Successful distance teaching, which can be defined as a rich and meaningful instructional experience for students and instructors, is based on some important pedagogical principles rooted in the scholarship of both online and adult learning. This document provides some simple tips to consider when planning a virtual session.

Planning the content to be addressed

- Identify the content that you want to discuss with students during your virtual session. Establish the sequence by following the inverted pyramid technique (by going straight to the point with the most important ideas from the start and then offering additional details and background information).
  - The rule of three is also an important communication approach to use. It involves selecting the information to be presented by chunks of threes (a primer to get students' attention, a central part to share important ideas in threes, and a conclusion to help students consolidate their understanding (always highlighting important ideas in threes).
- Plan and practice your virtual session to ensure realistic timing. This timing will allow you to maintain a consistent pace and, more importantly, identify appropriate strategies to sustain the level of student engagement.
  - Some educational experts argue that the 12-minute rule is an important guide to follow (even more so significant in a virtual space). In essence, use a variety of active learning strategies every 12 minutes. Your lecture should therefore be interspersed with these more active moments that allow students to participate rather than simply listen (which is difficult for many students to maintain for a period of more than 12 minutes). Depending on your virtual interface, different tools can help you implement active learning strategies. Not to mention that the way you present content during your session can also be organized to maximize student attention and thus help overcome the challenge of attention loss.

Effective Primers

- Personal experience
- Example situation
- Case-study
- Shocking statement
- Question
- Testimony
- Statistic
- Scientific fact
- Image (photograph)
- Video
- Expert opinion
- Quote
- Physical object

Actives Learning Strategies

- Asking a question or sharing an idea (with microphone or webcam).
- Posting a question or answering a question (in the chat the space).
- Answering a question (through a virtual survey).
- Having students discuss a case or a problem with one another (in a virtual working group).
Choosing an appropriate approach for the virtual modality

- Choose an approach that will allow you to communicate the contents of your virtual session in an appropriate way, that will contribute positively to the students' learning and with which you feel comfortable. Here are some possible approaches:
  - **Visual presentation centered on you** (you activate your webcam and microphone and occupy the main space in order to, for example, present information, explain a case or demonstrate a situation with artifacts).
  - **Visual presentation with a slideshow that you will comment on** (you share your slideshow and activate your microphone to comment from one slide to another on the content you have chosen to discuss during the virtual session).
  - **Multimedia presentation** (you share your screen in order to present a video, audio recording, images or application).
  - **Mixed presentation** (you use a combination of the strategies listed above and the tools available in your virtual interface – chat space, survey, working groups, whiteboard, etc.) – to actively engage students during the presentation of the content).

Testing the technology

- If necessary, schedule a meeting with your technological support team so that you can test the technology you will use during your virtual session (webcam and microphone). Take advantage of this meeting to also test the tools you want to use (screen or document sharing, chat space, survey, working groups, whiteboard, etc.), especially if you plan to use a mixed approach (test moving from one medium to another).
- Plan an alternative strategy for the tools you plan to use (unfortunately, the technology may not always work well for any number of reasons... you want a plan B).

Sending the necessary documents to students before the session

- If applicable, be sure to send in advance the documents that students should consult before your virtual session or that will be needed during the session.
- If there is information that is important to ensure your virtual session runs smoothly (e.g. instructions to login, navigate the interface, of find specific information), you should also ensure that students receive this information before the session.

You will have noticed that the bulk of the tips shared above revolve around planning, preparation and practice. This type of attention to the details of your session can make the difference between a seamless, engaging and meaningful instructional session and one fraught with varied technical, communication and pedagogical challenges. Consideration of the tips above before your next session will greatly help you feel more comfortable as a facilitator and indicate to your students your level of preparation and commitment toward their learning.