

Blended Learning Masterclass

How to Motivate Your Learners in an Online Class

At Altissia, we launched our Blended Learning Masterclass to help foreign language instructors from all over the world familiarise themselves with the concepts of distance learning and blended learning.

In today's summary of the second webinar, we will provide advice and best practice on how to motivate learners in an online class.

By taking a superficial look at face-to-face and online classes, we are led to a simple observation: the main components remain the same, a teacher and a learner in a synchronous, real-time setting. A closer look reveals the real difference: **the presence of a screen in the online setting. The question is, is the screen friend or foe?**

While the screen allows you to connect with people all over the world, it also leads to a world of distractions and provides fertile ground for trolling and anti-social behaviour.

Let us start by tackling some of the better-known issues that can occur when teaching online:

- Technical problems WILL happen. Your learners might not be able to connect or might have issues with their internet. There might be lagging, headphones and/or microphones might not work... These issues will happen no matter how much you prepare and test before your session.
- Screens are known to be linked to emotional and cognitive distancing. This induces lower retention rates and lower engagement rates.
- While online, distractions are many and readily available. When attending an online class, it is very likely that attendees will have another window open on their screen to read their emails, look for a recipe, check their social media accounts, etc.
- Online interactions cause more fatigue. This makes it harder to concentrate. Many people find it more exhausting to attend virtual meetings. This is correlated with the absence of body language cues. For instance, when you look at someone on a screen, you do not actually make eye-contact. You generally look slightly downwards, which is not very engaging, thereby highlighting the emotional distance mentioned earlier.

These factors (lack of concentration, fatigue, emotional and cognitive distance, absence of body-language, potential technical problems) are some of the main differences between a face-to-face and a virtual classroom. **Acknowledging them will help you take the necessary steps to make your online class genuinely fun and motivating!**

In the following section, we will give you some tips and tricks based on the literature and our own experience in teaching online, in addition to the countless hours spent observing peers teaching online. There are probably many other tips that might work for you, as the age-old adage that "no one-size-fits-all" rings true in teaching, too. It is important for you as trainers to remain true to yourselves and to your teaching persona.

Create and Maintain a Link with the Group

As mentioned earlier, the absence of body language and the screen in general can make people feel less emotionally involved, as the impression of distance is heightened. Potential technical problems such as lagging can also contribute to an impression of impersonality and emotional distance.

Some advice to improve the communicative aspect and maintain the link with your learners:

- ✓ Keep in touch: even between classes, send emails or announcements with essential information, activities, instructions and/or feedback, showing that even at a distance you are available.
- ✓ Try to make eye-contact by focusing on the webcam (and then slightly to the right side). It might feel awkward at first, but it does create more of a link than looking downwards. Studies show that it makes people feel more bonded. A very simple but efficient trick is to always address participants by name. Their name is usually found right underneath their video, so you don't have to remember everyone's name, even if it's a very large group.
- ✓ Make sure you (and your students, ideally) have the right equipment. Check your webcam, and use headphones with a mic or a headset, to make sure the sound is of the best possible quality and there is no echo. This is especially relevant in foreign language teaching, as we are a crucial source of input, and pronunciation is an important part of learning.
- ✓ Have a professional outfit. Whilst you may be working from home, you are still in a professional context, and presentation is directly linked to a perception of competence.
- ✓ Build a community to help overcome the feeling of remoteness: from simple interactions between peers (very good for language learners) to sharing personal stories, humour, or simply listening, all the way to chats, Facebook pages, and WhatsApp groups where this sense of belonging can be extended beyond the classroom.

Keep Their Attention

As previously mentioned, online meetings and classes are frequently tiring and overwhelming. It is therefore crucial to keep virtual classroom time to a minimum. If you usually have a two-hour class, it might be difficult to keep learners focused and able to learn for the whole period in an online setting. Whenever possible, break it down into smaller sessions in a blended learning approach, where your learners split their time between shorter virtual classroom sessions and autonomous distance learning (also online) with activities you provide them.

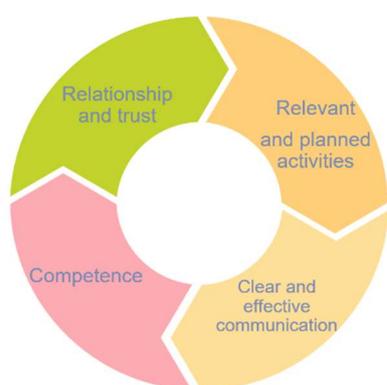
To capture their attention at the beginning of the class, you could use icebreaker activities that dive into the activity without long introductions or explanations.

Avoid lengthy blanks in class: in foreign language learning, we do need to give learners time to think, search for words and make sure they understand. Avoid wasting ten minutes looking for a webpage you want to show, setting up a video or trying to figure out how to use something. It is essential for you to master your tools and have your sources at the ready, either in an open browser window, or a link in your PowerPoint.

To avoid wasting precious learning time, set up a code of conduct when starting the class: rules for speaking, giving corrections, using a chat, addressing technical problems, etc.

As mentioned earlier, body language is limited online, so DO use (natural) hand gestures and facial expressions, be enthusiastic, even if you are struggling with the tool because if you are, your learners will be too! Avoid lengthy, monotonous explanations. These can be done via email or a recorded video.

Choose the right materials to avoid monotony. They need to be varied and short enough to grab the learners' attention. Favour interactive, spontaneous activities (dialogues, role-plays, games, chat, etc.). If you use a PowerPoint or something similar, make sure it's not full of text and repetitive, but a bit more eye-catching. Just be careful not to overdo it with the effects and colours. You want to grab their attention, not dazzle them.



This visual summarises the key pillars of learner engagement and motivation. **How you apply it is entirely up to you. Make it your own, apply it to your own teaching style and enjoy teaching online!**

Altissia specialises in the creation and implementation of language learning projects using new technologies. People are at the centre of everything we do. That is why we have made it our business to accompany communities and individuals and create a better language learning experience for all. We provide tools and services to measure and improve language skills. We work with each of our partners to make sure that every project is a success. We also work with teachers to help them bring out the best in their students. Visit our website www.altissia.org to find out more and follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#) to keep up to date with our latest news.



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