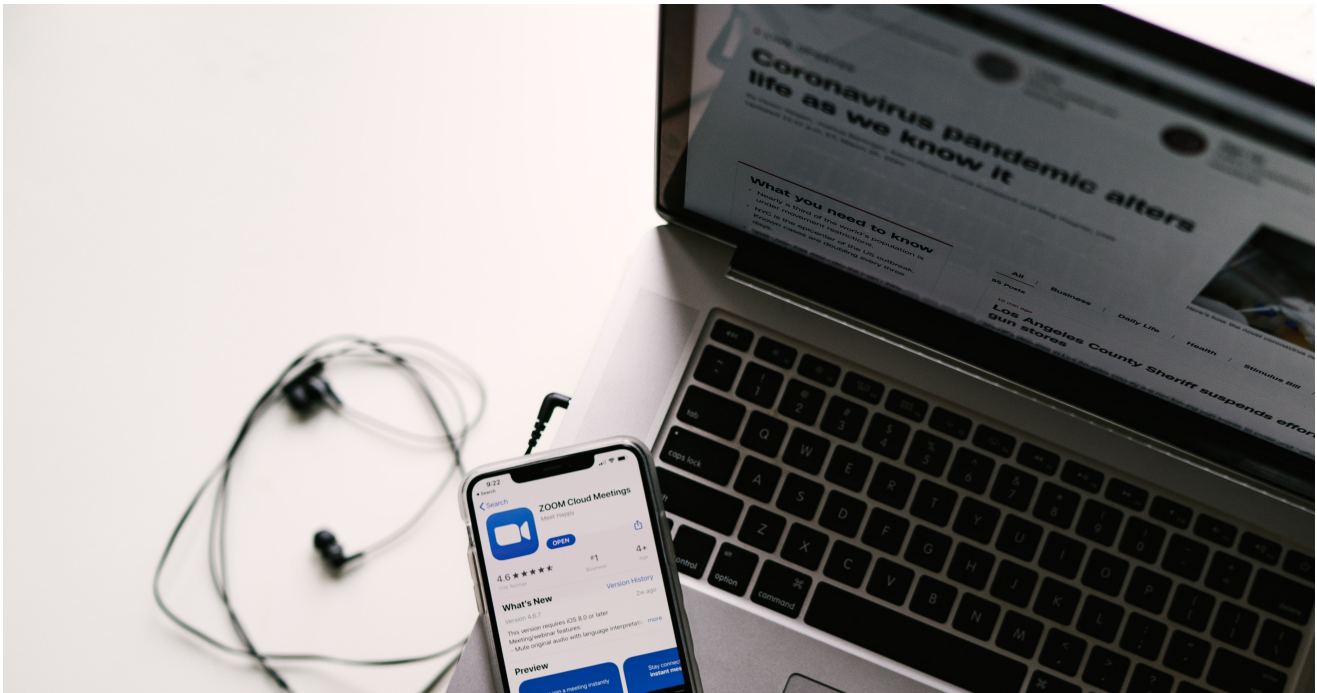


# THREE TIPS FOR TEACHING ONLINE

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The Office of Digital Learning at Princeton Theological Seminary would like to offer some pedagogical resources for you to consider as you think creatively about your courses. Drawing on an [extensive article](#) by Flower Darby in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (and to a lesser extent, the recent article [Going Online in a Hurry](#) by Michelle Miller), we want to share three small tips for teaching online.

## ***#1 BE PRESENT. Online classes are not meant to run on auto-pilot.***

One of the most challenging parts of teaching and learning away from a physical classroom is the missing element of physical presence. Some may have the misconception that students will progress through an online course without interaction with the instructor. In response to this misconception, here are some specific ways to be present with your students. These modes of personal connection will be vital in this season of learning together online.

- Continue to hold Webex class meetings during regular class time.
- Set virtual office hours where you will be available for real-time communication by phone, Webex, or email for students who have questions.
- Send a class-wide email before each meeting to remind students of the work due, direct them to the link for the Webex meeting, and clarify any issues that have arisen since the last meeting.
- Respond to student emails quickly and thoroughly. We recommend a turnaround of less than 48 hours for email responses.
- If you normally include break out small groups during your class time, you can continue to do so through Webex. To facilitate this, you will want to designate groups and group leaders in advance. You'll want to give the student leader the names and emails of their group members. They will need to send out meeting link to all the participants and then start the meeting. If you use Discussion Boards, be active and respond to student questions and comments.
- Quickly grade and give feedback on student work through Blackboard to remind students who may be feeling isolated that their work matters and they are a part of a learning community.

