Understanding your best approach to Remote Teaching

(adapted from [Tannis Morgan](#) CC-BY)

Scenario 1: Content is everything in my course.

How to distribute materials - organization tips.

When content is king in your course, your priority is distributing content to your students in an organized way. Avoid dumping an entire set of course materials into one location and instead organize content into weeks. The content files should be renamed to follow that convention (i.e. week8_PPT, week8_reading1, week8_worksheet). The key here is to organize content well enough that students can follow along and understand what to do and when.

What tools can I use?
Course materials can be distributed using a number of tools depending on your comfort level with teaching technologies. At the most basic level you might consider emailing weekly content to your students using the **Email Tool in Blackboard** which is already populated with your class list. Using clear subject lines like, *EDFT 101 Week 8 Course Materials*, will help students stay organized as well.

You might also make use of your **OneDrive** cloud storage account. You can use this as a container for your stuff and share the link with your students. Again, the key here is to organize it well: You can have a folder for each week, and label the folder and the content well – *Week 8 course materials*, *Week 8 PowerPoint presentation*

The third option is to create content folders in the **Blackboard** (PAWS Course Tools) to organize and distribute your content. As every course in the calendar already has a course shell waiting for use each term you're already set up to begin uploading content. Log in to Course Tools in PAWS and look for your course section in the course list provided. Again, organization is key to keeping students on track. Build Content Folders to house files, videos, links, and library resources in weekly chunks.

How should I communicate with students?
(organize messages i.e. Housekeeping, context to content, assessment instructions etc.)
Organization is key here as well. Categorize the types of messages you might have for students whether they be housekeeping items, adding context to course materials, providing clarity around assessments or providing feedback on students work.

Organizing your students into peer support groups can also help to alleviate a lot of questions. Their first task is to establish some group guidelines: what tool will they use to communicate with each other, how often will they do that, and who will assume the coordination of the group. You want students to solve their problems in a group first before emailing you in order to make emails to you more manageable. Anything they can't figure out in their groups they surface to you via the group coordinator. Tell them to use a specific subject line so your email can be easily sorted e.g. Week 8 Questions – Group Number. (Alternatively, create a shared document that students can add their comments and questions to, and invite students to answer each other's questions or challenges.)

Now, how do you deal with these questions coming at you via email? Tell them their questions/muddiest points have to be in by a certain day, then compile all of the class group questions into one doc and respond. This doc could be called Week 8 Question responses.

What tools can I use?
Again, the simplest tool the **Email Tool in Blackboard** as it already has your class list populated. The **Announcements Tool in Blackboard** also serves as a good way to get emails out to all your students at once and also provides an archive of your messages in the Blackboard course so students have one place they can go to find your communications.

But that's a lot of work typing up all those responses. Turn on voice to text or dictation. (You can do this in Microsoft Word on a Mac under the Edit button). You will have to do some text clean up but it's a good way to save some time.

Text seems so impersonal. You can record audio responses and share them in your shared **[OneDrive](#)** folder. Emailing them might be too big, but if you keep them short and concise, that might work as well. Alternatively, you can record these responses using the **Academic Video Tools** called **[Panopto](#)**. Panopto can link them directly into your Blackboard course or you can provide a link to the videos via email.

Scenario 2: The Heart of my Teaching is Discussions

Organizing and communicating discussion structure.
Clear communications with your students about how the discussions will be transitioning from a face to face discussion format into the online environment will be key to success.

You'll want to consider whether you'd like your course to discuss things asynchronously or synchronously. Asynchronous discussions can be handled with tools as simple as Email. They can be enhanced using tools like **[Blackboard](#)** Discussion Forums and Groups. If you're moving to an asynchronous model then communicating how things will work will be important. For example, if we are sticking to email and your class size is in the 20 or less range, you will want to structure the discussion around a key question or two per week and ask everyone to reply in that email thread. Designate a student or group to summarize the discussion or part of the discussion at the end of the week and post to everyone. Rotate that role. Consider doing your own wrap up email (Subject Line: Week 8 – Wrap Up) to capture any topics that didn't get addressed or need further exploration.

If you're wanting to keep your format of discussions live then a web conferencing tool like **[WebEx](#)** will need to be employed. Here the discussions can follow much the same format as in class with the instructor calling on students to respond, students raising their hands to speak and everyone taking part at the same time, same place. There will be some minor adjustments to accommodate the technology, but you and your class will soon become accustomed to the nuances. That said, organizing your questions and distributing the information to students will still be something that requires consideration.

