

The Elements of Effective Instruction is a framework for accessing research, tools, and strategies that build student engagement in and ownership of their learning. We designed that framework for classroom environments that might include virtual and synchronous instructional strategies, but not to focus specifically on them.

This tool highlights the specific features, strategies, and resources that bring powerful instruction into virtual spaces.

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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### Key Features

- Technology that enables virtual interactions and connects virtual and in-person learners.
- Physical and virtual classroom spaces.
- Relationships among teachers and students.
- Routines and norms for interacting, collaborating, and moving through learning experiences.

### Strategies for Remote and Hybrid Environments

1. Develop fluency with classroom technology used routinely with students, particularly with techniques for grouping students who are online and in-person.
2. Learn a few tools well so that students trust your expertise and disruptions are minimized.
3. Design classroom and virtual spaces to be warm, welcoming, and engaging.
4. Take time to build and maintain a sense of community and connection among all the members of the class; relationships matter as much as content if students are to have any success in online learning.
5. With students, build on classroom norms and routines to establish norms specific to online learning and class interactions.

### K-5 Resources

1. [10 Strategies Designed to Engage Elementary Students Online](#)  
(Caitlyn Tucker, August 2, 2020) A list of suggestions for teachers of younger learners that includes specific technology tools that integrate the home environment, offer students choice, and encourage peer sharing.
2. [Using Social Stories to Establish New Routines](#)  
(Edutopia, October 6, 2020) A video example and an interview that show how social stories can be used to orient young students to virtual learning.

### 6-12 Resources

1. [8 Ideas Designed to Engage Students in Active Learning Online](#)  
(Caitlyn Tucker, July 9, 2020) A list of suggestions for teachers that includes specific technology tools that encourage collaboration, creativity, and independent work.

## K-12 Resources

1. [8 Strategies to Improve Participation in your Virtual Classroom](#)  
(Edutopia; August 21; 2020) A list of synchronous and asynchronous strategies that includes a video of “discussion mapping.”
2. [Bringing Humanity to the Virtual Classroom: Lessons Learned from My Desk](#)  
(Ben Chase for GSP; January 2021) A teacher from a Maine high school shares his lessons about virtual learning from a year of challenge
3. [How Can We Make the Most of Synchronous and Asynchronous Time in Distance Learning?](#)  
(Katie Martin; Summer 2020) A blog that identifies challenges and considerations for effective remote learning; it includes four structures for synchronous learning and four structures for asynchronous learning.
4. [How to Create Community in a Virtual Classroom](#)  
(Edutopia; August 17, 2020) An article that emphasizes the importance of students feeling a sense of belonging; it also provides a list of several activities for building community in a virtual setting.
5. [Keeping Students Engaged in Online Learning](#)  
(Edutopia; April 8, 2020) A video with six tips from veteran teachers with strategies to help students navigate, focus, and actively participate in online learning.
6. [How to Forge a Strong Community in an Online Classroom](#)  
(Edutopia; April 15, 2020) An article that emphasizes strategies for building and maintaining connectedness in online learning.
7. [7 Activities to Build Community and Positive Classroom Culture During Online Learning](#)  
(NY Times; August 27, 2020) An article that includes audio and visual examples and specific descriptions of activities to encourage students to share and reflect in a virtual setting.

## CLEAR, SHARED OUTCOMES

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### Key Features

- Both long-term and short-term learning outcomes are clear.
- Success and scoring criteria are established and shared.
- Materials, activities, and assessment tasks are selected by teachers and students to align with the learning outcomes.
- Students can explain how tasks and experiences align to learning outcomes.
- Students use standards and learning targets to reflect on their own progress and set goals for growth.

### Strategies for Remote and Hybrid Environments

1. Provide students with a course or unit outline that identifies the course competencies, progression of learning activities and outcomes, and a timeline for assessments.
2. Use clear scoring criteria (or success criteria), aligned to course competencies or learning targets and provide these to students prior to engaging in learning.
3. Organize your online platform so that it is clear to students which tasks or assignments are aligned with which competencies and scoring criteria.

4. Provide time in small group or one-on-one conversations for students to reflect on their progress toward the learning targets or competencies and set goals for growth.

