

# Chapter 5 | Instruction

## Getting Started

### Introduction

Online teaching in adult education, whether it happens in class or at a distance, is ever evolving. These changes are due to more widespread availability of free and licensed edtech tools and curriculum products, along with increased access to learning made possible by mobile technologies. This evolution in online teaching accelerated dramatically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the United States, practitioners and professional development providers have come together in webinars and communities of practice to share innovative strategies and resources. Much innovation has been hatched in IDEAL Consortium states, buoyed in part by their past efforts to implement distance education. One lesson we have learned is that while the major functions of a distance teacher may mirror those of a classroom teacher, the tools and methods at times need to be different. This chapter introduces an approach to distance and blended learning instruction that encompasses both what we have learned from these teachers and the opportunities made possible by new technologies.

A key takeaway from past experience is that, in distance learning, even when learners are working independently and possibly primarily through an online curriculum, teachers still play a vital role in providing instruction, feedback, and support. Since many adult learners may not have had previous distance or blended learning experience, teachers must endeavor to guide them, assign supplemental instructional activities as needed, and provide encouragement as they work toward their goals. We call this approach *involved instruction*, where teachers are actively engaged in their students' learning—even though they are remote.

### Involved Instruction

Some of the first research on online distance education in adult education shows that effective distance learning requires more than passing out login information to an online curriculum. Rather, it must include:

*A continuum of instruction, ranging from high engagement in social interaction to individual independent learning opportunities that may include some minimal electronically mediated instructor to learner and one to one learner interactions (Askov, Johnston, Petty, & Young, 2003, p. 67).*

In another early and important study, Zhao et al. (2005) found that the amount of instructor involvement positively impacted the quality of the student experience; increased involvement meant increased success. They defined

involvement as the “extent to which the instructor is involved in actual delivery of content and available for interactions with the students” (p. 1846).



Minimally, this means a teacher assigns appropriate content and then periodically monitors learner work in an online curriculum and provides feedback or encouragement through email, an app like WhatsApp, or the curriculum’s communication features. Ideally, some measure of responsive teacher-student interaction should be a regular aspect of the learning experience. More teacher involvement could include periodic in-person or virtual face-to-face meetings via telephone or video conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, WebEx) along with the assignment of supplemental activities to support learning. Teachers can foster further involvement by creating facilitated opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction online. (See Appendix B for a list of key activities required to monitor and support learners at a distance.)

I set up small WhatsApp groups to give students a space to ask each other questions or build community. Many already had WhatsApp, so it was easy to get started.

—A teacher in Texas, explaining how she established communication with her students after school closures in response to COVID-19.

Such interaction is possible today because of improvements in technology, which allow for a great variety of instructional activities and communication formats. These technologies make both students and teachers more comfortable working online and increase student motivation and outcomes. Online collaborative activities foster community among students because they support each other with both academic content and technical aspects of the online work. Most social media tools are great for this purpose. Integrating some social media into your instruction encourages collaboration and supports peer learning. Prior research shows that students posting and responding to each other leads to rich interactive learning experiences because, through that communication, learners establish social presence. They are seen. This is beneficial even for beginning literacy students (Bigelow et al., 2017; Vanek et al., 2018).

## Benefits of Involved Instruction

Involved instruction also supports learner persistence. In this approach, an instructor takes on the role of a facilitator, and the online curriculum and supplemental materials become a resource, not just the sole means of instruction. As a facilitator, an instructor mediates between the learner and the online content, personalizing learning. Because an instructor is more present, they can provide support and learning activities that best suit a learner's needs. An excellent example of this is found in the work of Delgado Community College in Louisiana. Instructors at Delgado have created an online curriculum that is used by teachers across the state as a basis for instruction. Using Google Classroom, Slides, and Docs, teachers are able to personalize learning using targeted responses to learners' work and assigning supplemental resources as needed. A student developing proficiency with online learning in this supportive approach can build the confidence and computer skills they need to succeed in online learning (Sharma et al., 2019).

## Components of Involved Instruction

What does involved instruction look like? In 2013, a Project IDEAL instructional strategies study group convened under the leadership of Dr. Jere Johnston to explore the state of distance education instruction and to describe the practices used by teachers identified as "successful" by their states' distance education leadership. The study group members interviewed these teachers and noticed similarities in their work that illustrate how to provide involved instruction. Common practices of these innovative teachers included the following:

- Used blended learning, even if they needed to work completely remotely from learners
- Focused on using one primary curriculum
- Provided supplemental learning activities and resources when learners required more instruction
- Organized online learning using a digital homeroom, a website hosting links to all learning activities
- Adopted technology tools to suit instructional and content needs
- Made use of computer labs where they were teaching
- Continued to learn themselves

The full report from the group is called [New Models for Distance Classes in Adult Education](#). In the next section, we take key strategies and models from this study and combine them with more recent research, giving you more ideas about how to provide involved instruction.

## Preparing for Online Instruction

### Strategy One: Use a Blended Learning Approach

Sometimes called "hybrid," these learning opportunities blend classroom (or remote face-to-face) and online instruction. This approach to instruction is highly effective. For example, in Arizona, level gains for the state's adult learners participating in blended learning moved from 6% above those made by learners participating in traditional in-person classes in 2014 to 16% above in 2015 (Vanek et al., 2018). Why? Blended learning extends the amount of time spent learning and allows teachers to intensify learning by differentiating instruction, providing activities at a variety of levels to suit the knowledge and skills of different learners. Additionally, when done in the classroom, learners benefit from

ongoing support from the teacher as they learn how to learn online. Even if the face-to-face component of blended learning occurs remotely, with the teacher present to guide learners through problems, misconceptions, and applications of newly acquired computer skills, adult learners can move through learning material more efficiently and develop skills needed to continue their education independently online. For learners who have more time, it also may enable them to accelerate their learning by adding more study time outside of class, especially if the online component is well integrated with the face-to-face curriculum.



