



Top Ten Things to be Aware of During your First Week of Distance Engagement

- 1. Social Distancing will limit social interaction:**
More than ever your students are on screens, but providing face-to-face video calls where they can speak with each other about life will be crucial. Give them time to speak before your video gathering begins or take them on a tour of your learning space. Bring your pet into the video gathering. Acknowledge the emotional rollercoaster we're all on and note that not every one's journey will look the same. This is a great opportunity for Windows and Mirrors work. Be an inspired adult in their lives as much as you are their teacher.
- 2. Technology will fail:**
Whether it's your computer dying, your headphones dying, your students' tech dying, the Wi-Fi cutting in and out, or the thing not doing the thing that the thing is supposed to do, count on the failure. Check the cables, maybe refresh the app, and most importantly breathe through it.
- 3. Communicate with Parents & Guardians:**
They are your number one resource at home. Students can no longer raise their hand and call you over. Consider a tutorial for your guardians to acclimate them to your expectations and digital platform. Call it a "Back-to-School Digital Meeting." Whether it's flexible office hours, a video call, screencast, or a simple FAQ, let them know how they can support their students. (Oh and, if you're using Google Classroom, set share settings to "All Can View." Parent accounts may not have the same access you or your students have.)
- 4. Consider access to devices:**
Remember that those who have, may have little. We are lucky if our students have technology at home. We are even luckier if they have access to wifi or costly cellular data. We're smooth sailing if they have more than one device. Acknowledge that adults may be working from home, and siblings likely need to be online, too. Families are sharing what they have, so make sure people know when to meet. And plan a backup option in case of conflicts.
- 5. Internet time is fluid:**
Count on the fact that students will be late to your virtual gathering. Not only are they out of routine, number 2 or 4 may present obstacles, too. If you plan to begin at 9am, let your students know that you're starting at 8:50. Those who are early can mingle and chat with each other. They'll be missing face-to-face time with peers (Snapchat and TikTok only go so far. See number 1).
- 6. Stick to the basics:**
In the first week, students will either be familiarizing themselves to the platform or to a new way of living at home and engaging online. Save the fancy new tech strategy you read about on that blog until next week once everyone has basic operating knowledge.
- 7. Sound Matters:**
Play around with your best options. You want to be able to hear and be heard. Headphones not only work great for families, but also for individuals who are in their own spaces. The microphones on earbuds tend to filter most ambient noises. Whether it's your dog snoring, your daughter playing drums, your tea kettle whistling, or simply your cell phone vibrating next to your computer, noise is inevitable and your participants will hear it. (Don't forget to check your cable connections; for example, Apple's lightning cable buds won't fit into your Chromebook without an attachment.)



8. **Be Camera Ready:**
Think about how you'll present online. Get dressed for video calls the way you would for the classroom. Consider what is behind you and try to find a private place away from home traffic. Remember that this is also something you'll need to communicate to your students. We've heard stories of students showing up for digital gatherings without shirts on!
9. **The activity you uploaded will get lost:**
We've all been there. You spent a lot of time on it. The activity is really beautiful. You've finally figured out this "tech" thing and your students are going to be so engaged. You go to bed feeling successful, content, and exhausted. The sun rises, and we all know what happens next. When you log on that morning, your activity is totally and completely gone... Save, save, save! Save what you can to your computer's hard drive AND click the save button on your platform a couple times for good measure.
10. **Remember to assign to all of your classes:**
This likely applies more to our middle school teachers, but perhaps you are an elementary colleague collaborating with your grade team. Be sure to understand how your platform assigns to different class sections. You will inevitably forget to assign a topic to multiple classes, which means you'll need to know how to do it quickly. Guardians and parents will flood your inbox until that activity is loaded (See number 3).



Top Ten Things You Should Grab from Your Classroom

- 1. Your Units of Study:**
Whether you've been asked to only reteach the year's topics or your district is requiring new learning, have the curriculum with you.
- 2. Paper and Post-its:**
Stick to your teaching style. If paper and Post-its are your thing, continue to use them digitally. Don't spend your time learning PowerPoint or Google Slides. Not only will this be easier for you, it creates continuity for your students.
- 3. Chart Paper:**
Take some chart paper with you so you can build your own anchor charts at home (markers, too!).
- 4. Take a video of the classroom/pictures of anchor charts:**
The pictures of your classroom will not only mean continuity for your students, they will also help parents and guardians learn the content you're discussing quickly and efficiently.
- 5. Doc Cam:**
Zoom has a great feature where you can split screen your image with a DocCamera. Bring that tool home with you so you can model thinking and writing work or even create an Interactive Digital Read Aloud.
- 6. Favorite read aloud titles:**
Ones for comfort and ones that are new: We all know the power of a good Read Aloud. With our students self-isolated, the power of a good read aloud could be beyond therapeutic.
- 7. Student Texts:**
A thing that has become is our students may have limited access to texts. Grab a couple of great texts from various genres from your class, so you can have shared reading experiences in small groups.
- 8. Have at least two Internet ready devices:**
If you can, take home an extra iPad, Chromebook, or laptop. Teachers can't speak enough about how important having a second device has been--whether it's preparing for the inevitable dead battery or needing to quickly access something on a second screen. (You might also want to have back-up chargers for your devices.)
- 9. A student roster of log-ins and passwords:**
One teacher even recommended giving everyone the same password so there's no time wasted when a student forgets it.
- 10. Mabel, Rasheed, and Gus:**
Last, but certainly not least. Your students will be so relieved to know their favorite Phonics Mascots are safe and sound with you at home.