### **K-5 Resources**

1. [Students Unpack a Learning Target](#)  
(EL Education; January 2011) A video of a teacher guiding a 4-5 grade class through a learning target on transitional words and phrases in writing.

### **6-12 Resources**

1. [Standards-Based Learning](#)  
(CVU Learns) An outline of standards-based learning that includes design, assessment, grading, and reporting considerations and provides links to scales for teachers plus examples of “know, understand and do” templates.
2. [Promoting Metacognition](#)  
(Brown University) An article that provides prompts for students to practice thinking and reflecting about their learning.

### **K-12 Resources**

1. [Meet the Single Point Rubric](#)  
(Cult of Pedagogy; February, 2015) A blog post and tool that makes the case for simplifying rubric language to one point to provide clarity and inform feedback and self-assessment.
2. [Power Standards: Focusing on the Essential](#)  
(Heather Clayton; 2016) An article that promotes the prioritization of standards to ensure depth and rigor; it also outlines criteria and a process for selection.
3. [The Why, What, and How of Learning Scales](#)  
(Bill Rich; February 6, 2019) A blog that explains the difference between rubrics and learning scales and offers tips to improve writing and using learning scales.
4. [Writing Good Learning Outcomes](#)  
(UC Davis) An article that provides a model and an interactive tool for generating observable and measurable learning outcomes.

## **VARIED CONTENT, MATERIALS, AND METHODS**

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### **Key Features**

- Content allows student choice and multiple ways of learning.
- Students can access a number of ways to learn course content.
- Assessment allows multiple ways for students to show what they have learned.

### **Strategies for Remote and Hybrid Environments**

#### **Content**

1. Narrow coverage to the most essential content needed to progress in your content area.
2. Select content that reflects an understanding of multiple perspectives and critical issues.
3. Select materials to meet a variety of student learning needs.

4. Whenever possible, give students a choice in selecting content that will meet learning outcomes.

### **Process**

1. Provide multiple ways for students to engage with information, including teacher-led sessions, video and audio recordings, and online materials.
2. Use breakout rooms, message boards, and other online tools to create a variety of grouping methods for students.
3. Use playlists, menus, and other blended learning and flipped classroom techniques to enable choice in how students learn.
4. Build flexibility into the schedule to allow students with divergent needs at home to access learning at different times and in different ways.
5. Schedule students, preferably in groups, for check-in times to answer questions, provide feedback, and guide learning.

### **Product**

1. Allow students to demonstrate learning in multiple ways to reach learning objectives based on the resources available to them.
2. Design summative assessments that do not rely on controlled environments to provide accurate information about student learning.

### **K-5 Resources**

1. [7 Choice Board Examples for Remote Learning](#)  
(Kodable; August 3, 2020) A blog that showcases samples of choice boards for remote learning.
2. [Keeping Kindergartners Engaged in Distance Learning](#)  
(Edutopia; August 10, 2020) An article that outlines pros and cons for several virtual strategies aimed at keeping kindergartners engaged in virtual learning.

### **6-12 Resources**

1. [A Flipped Flow for Blended or Online Classes](#)  
(Caitlyn Tucker; July 24, 2020) A blog that lists examples of digital tools that can be used to assist teachers in planning for asynchronous learning.

### **K-12 Resources**

1. [A 5-Step Guide to Making Your Own Instructional Videos](#)  
(Edutopia; August 20, 2019) A blog that provides helpful tips for teachers to create and record authentic videos for instruction.
2. [How to Improve Distance Learning for Students with IEPs](#)  
(Edutopia; June 29, 2020) A blog that outlines the importance of parent involvement and provides strategies for synchronous and asynchronous learning.
3. [How to Make Station Rotation Work During Hybrid Learning](#)  
(Edutopia; September 29, 2020) A blog that helps teachers design flexible learning stations that can be applied in a variety of settings.

## PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

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### Key Features

- Routines, strategies, and instruction support student learning of essential skills and knowledge by providing opportunities for practice.
- Opportunities for practice allow students to work independently, cooperatively, and with teacher guidance.
- Students practice applying complex skills over time within and across disciplines.
- Teachers give students feedback that is timely, specific, and actionable.
- Students are taught how to give, interpret, and use feedback during their learning.
- Students have opportunities to use feedback to revise essential pieces of work.

