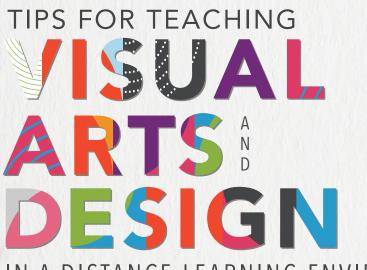# PREPARING FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2020–21

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

Updated August 2020

OVERVIEW:

Distance learning can be especially challenging for the visual arts and 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.

You play a critical role in facilitating arts learning in safe, affirming, and transformative distance-learning spaces. Be mindful of personal privilege, bias, institutional discrimination, and the impact that social inequities and manifestations of racism have on arts learning, especially with the Black Lives Matter uprising amid COVID-19. Make time to learn about and process the insurmountable effects of historical and heinous injustices. This will inform and guide your instructional planning process to ensure that your most vulnerable students and families are served with compassion, creativity, and invention to begin to **radically dream** a new future for art in your new learning environment.

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

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.

2 | **Encourage students to create a dedicated working space.** It is important for students to have a special space to do artwork/schoolwork and also be able to move away from that area. Larger families have a more difficult time providing space for everyone. Suggest a dedicated area of the kitchen or using blue painter's tape to mark off a "studio space."

3 | **Engage students with meaningful assignments/projects and ensure that artists and art styles are relevant to their lives**. Include work that is reflective of students' cultural backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Highlight artists, genres, and processes to which they feel a connection. Challenge them with new perspectives. Find out who the artists and protagonists are in alignment with the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color, especially those that are making art in this current moment. Make sure that you are representing and affirming your students' identities in your community of learners.

4 | **Apply art knowledge from the classroom to real life.** 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. Learning can happen outside of technology and in the community through things found in students' natural and urban living environments. Work with students and families in planning safe artmaking experiences free from screens and that can be found outside of their indoor living spaces. Explore what safe service-learning and **community-based** art activities could be included in your lesson planning.

5 | **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 social–emotional learning (SEL).

6 | **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.

7 | **Create distance-learning opportunities that acknowledge and celebrate family structures and dynamics.** Families are the first educators. Inserting outsider perspectives in home environments may challenge family educational systems that may differ from the educational system imagined in a public school. Procedures should invite student inquiry and social interaction within the home environment, acknowledging that this may be different for each student.

8 | **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.

9 **Focus on formative assessment.** It may not be possible for students to be assessed fairly amid teaching conditions and crisis. Formative assessment can help your students in continuing their learning trajectory. Eliminate failure from your assessment metrics and systems. Your students should instead have growth indicators that highlight their strengths and assets.

10 **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.

11 **Focus on social–emotional 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–emotional learning resources developed by CASEL, including free professional development, located **here.**

12 **Show that you care.** Put your students' **well-being** first during learning. Never begin learning by lamenting possible learning losses or skills needed. If your students know you authentically care, you will be surprised how far they will go to make their arts learning a priority.

13 **Plan for packets.** Understand and plan for offline assignments that can be picked up in hard copy at school, or mailed to students and families. There may be extenuating circumstances that prevent students and families from accessing learning virtually. Packet-like work is a last-resort teaching method that should be available as a means to continue students' progress.

14 **Be culturally responsive.** When **planning** for an inclusive distance-learning environment, understand the unique identities and cultures of your students and families so that their **funds of knowledge** are seen as assets that can be sustained and built upon in your virtual learning environment. **Culturally responsive** art teaching gives students **mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors** to seeing themselves in your curriculum and beyond.

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.

2 **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.

3 | **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.

4 | **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 3D design, art history, or critique for lessons.

5 | **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.

6 | **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Communicate with your students and families about their concerns and doubts to help navigate them through their shift in learning. Include frequent and accessible instructions in technology setup, procedures, instruction, schedules, and routines. These conversations will illuminate needs for modified schedules, devices, equipment, Wi-Fi, and tech support so students can fully engage in your virtual learning environment.

7 | **Plan for alternative materials.** Art supplies should be limited to what your school provides and what materials families commonly have around their homes. Give alternatives to required materials and be mindful of the disparities that challenge a family's ability to travel outside the home and purchase materials. When it comes to art supplies that are needed in virtual learning, be flexible and realistic in your budgetary needs at the onset of the year, as situations may change rapidly and require a shift in your delivery of instruction from virtual to hybrid.

8 | **Match student needs with supports.** Be knowledgeable of your students' diverse abilities, cognition, and mental health to support their management of time, technology, and independent learning in your virtual environment. Match students' needs with tech tools that support access to students' specific learning differences and account for the social–emotional needs of students who have experienced trauma or have different mental health challenges. Read your students' IEPs, 504s, and other intervention plans. Ask support staff how to help students in your new virtual learning environment.

9 | **Design for participation.** Deliver content and materials with an inclusive lens to ensure full and equal participation of all students in their learning. Resources and materials should require low to no Wi-Fi and be adaptable to the multiple abilities and languages in your school. Live engagements and synchronous activities should be structured for caregivers who are unable to actively monitor and support students' work during the school day.

COMMUNICATING AND ADVOCATING TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1 | **Connect the arts to the 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 and 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**, 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 Covid-19 Prevention and Control in Schools.**
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: **www.epa.gov**

5 | **Vocalize your visual arts and design needs.** Continue to **advocate** for equitable visual arts education that inspires **social change** in your communities given your new teaching normal. Visual arts has specific needs in hybrid learning. It is important that you voice your curriculum's needs and be an advocate for the needs of your students and families when it comes to art supplies that may be needed outside of the classroom.

6 | **Be specific with your language.** Use the words *coronavirus* or *COVID-19* when referring to the pandemic. If you hear xenophobic terms for COVID-19, say something. Research tells us to reduce prejudice by educating about the **disease**.

7 | **Prepare for ongoing support.** From the onset of the school year, create time and space for grieving. Make it clear to students that you recognize that a crisis has occurred, and that it is important that your community of learners experience loss together. Be able to identify when students and families are in need of help and have a list of resources to instantly connect them with the professional help that they may need. Consider creating accountability partners in the classroom where students can check in with their accountability partner at the start or end of class. Alternatively, some students may choose to journal independently. Ultimately, provide space and place for students to be reflective in conversation and to feel heard.

8 | **Identify communication preferences.** Your effectiveness in communicating with your community of learners will determine the level of student engagement in your new learning environment. Find out the ways your students and families **prefer to communicate** with you about the learning that is occurring in your virtual classroom using the language that they understand. If language is a barrier, work with cultural liaisons at your site to provide interpretation support and guidance on the cultural dimensions of communicating with families. If this support is out of reach, use digital communication tools such as the **Talking Points app**, which allows you to text in English, and the message is translated into one of 100 languages. Explore **Cogen's** seven C's in building relationships that are equitable, reciprocal, and encourage engagement with your community of artists. Listening **circles** are a great way for students to share what they value and what their needs are. The information gathered during circles can be the building blocks for any distance-learning platform and methods of instruction.

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.

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**.

REMOTE LEARNING TOOLKIT

SUPPORTING YOU AND YOUR LEARNERS DURING THIS UNPRECEDENTED TIME.

The *Remote Learning Toolkit* is a repository of resources curated to help visual arts educators navigate challenges and opportunities within and beyond the classroom in the 2020-21 school year.

NATIONAL ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION