

Questions asked during the webinar, *Teaching Beginning Language Classes in Remote Learning Contexts: A Focus on LCTLs, on May 28, 2020*

Cosponsored by CERCLL and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at The University of Arizona

These questions were posted in the Q&A during the webinar. Some were answered during the discussion live, and others were answered by the presenters in this document. The presenters are: Dr. Wenhao Diao (WD), Dr. Mahmoud Azaz (MA) and Dr. Liudmila Klimanova (LK).

1. How does one use Whiteboard in typing?

- **MA:** To use typing in the Zoom Whiteboard, the teacher basically shares their screen and selects the Whiteboard. The Whiteboard is compatible with Arabic. A tools bar will appear that enables the teacher to type in Arabic. From their ends, the learners can type in Arabic as well. They also can annotate the text.
- **MA:** For true beginners, they can also use the draw function that can help them to handwrite using the mouse.
- **MA:** It is possible to purchase the stylus and/or the trackpad and get it connected to their computers. this can make handwriting easier.

2. Had you always had the Arabic keyboard entry skills as part of the course, before lockdown?

- **MA:** Typing is an integral part of the skills ARB 101 students learn. They learn how to type using the standard keyboard starting from week 8. They are asked to turn in 5-7 written assignments that are typed using the board.
- **MA:** I ask them to purchase the stickers from Amazon and practice typing at home or in our lab at their convenience.

3. How do you make sure students do not have class before your class start (to begin 10 min before)?

- **MA:** I asked them beforehand and I gave permission to those who cannot.

4. What is D2L?

- **MA:** It is the LMS used at the University of Arizona. It is similar to Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, etc.

5. How did your student submit their blue books? Did you use PPT to show exercises, instruction of the tasks, or play audio in the textbook?
- **MA:** They scan it and upload it to the D2L under Assignments.
 - **MA:** I give them the prompt or guidelines in English beforehand.
6. How can you proctor an exam synchronously if a student is not able to share video?
- **MA:** I simply ask them to make their video camera on. I ask them not to use any resources for the quizzes and exams.
 - **MA:** It is easy to know who cheated. In this case, I meet with the student individually to check.
 - **MA:** Building trust is key to avoid cheating.
 - **WD:** I also recommend changing the format of an exam based on the goals and reconsidering the purpose of the exam. I would like to think of an exam as an opportunity for students to use the target language. Therefore, as I have said in the webinar, if they have to “cheat” by looking up words in a dictionary or a book, that to me is also using the language. Even in in-person teaching in the past, I have worked in programs where we ask students to make corrections after they receive a grade, and then they receive partial points back if they make those corrections accurately. Those corrections were not supervised, and we believe in doing so students had to think about the linguistic form more carefully. After all, exams are opportunities for students to learn, and we don’t want to burden students with exams.
 - **WD:** I also recommend using authentic materials online for purposes such as quizzes (if possible). Even teaching in person, I like using songs and the alike for students to transcribe as a listening quiz. After all, the goal should be meaningful participation in the use of the target language by the students.
7. How do you check in synchronous exams that students do not cheat (i.e. open another window online for answers)?
- See above response.
8. Could you please demonstrate how the students wrote in Arabic during their exams?
- **MA:** A typical exam or quiz lasts for 50 minutes. Students do not type in an exam or a quiz. They type in Arabic for periodic assignments.
9. Does synchronous teaching discriminate against students with childcare/homeschooling responsibilities or difficult home circumstances?
- **MA:** To some degree, it does at the K-12, but I still think it is essential in foundational language courses. How can we teach the basic skills of the literacy system efficiently in an asynchronous format? The outcomes may not be as someone expects.

- **MA:** One way to handle this is to use the blended/hybrid model; with the hard parts to be taught synchronously. Items that have to do with culture learning can be taught asynchronously.
- **MA:** Most of the consolidation activities can be done asynchronously with clear instructions.

