TIPS FOR TEACHING VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN IN A DISTANCE-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

OVERVIEW:

Distance learning can be especially challenging for the visual arts/design classroom. However, teachers can plan successful art learning experiences for all students by establishing overall consistent structures, communications, and expectations, as well as by keeping a flexible mindset.

It’s important to keep in mind that the more current and relevant the lessons and topics are, the more students will likely be engaged. Not everyone has a computer or Internet access, and one computer is shared by many in some families. So, it’s key to not assume that everyone will have access. Additionally, each school and/or district may have different types of online software which—from a parent’s view—could create a challenge in setting up multiple platforms. Art educators should be flexible and consider providing physical, take-home learning packets as well. Lessons should be inclusive of all learners, scaffolded, and relevant to meet students where they are in their educational journeys.

The following lists, created by practitioners in the field, suggest approaches to successfully navigate the teaching of visual arts/design in a distance learning environment.

PREPARATION, PLANNING, AND PEDAGOGY TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Establish regular structures, set clear expectations, set-up communication systems, and keep lessons current and relevant. Distance learning requires adaptability, modification, and a flexible mindset. Prepare lessons in advance and plan to be nimble in the moment, in order to provide both group and individualized instruction as well as on-the-spot feedback and redirection.
Apply art knowledge from the classroom to real-life design challenges. Students love a challenge. Ask them to consider solving a problem through an artistic response. Some students are now designing games for their families using their art knowledge for aesthetics and materials they have found at home.

Develop a “minimum, better, best” list of art supplies that can be used in a kit that students can take home.

Work with administration to align resources throughout the school so that students receive one “education kit” encompassing all courses.

Be flexible in allowing students to take the assignment in another direction and to express their views, interests, and feelings. How wonderful it is to have a student explain why it is important for them to try another idea to submit. Be that positive and accepting place where students can express their insecurities, mourn their losses, and express what they’re going through. Visual arts allow for a safe space for socioemotional learning (SEL).

Engage the family. Assignments that include student choice and voice will allow for scaffolding and increased student engagement. When parents are involved because they are excited about the learning, art becomes more important in our virtual learning process. It is also important to build opportunities for families to fully participate together and not just “assist” the child/student. Make family participation an important component.

Provide valuable and timely feedback, don’t overly focus on grades. Assessment is going to look different. Students still need ongoing feedback and will benefit from encouragement and validation based on the evidence within their artwork. Be prepared to provide regular feedback and redirection, and to help process their reflections and feelings.

Showcase their work and accomplishments. Celebrate the art in their daily lives. Not every assignment has to be focused on making a finished product. Find ways to celebrate students’ successes, whether through virtual exhibitions or individual conversations. Show students how to celebrate and apply their artistic knowledge successfully to the everyday; have them go outside and identify textures and patterns in nature, find objects in their homes that exemplify five geometric shapes, or find a functional kitchen object that they feel is “art” and explain why. Take a virtual field trip to one of the great museums and ask them to write a poem about an artwork that inspires them.

Focus on socioemotional learning early. Student well-being should be the center of our work right now, and our instruction needs to reflect a place of caring. In this new distance-learning environment, your students need to be able to reconnect and find connections to everything that was once normal. Talk about things outside of school, encourage brain breaks and exercise, be willing to be vulnerable, and share your own home work space/studio. For additional resources, review the Social and Emotional Learning resources developed by CASEL, including free professional development, located here.

SUPPLIES, MATERIALS, AND ORGANIZATION TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Develop a “minimum, better, best” list of art supplies that can be used in a kit that students can take home. Work with administration to align resources throughout the school so that students receive one “education kit” encompassing all courses.
Imagine everyday materials as art supplies. Often, students do not have many, if any, art supplies at home. Lessons and projects should be designed with everyday materials, tools, recycled items, etc., as an option. This is a great opportunity to teach students how to problem solve around an obstacle, just as many professional artists do in their practice.

Develop visually exciting documents/videos to connect with students. Visually compelling worksheets, videos, and materials will grab your students’ attention but the content should be streamlined and succinct. Instead of only providing directions for students to read, create images and videos to explain processes.

Consider clay carefully. Use of single-use packaged clay allotments for students is recommended. Do not allow clay that has been touched by students to be recycled and reused during this time. Prepare to pivot to 3-D design, art history, or critique for lessons.

Purchase or make student journals/sketchbooks to document artistic process and idea generation, and to serve as a place to practice technical and artistic skills. While these could be purchased, they could also be constructed by providing loose copy paper or by binding copy paper. A folder with copy paper in it is also an alternative.

**COMMUNICATING AND ADVOCATING TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **Connect the arts to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).** Reminder! NAEA already offers resources and support for considering the arts as part of a well-rounded education plan [here](#).

2. **Utilize NAEA advocacy resources.** The NAEA Advocacy Toolkit, “Visual Arts Matter” publication, white papers, and position statements are available to support you in making the case for visual arts/design educators and programs.