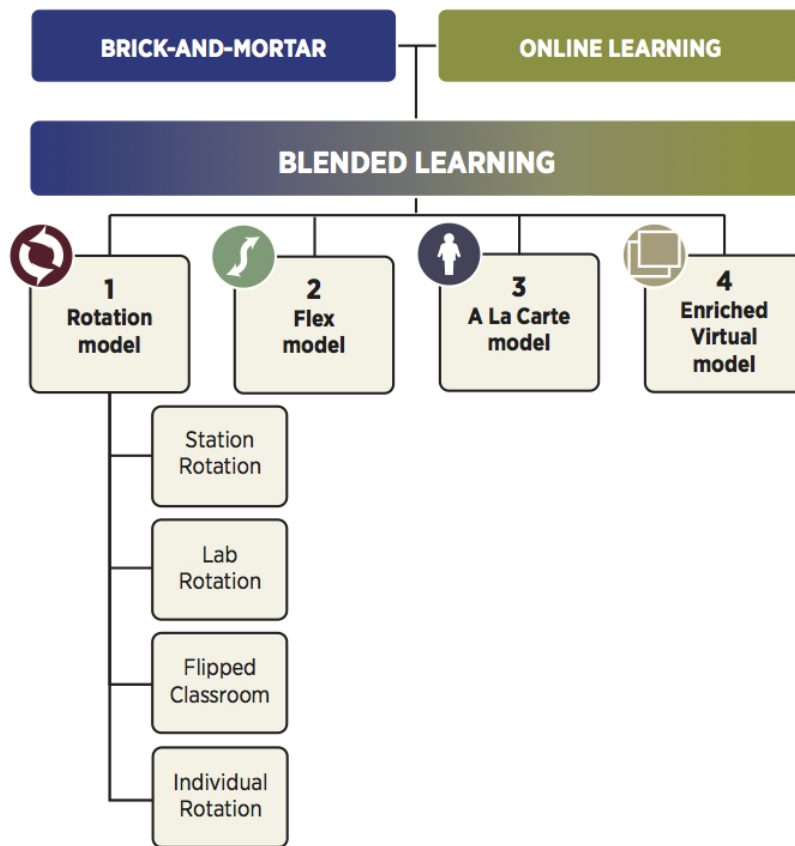
Peer-to-peer interaction is another benefit of blended learning. In class, conversation and support can prepare learners for online work. Face-to-face conversation and support creates opportunities for socially constructed knowledge, where classmates learn from and through interacting with each other. A blended learning teacher could extend this in-class interaction to an online space by periodically requiring learners to work in groups using cloud-based applications like Google Docs; email; or asynchronous discussion in blogs, WhatsApp, Remind, or Facebook groups, all of which are accessible on mobile devices. The impact of this interaction is not only the learning of content, but also developing the autonomy required for persistence and motivation in distance learning courses (Furnborough, 2012).

Most of the recent research defining blended learning, and examining models for its implementation, has been conducted in K-12 and postsecondary settings. The Clayton Christensen Institute has created useful models showing how different modes of instruction might be implemented in different blended learning scenarios. They define blended learning as:

*a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home; and the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience (Clayton Christensen Institute, n.d.).*

## Blended Learning Models

This integrated learning experience takes shape in several models, depicted in the graph shown here from the



[Christensen Institute.](#)

These definitions were constructed in the years before the pandemic. It is true that this reality has introduced additional considerations to take into account; however, understanding these different models can make ideas that feel very abstract seem more concrete when you are in the planning process.

Consider these definitions with enough flexibility to understand that though students might not be together with other students in a classroom, the benefits of blended or hybrid can be leveraged to support completely remote approaches that mix synchronous cohort classes held via video conference with independent or small group asynchronous learning activities coordinated via group messaging/texting tools.

Rotation models: Students rotate through different stations on a fixed schedule. At least one station is an online learning station. In the flipped model, this “station” happens at home, where students engage in essential instruction through video and other media. This “flipped” instruction allows face-to-face instructional time to go beyond just traditional lectures. Because of intentional sequencing, instruction happens at home, often prior to class, so students come prepared to engage in face-to-face instruction beyond just traditional lectures.

### Flex Model

Students use different learning resources fluidly, as needed. Most of the resources are online, and teachers provide instruction as needed to supplement online work.

### A La Carte Model

Students take a course online with an online teacher, as well as other courses in-person, to give maximum flexibility in student schedules. In adult education programs in the United States, this is sometimes called dual-enrollment or hybrid learning (Murphy et al., 2017).

## Enriched Virtual Model

This model is what many adult education programs may consider supported DL, where a student completes most work online and outside of school, and periodically checks in for face-to-face instruction with a teacher.

In their rigorous study of the use of online curricula, Murphy et al. (2017) found three modes of use that were spelled out as blended, hybrid, and supplemental. (See Chapter 1.) An important observation from their work is that for an instructional model to be considered blended, a teacher must employ online tools, in-class activities, and instruction as part of a collective whole, where learner work in each setting impacts what a teacher does in the other. More recently, Rosen and Vanek (2020) present descriptions of different blended learning models and offer examples showing why they are employed to meet particular programmatic goals and how they are implemented. [This guide](#) is important reading for any adult education practitioner hoping to start using a blended learning model.

Rosen and Stewart (2015) highlight these important steps for getting started with blended learning.

### 1. Know why you are using blended learning.

Decide on the overall goals for use of blended learning. Perhaps you want to move away from traditional, teacher-centered classroom instruction, moving it to videos and activities accessed online and using class time for collaboration and project work; this model of blended learning follows a flipped sequence. Perhaps you want to leverage rich online resources to move to competency-based learning or support your organization's efforts to integrate development of College and Career Readiness Standards. According to Rosen and Stewart (2015), each of these goals is well-served by blended models; we suggest being intentional in your work and being able to articulate the goals you have for embracing blending learning before you select technologies.

