Teaching Music Online

By DANIEL PARDO

Dear colleagues,

As we rapidly transition to online platforms, here are some considerations while setting up virtual classrooms.

Academic Disclaimer: While being far from being an all-encompassing document, it is meant to ignite a conversation so we can all benefit from our initiatives and propose the best protocols for our students. These observations come from 4 years studying online at Berklee College of Music and my courses design at Prairie View A&M University.

Let's jump right in!

Welcoming the Transition

- Design weekly topics instead of class-by-class materials.

- Create a welcoming video or letter to smooth the transition to online learning and establish a presence. Honesty and clarity go a long way in earning students' trust.

- While not necessary, introductory videos to weekly topics are also very useful. YouTube *unlisted* video links are the most effective to avoid incompatibility issues and long upload/download times.

- Establish a **conversational tone**. Present materials in an accessible and inviting manner.

Structure

For a class with a weekly topic, use the structure:

- Introduction

- Content & activities

- Conclusion (Give a sense of accomplishment and closure at the end of the week).

Making Instructional Videos

Keep instructional videos short so they can be:

- Easier to make

- Easier to digest

- **Easier to go back** and watch again

- If possible, add a transcript so students with slower internet connections can read the content and not be slowed down (discouraged) by technology.

Performance Lessons online

- Prepare a weekly general topic (especially those topics we don't devote as much time due of lesson time restrictions).

- Explore group lessons/seminars and **shorter individual lessons**.

- Focus on things other than tone (lack of proper microphones and/or recording techniques negatively affect tone perception through the internet).

- Address aspects of music that complement/fortify performance: Form, analysis, rhythm, phrasing, history, etc.

- Request students to have several **questions written out** before the lesson.

Additional Activities

- Have a "Watch Party" either on Facebook or YouTube, (i.e. The **Berliner Philharmoniker Digital Concert Hall** has open their library for public access world-wide for a limited time). https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/en/info

- Encourage research and feedback through forums. They allow students to have a casual, yet scholar dialogue.

- Assign power-point presentations. This is a great way for them to learn how to teach and get involved, and for you to let them ride with training wheels on.

- Since everyone is in front of their computer these days, this is a great time to invite guests to share experiences with your students or talk about alternative subjects. We are connected world-wide and the currency is time!

Assignments

- Take time to explain how to make PDFs, MP3s, and MP4s (Unlisted YouTube links may be more practical) and adhere to a naming convention that works for you, or you'll end up with 1,000 untitled documents on your *downloads* folder.

- Formulate easy assignments per week on a easy-to-follow schedule. Forums are great tools for this. Note: Students will have to work a lot for many classes so **be considerate and keep it fun!**

- Assign recording projects (audio or video) through their phones. It's not about a quality recording but practicing the recording experience and meeting deadlines. Audition preparation largely depends on these skills.

Quizzes and Tests

Online training allows more flexibility and less crowd control than a classroom. Use quizzes to fortify the learning experience, rather than measuring content retention:

- Allow **multiple passes** at each question.

- Reinforce important concepts through "true-false" questions.

- Set them up for **long-term success**: If students can succeed in a quiz (graded or non-graded), they will be more confident and become more involved in the subject.

Closing Thoughts

- Learning online can be intense and fun. This channel offers the opportunity to teach and learn in different ways and participate in unusual ones.

- Students will have to adjust to multiple teaching styles at once, so take time to **consider their overall workload**.

- Some students will not feel comfortable with their surroundings on a video conference. Traditional **group chats are an excellent alternative**. In fact, 10 years ago they were the standard! One of

them per week is enough. Students need time to digest the content and come up with questions.

- Pace the amount of content presented weekly so it remains quality over quantity.

Adapting lessons and classes to a different medium offer the chance to experiment with different methodologies. The normal interaction of a lesson is challenged by some technological barriers, but there is still much for a mentor to offer each student. Thankfully, we are in a creative field so limits do not apply to us when it comes to all the things we can accomplish.

Best wishes to you designing the best classes for your students, enjoy your coffee ☕, and if I can be of any assistance, please reach me at dapardo@pvamu.edu

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