10. Have you increased, or do you recommend increasing, your office/conference hours due to issues with electronic communication devices. (NOTE: High school teacher here. I have had issues with one family sharing one device amongst multiple students. Is this a similar issue amongst those of you at the post-secondary level?)

- **MA:** I definitely increased my office hours due to issues with electronic communication devices.
- **MA:** Recording the Zoom sessions and posting them over Zoom has helped the few student students who do not have access to devices or missed the sessions for some reason.
- **MA:** Having an electronic communication device is not a common issue as it could be at the k-12 level.

11. I don't think time-constrained exams can work in our context. You monitor using a webcam? What about students in different time zones?

- **LK:** Of course, there is no one and only way of doing things in online\remote teaching. Your educational context and teaching objectives should guide you in your choice of evaluation method and frequency and type of assessments. In general, online assessments should be different from f2f assessments in that they should be more formative in nature, that is, more flexible and target language performance rather than focus on discrete language items.

12. In some contexts, requiring cameras on is considered a violation of students' privacy.

- **LK:** This is something you want to verify your College policies. In the United States, we take student privacy seriously. We also understand the importance of equal access to resources and tools. While you should not insist on having students turn on their video cameras (some may not have one installed on their computer), you can explain why the use of video cameras is important for language learning. A preliminary survey about students' access to tools and their level of comfort with video and audio technology may give you a good idea about your class, and will help you plan suitable activities that meet the needs and expectations of your students.

13. Can you give an example of how much written feedback you give for your students in PDF? Does the amount of feedback vary with the different types of assignments?

- **MA:** I gave specific feedback on every major mistake (subject-verb agreement for example).

- **MA:** It does. For example, I pay more attention to feedback in writing at the paragraph level. It is my window into how each student is doing.

14. In face-to-face class, I assign the task of group role-play and make video. Is there any way that we can do this when students do not meet physically?

- **MA:** Zoom for Students does this greatly. I taught my students how to use Zoom for students for turning in their skirts after instruction moved online.

15. Would you be able to have students use Zoom to record themselves during this group role play in target language and send video to you? I've thought of doing this before. (Others?)

- **MA:** Of course! Zoom for Students does this greatly. I taught my students how to use Zoom for students for turning in their skirts after instruction moved online.

16. How long does it take you to watching videos and give feedback on D2L? According to my experiences it is pretty time consuming. Do you have any other tools to do this more efficiently?

- **MA:** It depends on the videos, but I would say around 2-3 hours in the weekend.
- **MA:** Only very bad assignments are only discussed in office hours over Zoom.

17. What is a Virtual on-screen keyboard?

- **LK:** An on-screen, virtual keyboard is a visual keyboard that appears and stays on the screen at all times, and allows the user to type using a mouse. It is designed to assist people with certain disabilities to enter text more easily and more efficiently than with a traditional keyboard by clicking on the keys on the screen. An on-screen keyboard is available on both Windows and Mac computers. Your students need to install the L2 keyboard on their computer first, then they can open the on-screen virtual keyboard and type using the mouse.

Instructions on how to open an on-screen keyboard on a PC computer, [click here.](#)

Instructions on how to open an on-screen keyboard on a Mac computer, [click here.](#)

18. Question for Dr. Klimanova. To what extent were learner-learner breakout room activities successful from the beginning of first-year Russian?

- **LK:** It varies depending on an activity. I like to use breakout rooms to provide beginners with an opportunity to practice a dialog or read a text and answer a set of questions in pairs or small groups. Then, the students return to the main room and present their dialog to the entire virtual class. Instructors should still try to provide students with authentic tasks for break-out activities. For example, two students can receive a set of questions, and interview one another in a breakout-room, and then report the information about each other they collected to the entire class. In summary, a set of

clear instructions, and a strong pre-breakout practice (an advanced organizer) with the whole class will lead to a successful small group activity.