### 2. Find out about student access to devices and the internet.

Explore your students' access to computers and the Internet both in and out of your organization. Rosen and Stewart (2015, p. 32) provide a table that might be completed by doing an informal survey of your learners and considering your own knowledge about access to computers on-site. See Table 1 (included with permission).

**Table 1:** Web Access at Home, Work, or Elsewhere and Web Access at Your School or Program

|                                                                                                                               | School or Program Web Access |                                                                    |                                |                                       |                                       |                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                               | #/% of students              | 1. No web access and possibly no computer lab at program or school | 2. Web accessible computer lab | 3. Computers in class with web access | 4. Multimedia projector in the class. | 5. Student portable devices used in class for access. |
| <b>Web Access outside the program or school</b>                                                                               |                              |                                                                    |                                |                                       |                                       |                                                       |
| A. No web access at home; web access available only from library, at work, community computing center, or from mobile device. |                              |                                                                    |                                |                                       |                                       |                                                       |
| B. Family Computer with web access                                                                                            |                              |                                                                    |                                |                                       |                                       |                                                       |
| C. Student has own computer with web access                                                                                   |                              |                                                                    |                                |                                       |                                       |                                                       |
| D. Student has tablet with web access                                                                                         |                              |                                                                    |                                |                                       |                                       |                                                       |
| E. Student has smartphone with web access                                                                                     |                              |                                                                    |                                |                                       |                                       |                                                       |

Source: Rosen and Stewart (2015, p. 32)

Rosen and Stewart also include a link to [a survey on student Internet access and computer skills](#), which can be used as is or adapted. Information gleaned from these information-gathering activities will help you make decisions about what technologies, including mobile options, you can use for your blended learning course.

### 3. Survey current technologies.

Acquaint yourself with the range of learning technologies that you might integrate into your blended learning course. The report from [the IDEAL instructional strategies study group](#) includes a glossary of several popular tools. Rosen and Stewart (2015) also describe useful resources in their book. (See [Blended Learning for the Adult Education Classroom](#), pp. 10–30.) Additionally, there are useful online repositories that link to promising educational technologies. [CrowdED Learning's Teacher Tools page](#) lists tools for communicating, finding content, and organizing and managing learning. The EdTech Center's [WorkforceEdTech.org](#) offers similar resources and includes short case studies showing many of them in use.

### 4. Choose a learning platform.

Often, as teachers, you don't get to choose your curriculum, but if you do, decide whether a licensed online curriculum will suit your needs or whether you need to build your own online resources. Rosen and Stewart (2015) provide a logic model to help you determine which would be most suitable for your program. The exercise requires consideration of the following issues:

- Leeway given to teacher for making such choice (i.e., whether your state has a required online curriculum)
- Teacher preference
- Development time available, deadline
- Cost of licenses

([See Blended Learning for the Adult Education Classroom](#), pp. 43–45, for the complete logic model.)

Whether you choose a turnkey or teacher-created curriculum, be sure it includes features required for your chosen instructional model, including a way to organize content, a means by which to monitor learner work (e.g., teacher access to learner activities and/or reports of progress), accessibility affordances that meet your learners' needs (e.g., options for deaf or vision-impaired students), a place for learner collaboration, and mechanisms for ample teacher-to-student communication.

## 5. Decide on communication strategies and tools.

Establishing consistent, sustainable communication protocols with learners is the best way to support persistence. Reflect on how you will communicate with your learners online.

Consider integrating texting as a strategy. Learners and teachers alike feel comfortable using texting to support teaching and learning. Pew Center research suggests that 97% of smartphone users text (Smith, 2015). Sharma et al. (2019) found that when teachers or service providers used texting apps to nudge learners to complete assignments or attend appointments, the students responded with higher levels of engagement. In this way, texting can help learners stay on track.

Vanek and Webber (2019) noted that learners working independently using Cell-Ed, which relies heavily on texting, found even the automated texts encouraging.

*Many of the texts sent by coaches were automated reminders encouraging them to persist. Learners noted appreciating and feeling encouraged by these reminders, even if they didn't reply to the coaches directly. The learners loved the emoji "stickers" and the positive comments from coaches—both automated and live. They cited examples they especially liked such as "excellent, fabulous, well done, wonderful" and even "hmmmm," the response one coach sent when one person got something wrong. They also noted that the coaches never say "this is bad," but instead are always supportive (Vanek & Webber, 2019, p. 7).*

Consider using a mobile messaging tool like WhatsApp, Remind, or TalkingPoints for easy outreach and frequent nudging. WhatsApp and Remind also interface with web browsers, making it easy for teachers to manage student communications. TalkingPoints automatically translates texts between sender and recipient based on the language they've set on the platform. There are several useful [examples of using WhatsApp in this Google Doc resource](#) created from posts on the LINCS Integrating Technology community forum.

## 6. Prepare students.

Allow ample class time, or video conferencing time, to introduce students to any new technology and give them a chance to practice with your support. For example, while it is important to help students log in and navigate through features of a tool, it is equally important to make certain they can successfully initially reach it on their own. Give them at least one opportunity to go through the process of logging in and initiating an activity to demonstrate they can complete work independently.

Another idea is to show students the web page you might be using to coordinate instruction and communication. (See Use a Digital Homeroom section below.) You might build activities into in-person or remote face-to-face meetings each week that require students to use the website, for example, to find and complete an assignment or to post to a blog. In both examples, you are using in-person meetings to ensure that students can make best use of the digital communication tool that you have decided to use.

