: <https://www.merlot.org/merlot/>.

Setting up online learning management

Learning management systems (LMS) are used to set up online learning. An LMS stores unit and course plans and often has activities built into it such as discussion forums, quizzes and e-portfolios.

For schools that already use an LMS, ensure that remote logins are enabled, that each student and teacher has their own login, and that your LMS provider is aware that there may be increased activity or more licences required. This is also true for younger learners, but their accounts should be accessible by their parents or guardians. It is a good idea to check with the LMS provider if any new features and add-ons are available so the school can put as many learning activities as possible into one solution.

Several learning management providers have release guidance and have created plans for learning management support for IB World Schools. More are likely to become available depending on which regions experience school closures. Schools should contact their LMS provider for more information and to request any changes to services.

There are also free or open source options for learning management, but they may require more time to set up, and usually requires an IT specialist to maintain. Examples:

- Google Classroom (<https://classroom.google.com>)
- Moodle (moodle.org)
- Opigno (<https://www.opigno.org/en>)

Learning experiences that involve physical activities, resources, or spaces

The answer to this is specific to the school's situation. However, in most circumstances it is possible to assign activities and discussions so that students seek out the physical experiences they need, then bring back evidence of and reflections on what they have done. This is possible with all age groups, depending on the amount of supervision they need to conduct physical activities.

For younger learners, special software that uses video evidencing and adult reflection is the best option. Parents or guardians will need to supervise younger learners in their play and learning activities—the school needs to provide some basic guidelines on what to observe. The school should also set up video conferencing with learners and guardians to discuss the children’s development.

For students who are **not under quarantine** but separated from campus, it is possible to use public libraries, sports facilities, or even art galleries as part of their learning. Some colleges and universities can provide space for science and art activities. Online databases for resources are available through most library subscriptions.

If students are **under quarantine or must remain indoors**, intelligent tutors and virtual learning environments can provide some support, especially for science-related activities. There are many open-source and free options for virtual science labs, galleries, physics simulations, etc that can be used to support students. Physical health activities that can be conducted indoors are also reasonable options for students under temporary quarantine.

Mobile learning strategies

An option that might be considered is mobile learning. “Mobile” does not only refer to the portable computing device but also the learning that is best used with smartphones or tablets. The [4C framework](#) below is a simple, well-established starting point to decide on how to implement learning through mobiles.

- **Content:** providing media (for example, documents, audio, video) to the learner/performer
- **Compute:** taking in data from the learner and processing it
- **Capture:** taking in data from sensors (for example camera, GPS, etc) and saving for it sharing or reflection
- **Communicate:** connecting learners/performers with others

The 4Cs of mobile learning can help teachers design experiences that are not possible without mobile solutions. It can also serve to expand experiences students can have if they do not have laptops at home or easy access to fast internet. If a school is mostly dependent on mobile learning solutions, please contact your school’s IB authorization or IB World Schools (IBWS) manager for further support, because the complexity of mobile learning may require more guidance. Schools can also consult IB Answers if they have general questions about mobile learning.

How online learning supports exhibitions and wider community activities

There are a few methods of exhibiting or sharing content and discussion for wider audiences.

- **Virtual conferences or festivals.** Usually a combination of visual content, webinars, online discussions, and text chats. If the school wants to “host” a virtual festival, they can create a website or use tools like YouTube, Wix.com or Strikingly.com (China) to create opportunities for sharing.
- **Virtual galleries.** There are specific websites that use a 3D format where students can create virtual exhibitions with text and images. Example: Kunstmatrix Art.Spaces: <https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en>
- **Learning management unit sharing.** If the schools want to share *each other’s* exhibition work, an LMS can be an effective virtual space to share and learn.

Use of social media for learning and teaching

It is *possible* to use social media for some communications or media sharing with parents, guardians, or **learners who are over 13 years old**. There are also some closed social media sites that are moderated and that younger learners can sign into. Examples include [Edmodo](#) and [GeckoLife](#). For smaller cohorts of learners and teachers, schools can consider family sharing apps such as [FamilyWall](#) that allow small groups to post media, keep calendars, and have text chats.

That being said, using social media does not protect the **privacy** of users adequately enough for the depth of sharing and discussion required for learning and teaching in IB World Schools. If schools want to do extensive sharing of content and reflections, this should be done through an LMS.

Some social media sites and apps are not available in certain countries. China and the Persian Gulf have significant restrictions social media usage or use internal social media solutions. Schools in these countries should consider these restrictions when delivering learning online.