19. Dr. Klimanova, how do you solve the issue of “authentic” handwriting with a pen, if students don’t have access to a stylus. They would more likely use either a finger or a mouse for online whiteboards. Do you just request students to purchase a stylus in addition to their textbooks? What if they have access only to a stationary computer at home and no ability to purchase additional hardware or software for handwriting activities?

- **LK:** This is a great question because in the real world we do not write by hand when we communicate with someone on a computer. At the same time, handwriting skills and cursive writing are one of the main objectives at the beginning level. We distinguish between writing mechanics and writing for communication. Writing mechanics include recognition of letters, identifying sound-letter correspondences, writing cursive letters, words, and phrases paying attention to correct connections between letters, capitalization, and punctuation (at more advanced levels). These are the skills that can be practiced using a stylus with a virtual whiteboard. Some Russian programs teach cursive writing explicitly, while others consider handwriting an obsolete skill, and do not introduce students to cursive writing at all. Of course, purchasing tablets and styluses is an expense, and if you, as an instructor, feel that this expense is not warranted, you can have students write cursive exercises on a piece of paper, and take a picture of their work and send it to you by email or upload it to a LMC folder. The second set of skills are skills in writing proficiency, i.e., the ability to write and also read short hand-written communications in the target language. To develop these skills, students need to receive practical tasks where they need to communicate information in a hand-written note. An example can be writing a note to a roommate about a problem in the apartment, or writing a shopping list for a family member, filling out a paper form, etc.

20. Do you have any advice for increasing students’ engagement in an asynchronous mode?

- **LK:** Students are engaged if they are interested, and if there is a social component in an activity. For asynchronous individual tasks, I recommend offering a variety of activity types and methods of assessment, such as interactive exercises, culture lessons, games, etc. Immediate feedback is critical in asynchronous teaching. Students should be able to see their score and their mistakes immediately after completion of an activity or a quiz. Asynchronous exchanges of video and audio messages among students are also very effective, esp. video communications as students in online classes usually have fewer opportunities to interact with each other in a physical classroom. Project work was also found to be very effective in improving student engagement in an online asynchronous language class.

21. Is WeChat only texting, or also audio/video like WhatsApp?

- **WD:** It's like WhatsApp, and it also allows asynchronous audio chat. Therefore I suggest having students transcribe the audio recorded conversation is another idea.

22. For Dr. Diao: Do they “discuss the expressions and difficulties (e.g. accent)” in English?

- **WD:** Actually I think this should be done in mostly Chinese, with some explanation given prior to class in English. I typically teach my students phrases such as *tingbudong* (I don't understand) in my first language classes, and I think the discussion could be done using simple Chinese. E.g., 上海人说 *sao*, 不说 *shao*。 (People in Shanghai say *sao* not *shao*).

23. For Dr. Diao: How much do you use the social media WeChat? Can you share your experience with possibly pros and cons?

- **WD:** For personal use or teaching? I would like to restrict my answer to the language teaching context. I always use WeChat because I only teach language classes at UofA during summer study abroad. WeChat (and the alike) provide a few pros that I can think of: 1) It offers an asynchronous platform for students to connect with native speakers, instructors, and/or their learning peers. 2) It allows multimodal communication (images, memes, stickers, etc.) that potentially can be both authentic and motivating for students. 3) It also allows easy pairing/group assignment too. 4) It also comes with automatic translation if students select it. This could allow students to see how things are expressed differently in Chinese and English. 5) It is also a tool that is authentically used in Chinese speaking communities, particularly mainland China. Therefore it actually prepares students for study or work abroad in the future.
- **WD:** Obviously there are some cons too: 1) In my own experience, students who are motivated participate in WeChat communication more, and those who aren't may engage even less. 2) Students can organize their own groups without using Chinese. 3) If using telecollaboration, the instructor may find it hard to supervise the participation of native-speaking peers. 4) Both linguistic and cultural shock can take place, though I think that's authentic.