What tools can I use?
The **Blackboard Discussion Forums** are designed to better thread asynchronous conversations and organize separate discussions and replies in one place. **WebEx** would be the best option for synchronous conversations and would provide you the option of recording the discussion for those who may not have been able to attend synchronously.

Distributing questions and schedule expectations
Organizing the questions into weeks and scheduling expectations (i.e. Post a response to the question by Wednesday and reply to 2 other posts by Friday) will keep things moving in an asynchronous environment. Again, when using **Email** or **Announcements** to distribute this info you can provide these on a Sunday evening for students to get working with through each week. If you're in **Blackboard Discussions** you might set up all the Threads ahead of time with the questions and expectations listed at the head of each week's topics. You might want to use **Announcements in Blackboard** or build an Item in **Blackboard** with the questions organized by week if you plan on using **WebEx** as a synchronous option for discussions.

Scenario 3: The heart of my teaching is group work

How to make online groups and communicate their use.
Mid-semester students are already in groups and doing their thing. They may have online communications strategies and tools that they're already using such as Google Docs or a Facebook Group in which case they can continue to use whatever is working for them. If your class is NOT already working in groups you can easily set them up using **Blackboard Groups.** Regardless of where students are working together you'll need to communicate their use and the expectations and schedule of the activities. You can use Emails, or Blackboard Announcements to convey regular communications, but having an accessible set of clear instructions and expectations within Blackboard might be a good option as well.

What tools can we use?
Allowing students to use the tools they're already familiar with is likely your best bet. If you want to use **Blackboard Email** to correspond with student groups you can get your groups established sending an opening email copying all the group members, with some initial instructions and expectations, asking them to connect and begin planning their strategies. This way each group has the initial contact info they need to begin making group decisions.

Using **Blackboard Groups** to establish groups allows you to better monitor group work as you can "pop in" to group discussions and activities to help facilitate the progress. These **Blackboard Groups** have a variety of tools with which they can interact, share files and information and have discussions.

USask also supports the use of **Wikis** as a collaborative space for students to work together. Wikis can be a great place for students to organize and create content that can be shared with peers and professors alike.

The fourth option would be to set up a **WebEx** room for each group to use and then add them as moderators. This way, students have the ability to work synchronously and screen share as they discuss their projects. Providing a link to these **WebEx** sessions within their **Blackboard Groups** would keep them limited to the students in each group.

How to provide feedback and facilitation to groups.
Providing feedback and facilitation can be as simple as responding to a "Check In" that students send you each week which gives you a status update and a glimpse into some work they've drafted. They surface any sticky problems that you can respond to. The subject line could be Week 8 Group 5 Check in.
Within **Blackboard Groups** you can comment within their **Group Discussion Forums** as well as building Group Assignments as check points along the way. Feedback can be provided in these Assignments and even scored if you wish.

Scheduled **WebEx** meetings with each group throughout the semester might also be an efficient way to get a lot of questions answered and feedback provided. Don't forget about ubiquitous technology like the **Telephone**. You can have a group call or have the group coordinator call you at a designated meeting time to do the check in.

Scenario 4: I teach in a hands-on space.

How to communicate the instructions and expectations of lab work.
As with the group work scenario your communications with students regarding the instructions and expectations of lab work can be done a number of ways. **Emailing** the class a PDF or Word doc that has the full lab activity outlined is always a possibility. Building this information in to an **Item in Blackboard** or even a **Graded Assignment** is also possible. The important thing is that you can provide clear instructions and expectations as well as a detailed schedule of activities for students to follow. You may also want to provide virtual office hours where at a certain time of the day you'll be actively answering emails, phone calls, or texts from your students. Alternatively, you could open a **WebEx** session for drop in questions or concerns as students work through the lab exercises.

Lab work can be the hardest type of teaching to do remotely as often there is equipment and techniques that cannot be replicated outside of the lab. In these situations, we have to compromise and just do our best with what's available. Below are a number of options for simulating parts of the lab experience.
· Consider creating video **demonstrations of techniques** using **Panopto.** These videos can be linked and uploaded directly to your Blackboard course or shared via email with a link.
· Search online for relevant video demonstrations or simulations already created.
· Consider the use of existing open sourced virtual labs that might support your students' work.
· Provide your students with raw data sets that they can analyse and summarize when active data collection is not possible.