## Strategy Two: Start with One Core Distance Learning Curriculum

### Example Curriculum: USA Learns

**Shin-Jun's Emergency — Reading Shin-Jun's Story** Activity Me

▶ Read about Shin-Jun. Click listen to hear the story.



Shin-Jun is a construction worker.

One day at work, he drops a block on his foot. He can't move his foot. He thinks it's broken.

His friend calls 911. An ambulance takes him to a hospital.

 Listen

1 of 2 Next

Whether you are teaching in a blended or distance model, make use of a core online curriculum. This can be teacher created or a licensed product (e.g., Burlington English, EnGen, Essential Education, Learning Upgrade, or USA Learns). Having ready-made content available in a core curriculum has several benefits:

1. Students can become familiar with the technology demands of the online environment and, through actively using it, build skills and confidence using web-based resources.
2. A comprehensive curriculum follows a consistent, repeated lesson format.
3. Teachers can become local experts on the curriculum, deepening both their knowledge of it and their skill tying it to classroom instruction in a blended model. They can then support other teachers within the organization who wish to integrate the core online curriculum into blended learning.
4. Student work within the core online curriculum provides a means by which teachers can formatively assess learners' needs for additional instruction and practice activities. Many online curricula provide robust reporting to make it easier to monitor learner progress and identify areas for remediation.

In a blended or hybrid learning scenario, this online curriculum can be assigned to complement in-class instruction. For distance education, it may be the first means of instruction. Being an involved instructor means knowing the content your learners are accessing online, so once you know which curriculum you will be using, you need to thoroughly explore it by examining content, assignment modes, and its viability as an independent learning tool for your students. This requires an investment of time, but it will pay off when you are able to confidently direct your learners through the content and navigation required and assist them with basic troubleshooting. Taking on more than one core curriculum may not be possible; decide whether or not you have the time to adequately learn two curricula.

Workforce EdTech offers descriptions of many popular curricula. Additionally, it offers [this expansive list of tool evaluation criteria](#) to help structure your evaluation of promising options if you are planning to adopt a comprehensive curriculum.

## Strategy Three: Use Supplemental Learning Activities

There are times when even the most thoroughly developed teacher curriculum or robust licensed comprehensive curriculum cannot cover all of the learning needs of a learner or classroom of learners, or you might notice that content required to address required standards is missing, so you will need to find and evaluate supplemental resources. Why? Though most creators of online learning produce quality resources, what your organization or state purchases may not meet the academic, language, or computer skill needs of all learners or be culturally relevant (Smith & Ayers, 2006; Hannon & D’Netto, 2007). Also, an online curriculum may not fully address the key shifts and standards outlined in [the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education \(CCRS\)](#).

Programs may find that students need additional practice reading complex text, citing evidence, and building knowledge. Teachers may also want to provide additional opportunities for rigorous math activities that focus with equal intensity on conceptual understanding, procedural skills, and fluency. Or, they may wish to integrate other subject areas such as health literacy, financial literacy, or workforce preparation into academic skill instruction.

One way to address these issues is to integrate supplemental resources using additional materials or websites. Content developed or self-selected by practitioners allows for more customization and alignment with standards and is generally more learner-centered. There are plentiful free resources available on the web, which are particularly useful in blended learning scenarios, where programs may lack resources to purchase licenses for online curricula relevant for a broad range of learners.

The [Change Agent](#) is a resource that features articles (in PDF and audio) written by adult learners on important topics such as racial equity, re-training for work, working and caring for children, voting, and mental health. Some of the content is free, such as these [lesson packets](#) which you can use as is or adapt to meet the needs of your learners.

## Open Educational Resources (OERs)

One way to provide complimentary resources is by using Open Educational Resources (OERs). An image, eBook, podcast, video, fully developed online course (e.g., [EdReady.org](#)), or interactive learning activity are all OERs. What makes an educational resource “open”? Unofficially, [OERs follow the “5 Rs,”](#) meaning the user has the right to do the following:

- Retain: make, own, and control a copy of the resource (e.g., download and keep your own copy)
- Revise: edit, adapt, and modify your copy of the resource (e.g., translate into another language)
- Remix: combine your original or revised copy of the resource with other existing material to create something new (e.g., make a mashup)
- Reuse: use your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource publicly (e.g., on a website, in a presentation, in a class)
- Redistribute: share copies of your original, revised, or remixed copy of the resource with others (e.g., post a copy online or give one to a friend)<sup>2</sup>

The real value of OER comes from the fact that teachers can use them either as is or adapt them to better suit their learners and instructional context. Because they are free and often adaptable, they are ideal supplemental resources for either blended or fully distance instruction.

Typically, OER are licensed via a Creative Commons (CC) licensing. [The various CC license types provide clear guidance to users](#) as to what they can and cannot do with the resource.

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<sup>2</sup>This material is an adaptation of Defining the “Open” in Open Content and Open Educational Resources, which was originally written by David Wiley and published freely under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license at <https://edtechbooks.org/-tFQ>.

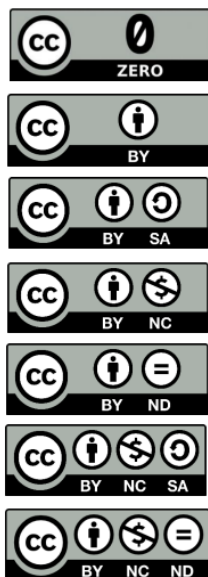


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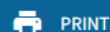
You can find OER by doing an Internet search. If you use Google, select the advanced search option setting “usage rights” to show only resources that can be freely used or shared. More instructions for finding OER are included on an [OER support website funded by the U.S. Department of Labor](#) for programs with learners in community and technical college programs. Also check out [OER Commons](#), which includes links to fully developed lesson plans and learning activities.