## ***#2 KEEP THINGS SIMPLE AND CLEAR. One of the best gifts you can offer your students during this transition is to simplify what you are asking of them.***

- Tell students what you expect of them during Webex classes. We recommend requiring video attendance. If students need to limit their attendance to audio only or they need to miss a class, they should discuss it with you just as they would if they were missing an in-person class meeting.

- Consider whether there are components of your course that may be overly complicated to offer online. Perhaps your course can be restructured to limit the number of assignments or simplify many different types of assignments into simpler ones. Think creatively about how you can meet your course objectives given our online context.
- It can be very helpful in online learning for students to see sample assignments as well. Consider adding examples for what a good discussion board post, reflection paper, or other assignment submission would look like.

### **#3 EXHIBIT WARMTH. Remember that this transition is also taxing on the students, and consider how your written communication can convey compassion as well as clarity.**

Another challenge will be that course details you might address casually at the beginning of an in-person class might take on a more formal tone over email or in course-wide announcements. It will take intentional effort to infuse warmth into your written communication. Megan DeWald, Assistant Director of the Institute for Youth Ministry here leads cohorts of online learners for our Certificate in Youth and Theology, begins each email with a personal, funny, or encouraging story that allows for connection and shared experience among the members.

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**“Infuse warmth into your written communication.”**

*For example:*

*Here's hoping that you are all doing well. I know it's been a tough week—car accidents and illnesses and church drama (Oh my!). I'm so glad that we can all turn to one another in these times.*

*I'm heading to Asheville, North Carolina, for a week of professional development at Montreat (my first time!) at a thing called the Just Leadership Institute. I'm excited (and nervous!) because it's been well over a year since I've done this kind of soul-feeding. Say a prayer for me if you think of it, as I'll hold all of you in prayer during my time here.*

*Wow, what a summer—amirite?! I am so thankful for each and every one of you, and I've been hold you in prayer through camps and mission trips and vacations and surgeries and all of life's unexpected joys and sorrows. What a fabulous group of people you are! I'm the luckiest person with the best job in the world.*

*What a joy it has been to spend time with many of you during the month of May! I have so enjoyed hearing about your joys and concerns, laughing with you, and holding sacred space as we continue to get to know one another. There is a lot of love among us all, and I am (again) humbled and honored to get to shepherd this tremendous program. As the calendar shifts to June and July, I want to provide you with some reminders and opportunities for deeper connection. So read on! Darby simply challenges online teachers to remember to “be human.” Expect that there will be challenges in this new format, and offer support and space when they arise. On a related note,*

*remember that learning from home may pose particular challenges to some students who may have difficulty finding a private space to learn and study or who may have to take extra steps to access a computer or wifi connection.*

Here are some ideas for adding warmth to your communication with students during this time.

- Record a short, personal video where you address students' anxiety about transitioning to the online format and recognize the challenges this will pose for everyone involved.
- Set aside time at the beginning or just after your formal class meeting for questions, just as you might connect with students in the minutes following an in-person class meeting. This extra space will allow you to answer logistical questions about the online format and to clarify any content-related questions that may have gotten lost in the digital medium.
- Consider the personal complications for some students when setting deadlines and addressing missing or late work.
- Remember that students will likely have limited access to library materials and other institutional resources.
- Remember, it is very likely that our students will be dealing with some exceptionally trying circumstances during this time. Consider this when setting course requirements and assessing student work.

Be present. Keep things simple and clear. Exhibit warmth. This is good advice for any learning environment, but connection, clarity, and warmth are particularly helpful when teaching online.



About the author: Lindsey (Trozzo) Jodrey is the Associate Director of Digital Learning at Princeton Theological Seminary. She has a PhD in New Testament from Baylor and is an ordained minister in the Alliance of Baptists. She spends most of her free time with her partner, Deborah, who is completing her MDiv/MACEF at PTS. You'll usually find them eating good food, playing board games, or walking with their pups.