3. **Take part in planning efforts.** Offer to support school leadership in planning and establishing schedules and routines for the coming school year. In many cases, especially preK–8, art educators know the majority of the student body and can be very helpful in considering creative scheduling solutions, inclusive of the arts.

4. **Follow up-to-date health and safety guidance.**
   - Centers for Disease Control: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov), specifically for schools: Childcare, Schools, and Youth Programs, Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting.
   - World Health Organization, specifically for schools: Key Messages and Actions for Covid19 Prevention and Control in Schools.
   - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

**Note:** This resource used in tandem with the “Preparing for School Year 2020–21: Tips for Returning to the Classroom” will aid in planning for a blended learning/hybrid back-to-school model.

Updated May 18, 2020

Founded in 1947, the National Art Education Association (NAEA) is the leading professional membership organization exclusively for visual arts/design educators, advancing visual arts education to fulfill human potential and promote global understanding. Find out more at [www.arteducators.org](http://www.arteducators.org).
OVERVIEW:

Preparing to return to the arts classroom may seem daunting, but it can be successfully tackled by systematically addressing each component of your instructional plan. Think through scheduling, managing materials and supplies, and designing lessons. Volunteer to get involved with school planning efforts—including scheduling, supply ordering and distribution, and room setup/organization. As an arts educator who likely knows a significant portion of the student body, you can provide valuable insight as well as creative problem-solving across grade levels, subjects, and classrooms. As for materials and supplies, individual student kits may best serve students, and organizing them can require coalescing school-wide resources—especially if supply orders for the next school year have already been placed. See the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for current guidance on safe handling and disinfection of materials and objects. (Links are below.)

Be prepared and flexible as many material-rich lessons may need to be modified. When looking at lesson plans and curriculum, include socioemotional learning standards (SEL) alongside art and academic standards to ensure a 360-degree approach to each student.

The following lists, created by practitioners in the field, suggest approaches for successfully navigating the return to the classroom.
Make multiple plans and embrace a flexible mindset. Re-entry to the classroom may take different forms and it is important to have multiple plans and a flexible mindset. Be proactive by working with colleagues to imagine a variety of scenarios and think through different pathways to reopening.

Plan for a phased reopening. Establish options for a phased reopening—such as beginning with reduced hours or certain classes/grades—that will allow for monitoring the impact before a full reopening. Consider spacing/social distancing, staggered scheduling, transportation/busing, eating areas, and waiting areas (e.g., pickup).

Increase transition time. When possible, provide longer transitions for cleaning the art room and tools between classes. Work with colleagues and administration to plan for flexibility within the overall schedule.

Consider mobile teaching options. Although “art on a cart” is not everyone’s favorite approach, it may be safer to have the art teacher move from room to room. Classroom teachers and other subject area teachers may travel and rotate as well. This can minimize the number of tools and spaces that need to be cleaned/sterilized regularly.

Aim for reduced class sizes. While smaller class sizes can allow for greater social distancing, it takes whole-school planning to consider all classrooms and courses of study. Staggered scheduling can support these efforts.

Be a resource to others. As an art educator, you are uniquely positioned to support whole-school thinking and planning. Volunteer to be a part of re-entry teams and add your voice as a creative problem-solver. Art teachers often work across the entire school and have a bird’s-eye view of school systems and structures that can benefit students and position the arts as critical.

Work as one unified school community. Coalesce whole-school supplies to create individual student kits and only order to fill existing gaps. Work with the administration to align resources throughout the school so that students receive one “education kit” that will encompass all courses. When possible, engage parents, partners, and local businesses in addressing supply gaps to ensure equity and access for all students.

Follow CDC and WHO guidance on cleaning and sanitizing tools, materials, furniture, and spaces. Wash/sanitize all shared tools for students after each use. Create designated areas in the classroom that are for specific purposes in order to separate sanitized tools and resources, etc. Tables and stools should be wiped down several times per day. See: Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Schools and Workplaces.

Be nimble with the curriculum. Favorite lessons and units may need to be modified or postponed based on concerns related to collaboration, shared-supplies, and high-touch materials. Be prepared to think through new ways to explore your curriculum.

PREPARATION, PLANNING, AND SCHEDULING TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

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SUPPLIES, MATERIALS, AND ORGANIZATION TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Create individual student kits. If possible, provide each student a kit of “high-touch” supplies—such as pencils, erasers, drawing materials, and brushes—that can be carried with them. Develop a “minimum, better, best” list of art supplies that can be used for each project.

2. Work as one unified school community. Coalesce whole-school supplies to create individual student kits and only order to fill existing gaps. Work with the administration to align resources throughout the school so that students receive one “education kit” that will encompass all courses. When possible, engage parents, partners, and local businesses in addressing supply gaps to ensure equity and access for all students.

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**SUPPORTING YOU IN FACILITATING DISTANCE LEARNING.**

The Remote Learning Toolkit is a repository of remote learning resources gathered in one place.