

Virtual Learning Quickstarts

from *The Educator Collaborative*

One barrier to successful online learning is helping students feel comfortable in an online environment. Students of all ages need support in things we as adults can take for granted.

These are all quick activities, organized by purpose.

On/Off Mics and Cameras	
<p>Students sometimes need help learning how to use different tools in your online platform. Not to mention, showing your face and speaking up online can be scary. Doing silly, low stakes, ice-breaker style activities can help kids feel more comfortable..</p>	
Simon Says <p>Use usual Simon Says rules, but be sure to include directions like “Simon Says turn on your camera,” “Unmute your mic... oh! I didn’t say Simon Says!”</p> <p>Include other fun callouts while they are unmuted (“tweet like a bird,” “Simon says, point to your head”).</p> <p>Then, make a student the leader.</p>	Funny Faces <p>Participants turn off their camera. Leader says an emotion and they and make that face. Leader counts down: “3... 2... 1... go!” Participants turn back on their camera and laugh together.</p> <p>More advanced: leader describes a situation: “it is freezing cold in your room!” and students act it out and turn on their camera on cue.</p>
Rock, Paper, Scissors Competition <p>Pair students up like in a sports bracket. Cameras off... prepare your rock, paper, scissors... okay, 3, 2, 1... cameras on!</p> <p>You can keep the brackets going across days or just have fun at the start of a lesson doing a few quick rounds.</p>	Who Else Has...? <p>Participants start with cameras on. Each round the leader says something true about themselves, any participant that shares that true thing (and wishes to disclose it), turns off their camera and leaves off for the round. The leader says 3 true things and tries to keep as many people on as possible.</p> <p>“I have a younger sister.” “I speak three languages.” “I can do a handstand.”</p>

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Quick Write + Hold up to the Camera

One key behavior of virtual learning is having students show you their work so you can do a quick formative assessment, either by scanning the video grid with your eyes or by taking a screenshot to look later. Help students practice this behavior in a few fun ways.

Memory

Riff on the card game when you flip cards to find matches, only students each write a number 1-5 on a piece of paper.

Choose a student to be the first player, directing students to turn on cameras by name, "Elianny and Marcus".

There may be multiple matches or no matches... that is okay! The goal is to be silly and get them comfortable.

Finish This Doodle

The leader draws a very simple line or shape and then participants copy the line or shape and add to it. On "3... 2.. 1... go!" Participants hold their doodles to the camera. Oo and aah together for a few minutes about the creative ideas.

Leader can model turning a circle into a few quick things: balloon, apple, Pacman.

Write a Poem Together

Leader gives a topic that can be shared by everyone ("weather outside today," "what it feels like to be sad," "what you wish for," "my favorite dessert would be one that...", etc.).

Participants each write a line that could fit into a poem with that topic.

On "3... 2... 1... Go!" they hold it to the camera and then the leader reads their screen, reading across the grid of faces, to create the poem.

Treasure Hunt

The leader sends a private chat to one person, that person will be the "treasure."

Everyone else can decide for themselves if they will be "sand," "bugs," "rocks," or "palm trees." Draw or write yours, only show the page on camera when your name is called.

A player goes one square at a time on their grid, starting with themselves, calling names until they find the treasure. *Note: everyone's grid populates differently, that is okay, it is only for the player to find.*

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Community

A virtual environment can be a strange and uncomfortable one for students and adults. Community building matters just as much as in-person teaching. Take the time you need to build community, even making the “quickstart” sometimes “not so quick.”

Annotate a Current Events Photo

Leader pulls up a current events image from a news source (such as New York Times’ “What’s Going On In This Picture?”), this could be from politics, science, technology, arts and culture, really any recent topic participants may have on their minds or find interesting.

Have participants use annotation tools to mark up the image quietly. If no annotation tools are available in your platform, use the chat box or just sit and think.

Then, discuss or use the chat box to talk and reflect.

Lift a Line

Display a poem, song lyrics, or short text excerpt. Even better, play a poet or writer reading their own work while the text is displayed.

Ask participants to type a line that really speaks to them, for any reason, into the chatbox. Younger students can annotate, memorize, or even just raise their hand at a line their love.

Then, open a brief discussion to share a line and talk about why it struck the listener.

Breakout Room Brainstorm: Object Uses

Leader holds up an object from their home (like a fork, a shoe, etc.).

Participants will go into small break out rooms and together must list as many creative, silly, alternate uses (like a fork could... be a gnome’s comb, a lookout tower for a mouse, a key to a door, etc.).

Each room should keep a numbered list.

Return to the main room and see who has the most uses on their list.

Highs and Low

Invite participants to opt-in to share a personal high or low from recent weeks.

Set a protocol for responding, where the other participants will use hand signals (like “jazz hands,” virtual “high fives,” thumbs up or down) to respond or show support. Those sharing can choose to ask for ideas or help, otherwise the group will move on to the next person who would like to share.

Not everyone in the group needs to share nor should they be compelled to, until feeling comfortable.