

### Tips, suggestions and strategies for the socially distanced classroom

As schools return to face-to-face teaching, many teachers are wondering how the safety measures put in place to combat the spread of COVID-19 will impact on their ability to teach student-centred, communicative classes and implement effective classroom management techniques.

Safety measures vary from country to country but include wearing of face masks, maintaining a distance of 1 to 2 metres between students and teachers, and avoiding or limiting shared contact of materials and equipment.

Here are some problems highlighted by teachers and some suggested ways to tackle them.

#### Pair and group work

Problems	Solutions
It's possible to do pair and group work but students need to speak loudly and clearly because they must sit or stand 1 to 2 metres apart.	<p>Space the groups out as much as possible in the classroom so they don't distract each other.</p> <p>Use this as an opportunity for the students to practise conversation repair strategies such as asking for clarification or repetition.</p> <p>If desks are in rows, students could alternate between speaking to those in front, behind and to the sides.</p>
It's not possible to do pair or group work. All activities must be done in open class.	<p>To help build up students' confidence, include a preparation stage, e.g. brainstorming ideas as a class, and time to make notes before asking students to speak in front of the class.</p> <p>Respond with interest to students' contributions in the lesson before you correct mistakes to help build an atmosphere in which learners feel comfortable to speak up. Focus on common errors at the end of a fluency-focused activity rather than correcting on the spot.</p> <p>Vary the Teacher to Students (T-Ss) interaction pattern by nominating different students to lead classroom discussions.</p>
It's challenging to manage open class discussions and keep all students engaged	<p>Try the following strategies to increase the chances of a lively discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• invite students to react and respond to each other's ideas</li> <li>• ensure all students participate</li> <li>• prompt with ideas to get students started if necessary and allow thinking and preparation time</li> </ul>

- ask for examples and justifications

### Monitoring and Feedback

Problems	Solutions
If students are wearing masks, it can be difficult to see if they are engaged or confused	Implement a system of simple gestures or 'traffic light cards' to help students signal that they need help more discreetly e.g. thumbs up or green card for 'I'm OK or I'm finished', thumbs down or red card for 'it's difficult and I need help.'
It's not possible to approach students to monitor written work or correct work on the spot	Use mini whiteboards (or A4 scrap paper). Students write their answers in clear, large handwriting and hold them up, so the teacher can check from further away.
It's not possible to stand close to students to monitor speaking tasks	Where possible have desks in a horseshoe, so you can sit centrally at a distance of 1 to 2 metres to monitor speaking tasks. To do this successfully, focus on listening to one pair at a time. You may have to ask quieter students to speak up.
Students are reluctant to answer in front of the class if they haven't had the chance to compare answers with a partner first	<p>Mini whiteboards can also be a good solution here as the whole class can be asked to hold up answers at the same time.</p> <p>Try using different feedback techniques that provide some prompts to help students come up with a correct answer. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the teacher writes the the board but includes answers on some wrong answers. Students say if they agree or disagree.</li> <li>• The teacher writes the correct answers up in the wrong order. Students give the correct order.</li> </ul>

### Classroom materials

The teacher is not able to approach students to hand out worksheets.	<p>If the technology is available, email materials to students in advance of the lesson or present materials on slides.</p> <p>Number handouts and place them on students' desks before the start of the lesson.</p>
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	<p>Reduce the need for worksheets by using strategies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dictating questions for students to answer or using a <b>dictogloss</b> to introduce a short text.</li><li>• having students brainstorm a list of things they want to know about a text based on its title and accompanying pictures and then read or listen to find answers to their own questions.</li></ul>
<p>Masks mean teachers and students are unable to see (or demonstrate) mouth position for pronunciation work.</p>	<p>Use pictures on the board or your hands to demonstrate in class – allow students to do this outside of class by checking themselves using mobiles/mirrors.</p> <p>Useful videos of a teacher modelling individual sounds can be found <b>here</b> on the BBC Learning English website.</p>