An excellent resource designed to simplify the process by which adult education teachers find quality OER (and other freely available resources) is [SkillBlox](#). It includes over 10,000 activities appropriate for adult learners which are searchable by skills frameworks such as the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education. Instructors can find relevant OER for their learners such as [Khan Academy math lessons](#), [PhET Simulations](#), or [leveled readings from Reading Skills for Today's Adults](#). Using SkillBlox, teachers find and select the activities they wish to use, then organize them into a playlist (a “skill block”) to share with learners.

Since there is such a wealth of OERs available, consider the following guidance when selecting an OER.

## Understand **10**s and **1**s

Access Code: 962E7D



Interactive Simulations | PhET (Interactive Simulations)

### Make a Ten

Open the simulation and select "Explore." Click and drag the numbers to make as many different combinations you can that total 10.



Interactive | MathsFun.com

### Number Blocks Freeplay (Interactive)



Interactive Practice | Khan Academy Math (Interactive Practice)

### Groups of Ten Objects



Interactive Practice | Khan Academy Math (Interactive Practice)

### 2-Digit Place Value Challenge

*This skill block was created by selecting activities that align to the CCRS standard 1.NBT.2 - Understand that the two digits of a two-digit number represent amounts of tens and ones.*

## Select standards-aligned content or content vetted by teachers.

Make sure that the OER aligns with the standards that define your curriculum or academic program. One way to do this is to find content already vetted by teachers who understand those standards or who teach a course covering similar content. For example, CrowdED Learning's [SkillBlox](#) allows instructors to search for math skills they wish to teach based on the CCRS. Instructors can then find resources that align to that standard from a variety of OER sources and then share them with, or assign them to, learners in a variety of ways.

## Choose a variety of resources.

Not all OERs will work for your class. Not only must you think about OER as resources or materials that will support the learning objectives of a curriculum or even a lesson plan; you also need to consider the media or technology through which they are conveyed. Be sure that your learners have access to the technology resources and possess the computer skills to make use of them.

## Ensure content is appropriate for your learners and the existing system.

Once you find a few that look promising, you need to evaluate how an OER will work for your learners in your particular context. Achieve.org has made available online [a rubric that teachers might use to evaluate the utility and suitability of an OER](#). You can adapt the rubric to best suit your instructional context. [Check out this example of an adapted rubric](#) from the EdTech Center@World Education. Because OERs are plentiful, you will likely find resources that align with a wide variety of learners, learning styles, and technical requirements or limitations.

## Collaborate on the crowdsourced curation or creation of OER.

Despite the availability of a wide variety of quality OER, they are often overlooked by educators because it can be time-consuming to sift through various websites to find the “right” activity. Many organizations and states have attempted to address this barrier by coordinating the curation of OER to address specific content needs, such as filling standards coverage gaps of existing curriculum or looking to provide more engaging options such as videos for their learners. This concept of structured, crowdsourced collaboration is the basis of the [CrowdED Learning EdTech Maker Space](#). EdTech Maker Space (ETMS) projects engage instructors in resource co-creation focused around a particular curriculum, content area, or edtech tool. As instructors learn about and share strategies for using the resources of focus for the project, they collaborate on the curation, adaptation, or creation of OER. One ETMS curation project focused on the curation and alignment of digital skills activities resulted in this [Digital Skills Library](#). Another ETMS project engaged teachers in learning how to use tools such as Jamboard, then adapting activities from the ESL Story Bank (Literacy Minnesota) using Jamboard and other tools to create [collections of interactive exercises to support language development concepts from each of the stories](#).

## Strategy Four: Use a Digital Homeroom

A digital homeroom is essential for organizing instructional resources and activities. Some programs choose to use a website tool such as Google Sites, Wakelet, or Padlet, while others use Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as the Google Classroom or Canvas. Wakelet is a free, flexible tool that allows anyone to create “collections” of online resources. [Here’s one example of a collection that provides teachers with a number of great, free online resources that can support blended learning](#), along with guidance on how to use those resources with learners.

[Weebly](#) and [Google Sites](#) are free popular website-building tools that teachers might use for creating a digital homeroom. It’s also possible to accomplish this using a simple Google slide. A Minnesota instructor used Google Slides to create a virtual classroom space (pictured below), which she shared as a PDF with her learners. Each object in the classroom is a link to an online resource. [Click this link to open the virtual classroom](#). Then, try clicking on images within the classroom to see what happens.



*"The cartoon of me is a Bitmoji. The furniture, books, cat, tree, etc., are a variety of .png files I collected from Imgbin and pngfuel. You can just copy and paste them into the slideshow."*

Learners can make regular use of a digital homeroom to access all learning resources (e.g., links to the core online curriculum and key complimentary online resources) and support documents (e.g., instructions for logging in, program information, and teacher contact info). Teachers interviewed in the Instructional Strategies study suggested that they were more likely to provide differentiated instruction to meet individual learning needs of their students when they had a website. Once a teacher had found and evaluated a resource, they could post it to a central location, rather than keep track of bookmarked web pages and emails to students. This strategy also puts the teacher squarely in the role of active facilitator, a critical characteristic of involved instruction.

## Why We Chose Our LMS

One of our main goals for using an LMS is for teachers to be able to share resources. I think we are coming to the conclusion that each LMS has its own pros and cons. In my agency, we chose one to use program-wide. Our decision is based on one teacher having deep knowledge of that particular

tool and content already available. It is also free  
and we feel it is very friendly for low-level ESL  
Learners.