### Strategies for Remote and Hybrid Environments

1. Establish regular routines for virtual check-ins.
2. Set up small group meetings for students to work collaboratively on projects or tasks with some guided support.
3. Only collect work that you will provide feedback on (reduce the volume to the most essential) and provide it within a reasonable time to allow for students to revise and resubmit.
4. Incorporate assignments into your course outline that require students to revise and incorporate feedback.
5. Set up a structure for students to provide feedback to one another. This could be by sharing and coding a Google doc, or by using a tuning protocol. These feedback sessions should be guided by the teacher until the groups feel comfortable with the process.

### K-5 Resources

1. [Focusing on Feedback in Distance Learning](#)  
(Edutopia; November 10, 2020) An article that suggests strategies for communicating feedback to students throughout the learning process.

### 6-12 Resources

1. [3 Strategies for Personalizing Feedback Online](#)  
(Caitlin Tucker; April 20, 2020) A blog that describes how to use technology to provide personalized audio and video feedback to students.
2. [A Guide to Remote Critiques of Art](#)  
A blog that outlines a process and provides sample illustrations and technology tools for art critiques in a virtual setting.

### K-12 Resources

1. [Assessment in Asynchronous Learning](#)  
(Crafted Curriculum; March 31, 2020) A blog that illustrates examples of ways to provide asynchronous feedback and assessment in virtual settings.
2. [Formative Assessment During Distance Learning](#)  
(WA OSPI) An article that describes the process of formative assessment with adaptations for young

learners and online learning; it also includes a table of explanations, sample actions, and possible actions.

3. [How to do the Feedback Loop in Distance Learning](#)  
(The Teaching Channel; April 28, 2020) A blog that suggests strategies for systems, structures, sharing the load, and closing the loop for providing feedback to students in distance learning environments.

## COMPLEX THINKING AND TRANSFER

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### Key Features

- Students engage in complex thinking throughout all stages of learning—from the introduction of new material to the application of what has been learned.
- Students ask and are asked questions that help them access and integrate knowledge to analyze, evaluate, and draw conclusions.
- Students are taught how to integrate and apply what they have learned within and across content areas and are given opportunities to practice.
- Students wrestle with complex and authentic problems.

### Strategies for Remote and Hybrid Environments

1. Develop interdisciplinary tasks that allow students to demonstrate transfer and application.
2. Incorporate opportunities for dialogue and debate in virtual learning settings.
3. Incorporate time for students to share individual perspectives and discuss critical ideas.
4. Pose open-ended, authentic questions that relate to student experiences.
5. Ask students to develop questions about content or topics that align to the learning outcomes and have students investigate answers to the questions they pose.
6. Build in time and space for students to grapple with new or complex ideas by allowing them to pause and reflect individually, by using chat features, and by creating opportunities for paired conversations.
7. Practice and model using norms and following protocols for engaging in discussions to allow all voices to be heard and appreciated.

### K-5 Resources

1. [10 Tips for Teaching Kids to be Awesome Critical Thinkers](#)  
(Marlana Martinelli; March 7, 2018) A blog that lists sample activities for students to dig deeper into learning and developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

### 6-12 Resources

1. [How to Lead Students to Engage in Higher Order Thinking](#)  
(Edutopia; December 9, 2019) An article that describes a process for using a thinking inventory and essential questions to prepare students for deep engagement.
2. [Teaching Problem Solving](#)  
(Brown University) An article that describes the problem-solving process and outlines strategies for incorporating communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and reflection activities to help develop these skills to reach a goal.

## **K-12 Resources**

1. [Five Ways to Help K-12 Students Transfer Their Learning to New Situations](#)  
(Edutopia; November 20, 2020) A blog that lists tools for helping students apply and transfer content knowledge across disciplines and contexts.
2. [Questions to Provoke Critical Thinking](#)  
(Brown University) A table of hierarchical question stems to develop higher levels of thinking.