24. Where can I find the standard rubrics for “Chinese” speaking? Like a table to grade students (point 1-5) to grade their tones, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and so on....

- **WD:** I think Dr. Miao-Feng Tseng provided a suggestion. I did not write down her recommended book. But maybe that is recorded in the video by CERCLL?
- **Comment from CERCLL:** It was posted in the chat during the event. It was *The Handbook of Tasks and Rubrics for Teaching Mandarin Chinese* by Miao-fen Tseng, with task-specific rubrics.

25. Would you recommend oral performance assessment than formal assessment? (as I understand)

- **WD:** I would recommend a combination of BOTH in a foundational language course.
- **WD:** I agree with the recommendation above. I would also recommend combining a wide variety of formative and summative assessment.

26. Any Chinese resources/rubrics for written & oral work related to ACTFL standard?

- **WD:** I think this question is related to #24. In addition to what Dr. Miao-Feng Tseng recommended, I would like to point out that the ACTFL standard has been modified for Chinese (<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012/chinese>).

27. In terms of the Arabic writing, what level do you think they should switch from handwriting to typing?

- **MA:** As early as possible. As I said above, I start it at around week 8 in Arabic 101.

28. Our language program uses asynchronous mode for the whole teaching process, I would like to ask do you have any suggestions to increase students’ engagement in the asynchronous mode?

- **WD:** This is a great question that we did not have ample time to address during our webinar! I think many of the recommendations from my portion of the webinar are applicable for asynchronous teaching too. (E.g., having everything in one place, routinized use of technology tools, designing activities using VoiceThread, incorporating listening quizzes based on authentic YouTube videos). Tools such as VoiceThread are fairly user friendly and allow multimodal communication (audio, image, slides, etc.). If your institution does not purchase VoiceThread, I also recommend Lingt (<https://www.lingt.com/>) for language teachers. I believe it’s less costly than VoiceThread for individual instructors.

- **MA:** I have also heard from colleagues and friends who are teaching asynchronously that they require one-on-one meetings during office hours and/or class time. These are shorter meetings (e.g., 5-10 minutes for each student), and students can sign up for the time slot that would work best for their schedule, in case they have other family duties that they need to attend to. Instructors can use these short meetings to help personalize the instruction for the students and engage them in the use of the target language. For students who do not have easy Wi-Fi access, instructors could also personalize it (e.g., via phone call) to connect with them.

29. Could you share some strategies to capture the attention of a distracted student?

- **WD:** I recommend shortening video lecturing or the lecture portion of synchronous teaching. If you are teaching synchronously, I wouldn't lecture over Zoom for 50 minutes just because the class time should be 50 minutes. That was why I recommended a combination of asynchronous and synchronous activities. The goal is to ensure students get to LEARN for that amount of time (e.g., 50 minutes) with guidance from the instructor, not the instructor lecturing for 50 minutes.
- **WD:** If you use VoiceThread or other similar tools, I recommend breaking the recordings down by slide. Each slide should take no more than 2 minutes, and students can participate after the instruction.

30. If students are learning any foreign language, but it is negatively affected by their mother tongue. What can be done in this stage? (With "negatively affected" meaning "their vocabulary and grammar is affected by their mother tongue...due to accuracy is not achieved".)

- **WD:** I recommend encouraging students to use the target language as much as possible (not just through production tasks such as writing or speaking, but also through reception tasks such as listening and reading). I also think that the role of mother tongue is not all negative. Research has repeatedly shown that students who are better at reading and writing in their mother tongue tend to do better in their target language too. So I would also recommend teaching that helps students reflect upon cross-linguistic differences. For example, I recommend assignments that ask students to write down interesting expressions that they have encountered through social media or YouTube.

The PowerPoint slides and a recording of this webinar can be found at:

<https://cercll.arizona.edu/event/teachbeginlcls/>

Visit CERCLL's website: <http://cercll.arizona.edu>

Visit CMES' website: <http://cmes.arizona.edu>