– An administrator in Rhode Island

A learning management system (LMS) is more sophisticated than a digital homeroom. It allows a teacher not only to organize content but also to create assignments and monitor learner progress. This is essentially a digital homeroom with reporting options and features to monitor and manage learner interaction with the content, the teacher, and other learners. Several popular LMSs are widely used in K–12 and postsecondary systems that also serve adult education: [Google Classroom](#), [Canvas](#), [Blackboard](#), [Desire2Learn](#), [Edmodo](#), [Moodle](#), and [Schoology](#). Canvas, Google Classroom, and Edmodo offer free, limited versions to any teacher. (While Moodle is free, it requires uploading to a server and initial configuration and updating.)

The benefit of using an LMS is that most of them offer the following useful affordances (and more):

- Organize content into lesson-or unit-based modules
- Embed external content into lessons
- Build assessments that can be automatically scored
- Track learner progress, including completion of learning
- Integrate discussion threads into lessons to foster collaboration
- Offer direction to individual learners or groups of learners

This list is not exhaustive and will likely change each time you do a web search for “LMS.” Such dynamic and constantly evolving learning technology is exciting, but be careful to not go overboard! Strike a balance between looking for the next new thing and deepening your skills using just one LMS.

In terms of selecting an LMS, check with postsecondary institutions in your region where students who are on a postsecondary track are likely to matriculate—what LMS is used there? Some IDEAL member states have leveraged using an LMS as their means for delivering professional development. An unexpected result was that as teachers experienced using the LMS as a “student,” they began seeing the benefits of using that LMS with their own students.

Perhaps focus on how to use one well in your organization for an extended amount of time, and support each other as you build your own courses. This has obvious benefits for you as a teacher; you can share resources and knowledge rather than working alone. The benefit for learners is important to consider, too. As learners become used to learning in any one web environment, subsequent learning opportunities or courses in that environment will likely be easier to navigate.

## Strategy Five: Adopt Technology to Suit Instructional and Content Needs



Successful teachers thoughtfully use technology to fit learner needs and content requirements. As tempting as it may be to leap into new resources or technologies because they are novel, you and your students will be better off if you choose technology that authentically enhances your instruction. This is especially important in a blended learning scenario, where teachers need to decide which content is best covered in class or online.

A framework can provide guidance for sorting this out and can help you choose the technologies that fit the learning goals you have for your students. [The Triple E Framework](#), developed by Liz Kolb (2017), is a useful model that addresses the degree to which a technology resource helps learners meet learning goals. The Triple E Framework is a useful extension of previous [technology integration frameworks like SAMR \(Puentedura, 2012\)](#) and [TPACK \(Mishra & Koehler, 2006\)](#), which focus on how teachers should design learning. The Triple E Framework, rather, focuses on what students do with technology to help them learn. The framework ensures that technology use helps focus student engagement, and then, while engaged, their learning is enhanced and extended by technology. [Gaer and Reyes \(2020\)](#) offer examples of what this might look like in an ABE classroom.

## Strategy Six: Use an On-site Computer Lab

Many organizations provide on-site computer labs where learners can use the computers to complete online activities required in a blended learning scenario or even complete fully distance learning work. Other organizations have mobile carts with devices (e.g Chomebooks, tablets) that learners can use, while others ask students to bring their own device (BYOD). Using technology in a computer lab or in class gives learners access to the support of teachers or lab volunteers. The support helps learners develop technology skills while they are working on their academic content. Many organizations staff labs with volunteers from local colleges who already have digital literacy skills and some personal experience with online learning.

## Keeping Up with the Pace of Change

*At the heart of the sustainable change is developing and helping people to build up an “inner resilience” that guards them from experiencing every change that comes their way as disruptive. Instead, this resilience ensures that they learn to cope with these changes...recognizing patterns in one situation and making sense of them and applying them in another. (Kop et al, 2011) [i]*

### Strategy Seven: Be a Lifelong Learner

The final important characteristic of effective educators is that they see themselves as lifelong learners. In the instructional strategies study group, teachers revealed that they themselves embrace opportunities to grow as learners and are open to continuous experimentation with technology. This embrace of continuous learning not only increases your knowledge of useful instructional resources, it also helps you build the persistence and resilience needed to face whatever technological innovation comes next.

### Teaching at a Distance

As you begin teaching online, you will find that many of the good teaching strategies you employ with in person learners can also be used at a distance. Adelson-Golstein (2021) developed a resource, [Ways to Transfer In-Person Activities and High Leverage Practices to Remote Instruction](#) which provides examples of in-person teaching strategies, ideas for digital substitution, and how learners experience this on a phone. In addition, creating or maintaining routines in your class helps learners to anticipate what activity and technology will be used which helps to build confidence and skills. An [EdTech Center blog article](#) shares more information about EdTech routines and the [EdTech Integration Strategy Toolkit](#), which can help to identify technology to use to build these routines.

The [Digital Resilience in the American Workforce \(DRAW\)](#) initiative conducted a landscape scan of adult educators and found the top instructional strategies for building digital literacy skills and resilience. These strategies can be a reference as you teach online. DRAW project staff presented a lighting talk webinar in February 2021, and the recording and presentation slides can be found on the [EdTech Center's website](#).

| Instructional Strategy            | Description                                                                                                                 | Tips for Doing This                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Contextualization and embedding   | A learning experience that is taught in a context that is relevant to learners' lives and goals                             | Teach digital literacy skills within a context that is relevant to a learner, not in a silo. |
| Choice, relevance, and motivation | A learner-centered approach that allows learners to choose what is relevant for their needs thereby increasing motivation.. | Build in choice for learners.                                                                |

|                                                           |                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Practice Engagement Theory                                | Instruction that provides learners with competencies and confidence they need to successfully go out and practice skills in their real lives (Reder, 2012). | Increase opportunities to practice outside of class.                                                                                                                              |
| Strengths-based approach                                  | Instruction that builds on the existing strengths and knowledge of learners                                                                                 | Focus on learners' strengths.<br>Provide opportunities for peer learning.                                                                                                         |
| Differentiated and targeted instruction                   | Adaptation of lessons to the strengths, needs, and interests of learners and providing instruction that addresses specific gaps in knowledge                | Provide opportunities for learners to work on skills to match their needs through blended learning and practice outside of class.                                                 |
| Recycling skill instruction to support transfer of skills | Instruction of skills across multiple content areas and opportunities for learners to apply skills from one context to another                              | Demonstrate how skills can be used in other contexts (e.g., filling out forms for school, health, and work).<br>Explicitly teach transferring of skills from one tool to another. |
| Flexible mindset and self-efficacy                        | The adaptability of and confidence to use technology in existing and new situations                                                                         | Teach and model problem solving. Build in productive struggle and failure.                                                                                                        |

