

Alternative Options and Tips for Engaging Students

Making the Most Out of Class Cancellations

1. First, remember that classes can't be held (online or face-to face) and no work can be required until classes resume. Some students may not have Internet access or power. So, the key is to plan ahead for when classes resume.

2. Communicate!

Communication with students is key to a successful learning experience, particularly online. They want to hear from you, and regular communication will provide them constancy and reassurance.

- a. Use Blackboard's **Announcement** feature to provide a consistent source of official course information. If students know that all important course information will come through a single, consistent channel, they are more likely to feel connected and up-to-date even during such times of disruption. For using this feature, follow the step-by-step instructions in the [Blackboard Quick Start Guide](#).
- b. Use the Blackboard **Email** tool to quickly and efficiently email students without having to search for their contact information.
- c. Provide **feedback** on: (a) assignments using the built-in Blackboard feedback tools, or (b) students' discussion board postings.

3. Create an Online Class Session – in whole, in part, synchronous or asynchronous

Good learning is collaborative and social. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding. Offering an online class session to encourage this interaction can be a useful way to keep students engaged with course content during a period of disruption in class scheduling. The University's [Blackboard Learning Management System](#) contains all the tools you need to create a synchronous or asynchronous make-up class session. Some ideas for an online class session:

- Have a large class size? Set up [Groups](#) in Blackboard and randomly assign students to different groups to complete the assigned activity or to use virtual class meeting options.
- For smaller classes, conduct a **virtual class meeting** using a tool like [Blackboard Collaborate](#), [Google Hangouts](#) or [Skype](#) to conduct a face-to-face meeting virtually and in real time. These tools allow all participants in a course to contribute to a class meeting, allowing for group activities, class discussion, and follow-up questions in addition to instructor-led activities. For good information, pros and cons, and guidance on using Google Hangouts, visit [Video Conferencing: Google Hangouts](#).
- Use **Blackboard Wiki** or **Google Docs** to aid student interaction by allowing student groups to work collaboratively at a distance, by giving the ability to share and edit content over the web as they complete group projects and assignments.
- Posting **audio or video recordings** of class assignments or lectures can make content available to students from home and asynchronously.
 - a. One great way - make a **podcast**! For helpful information and guidance on how and why to use podcasts (audio content streaming for the web) for lecture content, visit [Podcasting: General Resources](#).
 - b. Blackboard's [VoiceThread](#) feature allows you to record and post an audio narration or video lecture with PowerPoint presentations using a mic or webcam. For assistance, contact the Division of Information Technology (DoIT) at 803-777-1800. Read advice on [how to use VoiceThread](#).
 - c.

- d. **Adobe Connect** also allows you to create/record lecture presentations that feature your PowerPoint slides. To request a free account and instructions, contact DoIT at 803-777-1800 or via the servicedesk@sc.edu.
- e. **NOTE:** To keep students engaged with your content, best practices suggest that video lectures should not exceed 15-20 minutes. Shorter videos are even better, so consider breaking the material into five to ten-minute segments. For tips on how to create effective mini-lectures, visit CTE's [Distributed Learning Toolbox](#).
- **Learning Activities:** Create learning activities students can access online via Blackboard. Or, for a curated collection of free and open online resources, activities, including reusable assignments and assessments, visit the [Merlot Collection](#) or the [OER Commons](#) for discipline-specific online materials. Other activity examples include having students:
 - a. Read a chapter (or portion) from the textbook and submit to you a detailed **outline** of the content
 - b. Complete an online activity, **assignment**, or **quiz** via Blackboard
 - c. Read an online article or watch an online video and write a **reflective essay**
- Be sure to provide online **access to all course documents**, homework assignments, case studies, and other course materials to help students complete assignments properly.

3. Create “Sites of Interaction” in Your Virtual Classroom

Create an online **Discussion forum** or **Blog** in Blackboard, which allows you to set the stage for student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction focused on issues or content associated with your course. Through these tools, students can comment on posts or questions from other students or can be encouraged to produce deeper reflection and thinking on course content or other students' perspectives. For an excellent guide on using **Blackboard's blog function** in your classes, visit [Blackboard Blogging for the Classroom](#).

4. Supply Students with the Necessary Materials

Select materials that support the stated learning objectives and will encourage student learning. Here are some suggestions of resources that might be useful:

- **Textbooks** – You can assign a reading from the course textbook or from an open source textbook (view USC Library's [Open Textbook Resource list](#)).
- **Online articles** – When assigning an online article, we suggest you avoid copyright issues by providing a link to the source rather than downloading the article. Or, ask the USC Library to help upload content directly onto Blackboard using the [eReserve Request Form](#).
- **Online videos** – When assigning an online video, again, avoid copyright issues by providing a link to the source, rather than downloading the video and inserting it into Blackboard. You can also use the Library's [Educational Films Collection](#) for content. **Note:** To be considered “accessible” under University guidelines, videos must either be closed captioned or have a transcript available.
- **Recorded Mini-lectures** (see above for VoiceThread and Adobe Connect)

Blackboard Support:

For a step-by-step guide on how to use Blackboard, view the [Blackboard Quick Start Guide](#). For additional help with Blackboard, contact DoIT at 803-777-1800 or via the [Self-Service Portal](#).

CTE Support:

For assistance and ideas with designing your “Make-Up Sessions,” feel free to contact CTE's Instructional Design Team at 803-777-8322 or submit an [Online Request](#).