Guidelines to ensure the privacy and data protection of the school community

Privacy and data protection should be taken seriously. While there are no global agreements for data privacy and protection, certain regional mandates such as [General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union](#) (GDPR) affect many schools. Recommendations for data privacy and protection in this document are GDPR-adherent whenever called for.

GDPR rules

If a school is in a GDPR country and transmits or asks for personal data or information from anyone, including video and images, even temporarily, GDPR rules apply for transmission. If a school is in a country that is not under GDPR but is transmitting data or information to or from anyone residing in a GDPR country, the rules also apply. If a citizen of a country under GDPR currently resides in a non-GDPR country, the rules do not apply—GDPR only applies to residents, not citizens abroad. However, students or teachers returning to a GDPR-adherent country from abroad may find some of their data is not transferrable if the school does not comply with GDPR.

There are two major areas in online learning where privacy and data protection must be considered.

- Sharing personal data via the internet
 - Images, videos, or student submissions are all considered “personal information” under GDPR rules. It is required for GDPR countries (and recommended for others) that any information created by students, or with them included, is anonymized, blurred out, or otherwise protected unless the guardians give formal permission in writing that the information can be used. If the student is considered a legal adult in their country of residence, they can give formal permission, but guardians should be informed.
 - **Children under the age of 13 must *not* participate in unmoderated social media activities as part of their learning.** There are moderated sites for younger users or sites that permit moderators to be added (teachers and guardians).
 - If the school uses social media as part of its contingency learning plan, the personal information of students, teachers, other staff or guardians should **not** be used or transmitted to third parties online.
 - If the school uses learning management or reporting systems, the provider **must** be able to prove their systems are GDPR-compliant or the school must prove that GDPR rules do not apply to **any** member of the school community.
- Video conferencing and recording

- Just as with personal information, video imaging of minors needs permissions from parents or guardians for all age groups. With learners under the age of 11, video conferencing should happen with said guardians present. Learners can also chat in groups regardless of age, through one-on-one conferencing with students is best for feedback on individually-assigned activities and general wellness.
- As much as possible, video conferencing should be set up to eliminate backgrounds that provide information on learners' personal lives and locations. A simple white or light-coloured background is best.
- Personal names should be avoided in any chat invites or titles. For conferences, the student and guardian should be informed if the conference will be recorded.

How to ensure students are not disadvantaged by online teaching

Effective online teaching *is not the same* as face-to-face (F2F). It is not a matter of whether it is *equal*. It requires different activities, some which are *better* done online. However, learners become disadvantaged if they are not provided with certain resources for learning independently and online:

- **Access to devices appropriate for online learning.** Some learning activities can be conducted using mobile devices.
- **Internet access and adequate bandwidth (speed).** Poor bandwidth can make many synchronous activities very difficult. For schools with students in poor bandwidth areas, a combination of asynchronous activities and telephone check-ins provides more support.
- **Time zone friendly schedules.** Changing teaching schedules to shorter class times in similar time zones with more meetings but fewer students at one time is more effective in online learning situations. If meeting times are combined with collaborative activities, students are more likely to log on and complete tasks or discussions.
- **Effective feedback.** Checking in with learners regularly is important. If systems allow, students can also get valuable feedback automatically from online quizzes and intelligent tutors as well as direct comments or discussion from peers and teachers.
- **Opportunities for independent learning.** Wherever they are, students are learning informally every day. Designing learning activities and discussions that capture students' experiences while they are away keeps them engaged and gives teachers valuable feedback on how the students are feeling. It also provides opportunities for multiple perspectives in learning that might not happen if students were all physically together.
- **Meaningful screen time and conferencing.**
 - For children over the age of 5, this means developing activities that keep their attention and engage them with the environment around them. Common Sense provides a wealth of information on interacting online. An example of their offerings is here: <https://www.commonsense.org/education/articles/5-online-discussion-tools-to-fuel-student-engagement>
 - For children under 5, it means keeping engagement between the learner and the adults with whom they are chatting. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) provides some guidelines on effective strategies for very young children: <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/tips-video-chatting-young-children>, and <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2020/theres-no-such-thing-online-preschool>.

Managing screen time

“Screen time” refers to the amount of time a user spends on a device to access onscreen activities. There are limits as to the amount of time everyone should spend online, but the amounts and the rules for screen time vary by age. Videoconferencing and social interactions using video *do not count towards screen time*.

