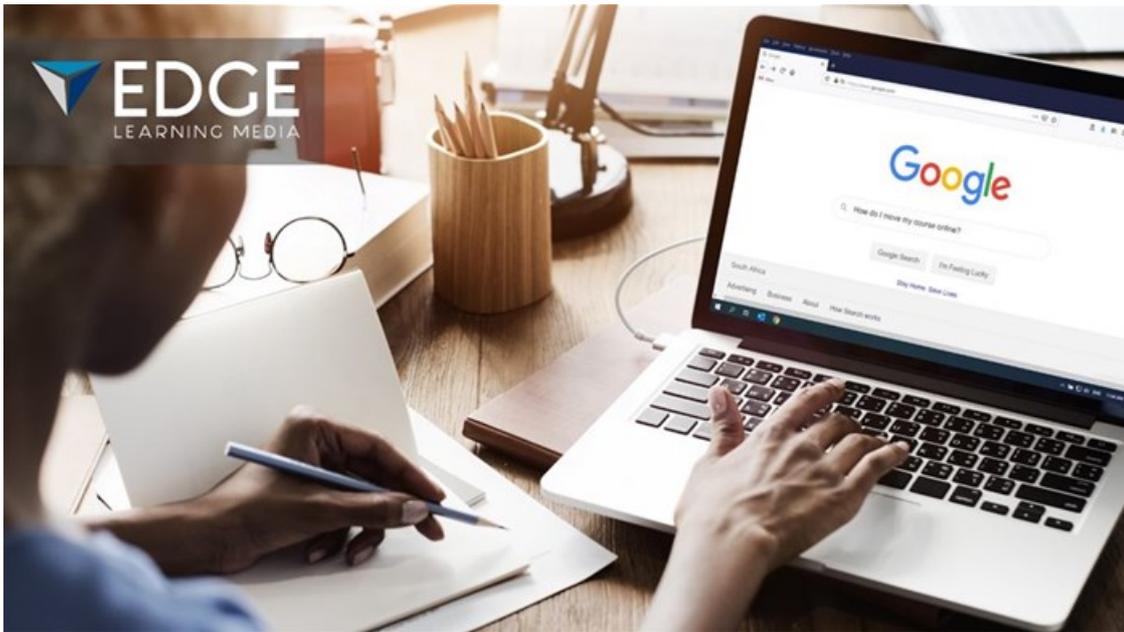


# Education in isolation: 5 tips for moving your courses online

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Educators across the globe are currently facing extraordinary circumstances in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, self-isolation and lockdowns have become the 'new normal'. Consequently, many educators have needed to move their content online - and quickly. For those who normally teach in a brick-and-mortar setting, this may be especially challenging. However, with just a few vital insights, educators can transition to online course design and resume their classes successfully. In this article, we'll cover five basic principles that will help educators to move their classes online.



## Tip #1 – Use the resources available to you

Few institutions will have set aside a **budget** for a sudden transition to online learning. Educators may, therefore, find themselves scrambling for online teaching tools that provide quick solutions. However, it's important to remember that many teaching essentials don't require specialised, expensive software.

Throughout this article, we'll mention some of the **free software** options available to educators. In addition, educators should consider which of their **existing materials** could still be used or adapted. In many cases, existing **YouTube** videos may also provide useful resources.

## Tip #2 – Keep it simple

Sometimes, educators may be tempted to imitate other online courses and digital media. However, trying to produce content that is on par with existing online courses is likely to result in frustration, dissatisfaction and unnecessary delays. It's important to bear in mind that these courses have resulted from extensive input (resources, expertise and time).

In many cases, similar results can be achieved while keeping things simple. Often, some **well-written** and **structured notes** can convey information just as effectively as a high-quality video. These can also be produced much more quickly, are less data-intensive and provide students with a familiar medium of learning.

It's also vital to **explain key concepts**, while keeping your language **clear, simple and concise**. Microsoft Word comes

with a built-in function to determine the document's [Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score](#). This is a useful resource for ensuring that your writing matches the standard reading abilities of your students.

### Tip #3 – Ensure engagement

While written notes are a good place to start, they shouldn't be the only medium for conveying information to students. This can lead to monotony and introduces the risk of decreased student engagement.

Although it's challenging to simulate the physical teaching environment, **discussion forums** can greatly enhance [social learning](#) in an online context. If your institution has a learning management system (LMS) with this built-in functionality, this should be simple to use. Some LMSs also allow students to **grade** each other's work. This is a great motivator and encourages meaningful contribution.

Those who don't have access to an LMS can consider using [MoodleCloud](#). This provides a free platform for groups of up to 50 users. For larger groups, educators could even use **social media** platforms like Facebook for discussion purposes. For educators who prefer a more [synchronous approach](#), **Google Hangouts** is another useful option.

Beyond social learning, **quizzes** are a means of ensuring that students engage with the lesson content. The [benefits](#) of including quizzes are significant – especially in terms of increasing motivation and ensuring that students remain on track. Apart from a dedicated LMS, educators can consider free tools like the [Flubaroo](#) plug-in for Google Forms, or [ThatQuiz](#).

### Tip #4 – Remain open to feedback

As educators, we should always be **learning and adapting**.

For those who have been teaching for a long time, there is always the risk of falling into a familiar routine. This means lessons may lack creativity or innovation. The **unfamiliarity** of an online learning context may be a welcome break from routine for some – or a necessary wake-up call for others.

Each class and student group is different, and faces unique challenges. What works for some may therefore not work for others. Sending out [surveys](#) or **polls** could assist educators in identifying different learning styles or preferences, which will increase engagement in the long run.

Here, some free tools include the [Forms](#) option under Google Apps, as well as [SurveyMonkey](#) or [SurveyPlanet](#).

### Tip #5 – Demonstrate empathy

Often, it's more difficult to **respond empathetically** to messages communicated through text or on-screen. For many, the online learning context is still unfamiliar territory with a new set of challenges. This means that increased empathy is required, especially on the educator's part. Students will likely need more **support** and **involvement** now than ever before.

Because of this, it may be helpful to provide means of **communication** outside of the formal learning platform. If educators are hesitant to share their personal contact details, they may consider creating a chat group, or even providing the option of video calls. Here, anything from [WhatsApp](#) to [Google Hangouts](#) or [Zoom](#) will provide **ease of communication**.

Naturally, empathy also applies to the process of creating learning materials and delivering lessons. Educators should remember to place themselves in their students' shoes and to maintain a broader perspective in the teaching process.

### Conclusion

All the platforms discussed here are a great starting point for transitioning classes to an online format. Of course, bear in mind that free platforms often contain adverts that may be distracting. Moreover, if students don't have unlimited data or a fast Internet connection, it's best to avoid unnecessary images or multimedia elements.

It's also vital for educators to resist the temptation to mimic professionally-developed online courses. Instead, they should focus on practicality and pragmatism, and focus on delivering their content in a systematic and timely manner.

Ultimately, educators need to consider which approach will ensure optimal engagement. Additionally, they need to balance the learning requirements with a sense of empathy and connectedness.

Although we face uncertain times, educators can use this opportunity to explore new methods of teaching and learning. And, once the Covid-19 pandemic has ended, they may even find themselves opting for a blended-learning approach for years to come.

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