Source: Ascher Webber, A., and Harris, J. (2021, February 11). Top Instructional Strategies for Digital Resilience [Webinar Presentation]. Digital Education Strategy Sessions, online. <https://edtechbooks.org/-XrAE>

## Other Considerations

### Start with Mobile Learning

A goal of implementing distance or blended learning into adult education programming is to extend the time and space where teaching and learning can occur. In this regard, mobile devices can make a big difference, particularly for learners who live in rural areas and those that need to be able to use apps to download content and use it offline.

A recent [Pew Research Center study](#) shows that the number of Americans who use a smartphone to access the Internet at home is on the rise. Ninety-seven percent of adults in the United States have a mobile device, and all but 11 percent of them are smartphones. Additionally, the demographics of adults who are smartphone dependent—meaning they can only access the internet on their smartphone—are people of color and/or are living in households that earn less than \$30,000 per year (Pew Research Center, 2021b).. This aligns with the demographics of learners who are typically enrolled in adult education programs.

[Cell-Ed](#) is an example of content developed specifically for use on standard cell phones. Their course catalog offers a range of learning content that could be used either as a stand-alone distance class or as a complement to classroom learning in English language learning, literacy, citizenship, or Spanish literacy. [USA Learns](#) is available as an app providing a full curriculum for English language learners and applications like the vocabulary builder. [Quizlet](#) can be used to integrate mobile options into a learner's experience. For example, a teacher might use Quizlet as part of a blended learning course by uploading vocabulary images supporting a class reading. Students could then use Quizlet flashcards outside of class to keep practicing with the vocabulary words.

Though many major online curricula developers are working toward becoming more mobile friendly, you cannot assume that all websites and online resources developed for educational purposes will work on a tablet or smartphone. Watch out for resources that were made using the software Flash, since they will not play on most mobile devices, and most

major browsers discontinued supporting Flash assets in 2021. In addition, as you consider platforms for delivering content, be sure to search for an LMS or Course Management System (CMS) that was either developed for deployment on mobile, or is at least mobile compatible (e.g., Schoology).

In addition to finding appropriate educational mobile resources and platforms, you can use apps developed to support facilitation of instructional activities in mobile learning, for example, [WhatsApp](#). This mobile messaging app does not require a student to have a telephone and texting plan. Because it works on Wi-Fi accessed in a public place, students need only have a mobile device. Teachers can create groups to coordinate cohort learning and send media-rich messages including images, video, and audio.

Ultimately, in order to take advantage of the technology literally in the palm of a learner's hand, it takes careful planning to leverage the strengths of the device and compatible resources. It may take some time and experimentation to develop an awareness of where and how to do this. Several promising strategies and resources can be found on the [EdTech Center's mLearning website](#), contributed by adult educators who use cell phones (both basic and smart) and other mobile devices to provide access to education to their adult learners, improve learning in classes, and develop self-directed lifelong learners. You might also consider taking our short self-paced course called [Introduction to Mobile Learning](#) or exploring the [EdTech Center's site](#) for useful resources and strategies.

## Monitoring and Documenting Progress

As you work with learners, you will need to monitor their understanding. This can be done in several ways including informal assessment during class, reviewing learner work and progress, exit tickets, and regularly scheduled check-in meetings with learners. You may find that you need to adjust the pace and/or review content. Just like in-person instruction, ongoing feedback and assessment can help to guide your instruction so that it best meets the needs of learners.

Whether you are engaging learners in a blended model or in supported distance learning, you will need to keep track of learner progress toward the goals they set in your orientation session. Some adult education programs rely heavily on the reports available in their core curriculum, which often report things like student progress, percentage of correct responses on quizzes and activities, percentage of assignments done, time spent on tasks, and login/logout times. The reports are a great way to measure progress with the learning activities included in the curriculum. These same reports are also available if a teacher has designed a course using an LMS like Moodle, Canvas, or Schoology.

There are other important markers of progress that need to be attended to that are likely not reportable in a core curriculum or LMS, such as the following:

- NRS testing dates and results
- Date and amount of time spent doing in-person instruction
- When and how communication has occurred
- Learner work in supplemental online activities
- Enrollment in classroom learning
- Proxy contact hours earned

## Using a Database to Track Learner Progress

Before we started using FileMaker Pro, we had no idea how much time each teacher was spending with distance learners. Now we have several years' worth of data and better understand how to adequately staff our distance program and which support and communication strategies tend to lead to completion of activities.

– A teacher in Minnesota

Information like this shows how much teacher time is required to support each learner and the impact of that time spent, both in terms of learner progress and in proxy hour accumulation. IDEAL member states have different ways of accomplishing this. For smaller programs, [a simple Google document](#) or Excel spreadsheet could be used. If you work in a program with several collaborating teachers supporting distance education, you might consider [using a Google spreadsheet that you work on together](#). Large programs tend to rely on more robust data applications, like FileMaker Pro, Microsoft Access, or custom-developed databases that link to or are a part of the state's NRS database. No matter the tool or structure of your tracking, be sure to figure out a way to make progress visible to the learner. Such awareness can support further persistence and engagement.