For more information, please check this blog that summarizes the research on screen time for children: <https://forge.medium.com/screen-time-is-good-for-kids-if-theres-a-human-on-the-other-end-d33124c1f74>

Recommended screen time, that is not video conferencing for learners and teachers, are based on the recommendations created by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#):

- **Ages 2–5:** 1 hour, broken into sessions of a maximum of 30 minutes.
- **Age 6 and above:** no specific screen time limits, but screen time should not affect physical activity and face-to-face interactions at home and school. *Consistent* limits on screen time are also very important.

Some screen time activities such as online socializing and gaming can be very immersive. Creating learning experiences with *limited* capacity to engage are key. Make sure that activities are limited in length with clear goals that learners can retain when they are finished.

How can teachers authenticate work that is being completed remotely?

It is easier to authenticate student work online than most people think. However, it requires some changes to how assignments are presented and submitted for review. It also requires teachers to monitor students’ online activity more closely than in normal classroom situations.

Note: these guidelines are for school-based assessments only. The rules and procedures for academic integrity of IB-validated assessments are mandated by the IB and schools should refer any questions about IB-validated assessment to their IBWS managers.

Here are some basic guidelines to designing and evaluating online work for authenticity:

- *Use more formative assessments* that are designed to get students to work together and use online resources.
- Have a very clear policy on how to submit work online. Students who are given a precise procedure are less likely to make mistakes in submissions, which accounts for many online learning integrity violations.
- Create more assignments that are collaborative. If the teacher is working directly with groups of students on their work, it is far easier for the teacher to monitor what the students are doing and to check their understanding.
- Create questions and inquiries that require learners to embed their personal experiences and context into any assessed content. Since many online students will be in different locations, it will be easier for the teacher to see when a student is using their surroundings to compose their work.

- Use plagiarism checkers whenever students have to submit individual work, and assign drafts of parts of the work prior to a final submission. Most plagiarism checkers can accept drafts of assignments to check against final submissions.
- Create more multimedia assignments that require students to remix pictures, videos and text into their own creations.
- Create libraries and pathfinders for students to use as part of assignments, then ask students to quote from them as part of their work. This checks how well they are able to reference and cite work as well as reduce opportunities for copying the work of others.
- Interview students about their work using a synchronous chat with audio or video feeds, if possible. It is much more difficult to produce spontaneous answers when talking online.
- For schools using an LMS, check login time, collaboration data, and submission types to see how often and long students are involved with assignments. Very short assignment involvement times may indicate students are submitting unauthenticated work.
- For older students, consider using MOOCs (massive open online courses) for certain topics or units. MOOCs are designed to create learning experiences that are evaluated using more multiple-choice and short answer assignments.

Transitioning from online back to face-to-face learning

A continuity of learning plan is advised to transition learners and teachers back to school.

Learners may have:

- become accustomed to more independent learning and will need time and guidance to transition from it. Some learners may have preferred learning remotely and will find the constraints of school difficult to accept.
- become accustomed to shorter activities, asynchronous assignments, more freedom in their work and less face-to-face collaboration. The school should consider how to slowly transition learners to in-school schedules.
- been temporarily transferred to other schools. The school will need documentation from parents and guardians to assess what learners have studied and how that fits into the school's programme(s) and pedagogical aims.
- experienced illness, isolation, intensive traveling and other challenges that require them to have time to process. Schools should be prepared to create space and interactions that take into account what their learners might have gone through.
- not had the opportunity to be prepared in traditional ways for examinations. The school should consider how to re-focus learners and assure them they are ready.

Teachers may have:

- experienced fatigue and stress due to the rapid professional development they experienced when facilitating online learning, creative scheduling, and exposure to a wide variety of apps, solutions, and technical challenges. Reduced schedules and less administrative activities might help teachers transition more easily.
- pending assignments and activities online that need to be completed before fully transitioning to face-to-face teaching. The school's continuity of learning plan should include clear dates on when online assignments should be completed, then give teachers latitude to use blended learning techniques to move online learning back to the classroom.

- been under quarantine or been separated from their students for extended periods of time. Some teachers may have had other students depending on how time zone scheduling was designed during the school closing. Giving teachers opportunities to collaborate and discuss student progress will be essential.
- not had time to evaluate student work. They may need more time for catching up.
- felt less confident that their online teaching prepared students for examinations. Creating activities that are specifically designed to prepare for examinations may be helpful.

In conclusion

Many teachers, leaders and learners are experiencing an unprecedented situation in their schools. This guidance reflects the schools' desire to stay open and provide the best possible learning experiences for students despite difficult conditions. For schools who have found a way to be successful given their constraints, a sincere congratulations is in order. For those who are just beginning their journeys, the IB community is available to help.