## Digital Badges



One way to mark learner progress is through using digital badging. These online micro-credentials are a way to display and document skills learned both in and out of the classroom. When learners complete a task, they receive a digital badge, which they can include in their portfolio and share with employers or postsecondary education institutions. When issuers include detailed information about what the learner completed or mastered, employers or postsecondary education institutions will have a clear idea of the skill levels and accomplishments of the learner. Not only do badges demonstrate learner accomplishments, a clearly sequenced badging system can also establish tangible goals for learners (Finkelstein, 2013; Wilson, 2019).

There are several ways that distance teachers have been using digital badges. Websites such as [Credly](#), [Badgr](#), and [Bloomboard](#) allow teachers to design digital badges and “issue” them to students. Once a task is completed, a learner is awarded a badge, which is then stored in his or her secure account and displayed on a web page that serves as a transportable badge portfolio to be shared with employers or other stakeholders who need to know a learner’s skills and experience.

Many LMSs, like Canvas and Moodle, have integrated badging systems. Note that some adult education organizations have invested in licensed badging and portfolio systems to provide insights on learner pathways, milestones, and progress toward their learning goals, like [ForAllSystems](#) and Badgr Pathways.

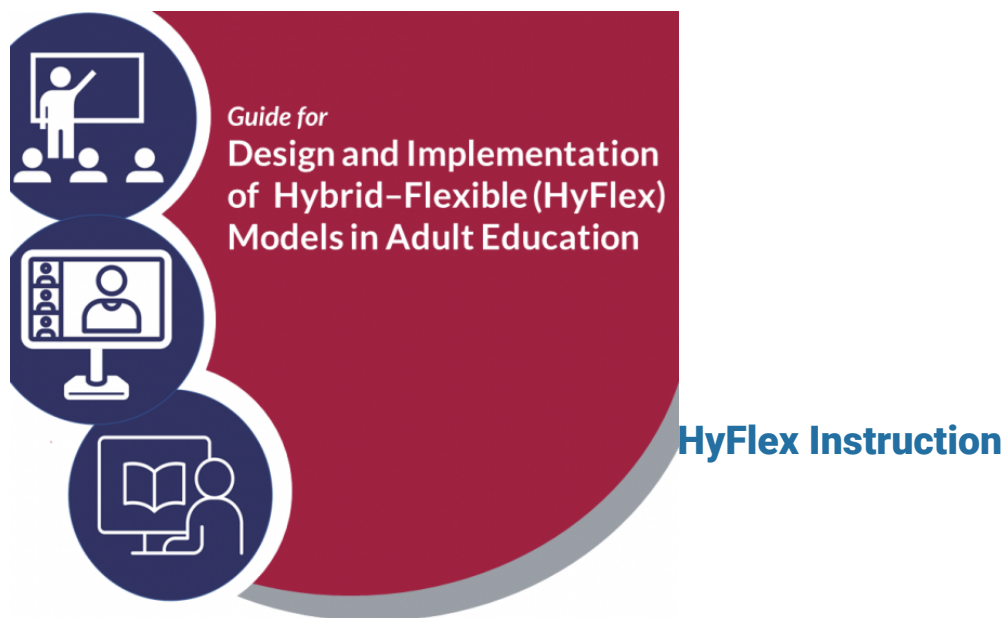
## Acknowledging Accomplishments Using Digital Badges

*"I started using digital badges as a way to reward outstanding performances by my students. I've been surprised by how much they appreciate something that takes me about 5 minutes to do! I now also use them to celebrate things like mastering fractions or reading so many hours of study."*

— A teacher in Pennsylvania

## Remote Instruction Observation Tool

The EdTech Center developed a tool that can be used by teachers and their supervisors to provide supportive review of synchronous online instruction. It provides structure for observation and reflective conversations to strengthen teachers capacity for remote instruction. The tool is available in an editable [Word version](#) or as a [fillable PDF](#). You can learn more about this tool by reading this [blog post](#) or watching the [October 2021 lightning talk webinar recording](#).



David Rosen, Destiny Simpson,  
and Jen Vanek

HyFlex is an emerging instructional method in adult education. In this method, learners can choose to participate in online or in-person synchronous classes, or to complete asynchronous online activities. This requires the teacher to simultaneously teach in-person and online learners. The EdTech Center has developed a [guide](#) based upon the experiences of adult educators and a [video series](#) featuring adult educators across the country.

## Concluding Thoughts

This is likely the longest and most significant chapter in this Handbook. We have tried to summarize some key characteristics of successful instruction in distance and blended learning. If you feel like you have more to learn, you are in good company. There are entire books and courses on the topics covered here. In fact, in our study group, IDEAL 102, we go further into instructional issues. To get the most from what you have read here, go back and try to read some of the reports linked in the chapter. Watch the videos. Do your own research. To avoid feeling completely overwhelmed, choose the instructional approaches that seem most doable in your teaching context and experiment. Learn by doing. Use the activities below to help you get started.

### Activity 5.1 Teaching Tasks

#### **Reflect and document how you will structure your instruction.**

Describe your plans for achieving different teaching tasks in distance and/or blended learning. Consider including the following information: activities supporting teacher involvement, learning content and technology required, and strategies for communication with your students.

## Activity 5.2 Monitoring Learning in Online Curricula

### Decide how you will monitor learner progress in your chosen curricula.

Find resources at your organization, through an online search, or from the curriculum publisher to see how student progress is reported. If student data is available to you within the online curriculum, how would you use it to respond to student progress (or lack of progress)? What feedback would you provide the student? What might indicate a student's need for additional instruction?

Note that in the course, IDEAL 101: Foundations of Distance Education and Blended Learning, these prompts are expanded into fully developed collaborative activities for your team to complete together.

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