

**Distance Learning Contingency Plan – 10<sup>th</sup> Grade English Language Arts**

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## **Introduction**

This is a distance learning contingency plan for a tenth grade English Language Arts classroom. In this plan, I will go over the procedures for introductions, class building, team building, classroom norms/rules, and student/family communications. I will also discuss the technology tools that will be used to carry out these procedures. As of the time that I am writing this in July 2021, many schools are planning to resume in person instruction for the 2021/2022 school year. Therefore, I will also reflect on ways that I would use some of these procedures in a physical classroom environment. This is a great opportunity to expand upon my classroom management plan from EDUC 427 and EDUC 442.

## **Teacher and Student Introductions**

### **About Me Collage**

There are several activities that I would conduct to get to know my students in the first few days of school. The first activity would be an “About Me” collage; students can use words, phrases, pictures, drawings, or anything else they want to share with the class. I would direct the students to use Google Slides or Google Drawings for their collage.

After the students create their collage, I would group the students into Zoom breakout rooms of four students per room. Each student will share their name, their pronouns, and one of their favorite things from their collage. This is to help the students get comfortable and have a practice run before introducing themselves to the class.

The students will come back together in the main Zoom room and each student will then share their name, their pronouns, and one of their favorite things from their collage, but now for the entire class. This may seem repetitive, but I think the small groups will help students to warm up to each other before talking in front of the entire class, similar to a think-pair-share strategy.

### **Introduction Letter**

The second activity that students will do for introductions is they will write a one-page letter to me. They can write about anything they want; the letter does not need to be formal. I will be the only person who sees the letter. This activity may help the students to open up about their lives or they will at least give me some clues about their interests that I can remember later during the school year. I would ask the students to use Google Docs for this letter.

### **Google Form**

Finally, students will fill out a Google Form with several questions. Some of the questions are more practical such as their name, nickname or preferred name, pronouns, phone number, email, and a family member's name and contact information. I use the term family member to be more inclusive and this family member does not have to be blood related. I would also ask fun questions such as their birthday, favorite music, favorite movie or TV show, and favorite candy or snack. Finally, I would also ask some inspirational questions such as "What are your top three strengths?" or "What are three words to describe you?" I would also want to know if the students are involved in any extracurricular activities.

### **Adaptations for Face-to-Face Learning**

These activities can be easily translated to a face-to-face classroom. If the students do not have laptops in the classroom, the collage and letter can still be accomplished with paper and pencil. None of these activities need to be extravagant. I would ask the students to complete the Google Form as a short homework assignment. The form could be completed from a computer, phone, or tablet.

The variety of introduction activities will help me to gather as much information about my students as possible. Each introduction activity caters to different multiple intelligences.

Visual learners would benefit from the collages while linguistic learners will benefit from the letters. Overall, these low-pressure activities are how I would help the students to introduce themselves to their classmates and myself.

## Class Building

### Activities

It is important to incorporate moments in the classroom where students can take a break from the content. There are several activities that I would weave into the beginning, middle, or end of the class to lighten up the atmosphere. The first idea would be to use polls. Based on the information I gather from the class, I could do quick polls on current events or topics that I hear the students talking about in passing. I could also use polls to check how students are feeling. Two websites that are useful for polls include [Mentimeter](#) and [Nearpod](#). Both websites allow me to create a poll in a few short clicks. The poll can be accessed with a direct link, or the poll can be accessed with a six-digit code.

### Figure 1

*An example of a Mentimeter poll about favorite movies*



There is also a website called [Brightful](#) which provides games for virtual meetings. Some of the games are better suited towards small groups but I would use the games such as “would you rather” or “question of the day” with the whole class. [Brightful](#) even offers guided meditations. Finally, I can also use a [random question generator](#) to prompt student discussions. Even if the questions are not related to the content area, students can still practice their speaking and listening skills.

### **Adaptations for Face-to-Face Learning**

I could transfer the polls and random question generator to a face-to-face classroom. The polls can be accessed with a laptop or a cell phone. It is important that I discuss responsible cell phone usage in the classroom before incorporating polls to be used in class. The random question generator can be displayed on a projector in front of the class. The [Brightful](#) games would not translate as well to a face-to-face classroom.

These games and activities are meant to be accomplished in short bursts of time. This is vital for a Zoom classroom because teachers and students become tired in the virtual environment. When an activity or game goes for too long, everyone will feel it. However, these activities accomplish class building because they create opportunities for the class to engage in conversation and get to know each other better.

### **Class Meetings**

One of the most important parts of my class building plan would be class meetings that are held either once a month or every two weeks. I would need to test it out and see which interval of time would be more appropriate for my students. For each meeting, an agenda will be created. I would give students the opportunity to submit their recommendations for topics in a Google Form. As the teacher, I would have the final approval on the agenda to make sure the

meeting is appropriate and conducive for all. During the class meetings, we can discuss serious topics such as issues in the classroom, the campus, or the community. But we can also discuss fun topics related to hobbies or entertainment. Part of what will drive the agendas will be knowing my students and hearing what they discuss in passing with each other. I would include time to resolve any unfinished business from the meeting. My favorite part of the class meetings would be that at each meeting, I would select a couple of students to highlight and celebrate. That way, each student gets an opportunity to be recognized and made to feel like they have a special place in the classroom. I could use class meetings in both a virtual environment and a face-to-face environment. This is one way that I can bring the class together to bond with one another. I also hope that the class meetings would provide an outlet for students to discuss topics that are important to them and help them to feel heard.

## **Team Building**

### **Creating Teams**

In general, I would primarily create teams with homogenous or heterogenous groups to meet students' needs. If the group activity is short or low risk, I would potentially use random grouping, but I would do this sparingly. I would never let students pick their own groups because I am worried someone will be left out at the end without a group. For assignments where the groups will be meeting for several days, I would have the students create a team name and a team motto. The students could also do a team cheer if everyone is comfortable. The team name and team motto help to build a sense of identity for the team. If I assign group projects, I will make sure the students have plenty of in class time to work in their groups. I find that group projects can be stressful when the students must meet outside of class.

## **Activities**

Similar to class building, there are some activities that I would use to help add variety to the class periods. [Brightful](#) offers small group games as well such as “draw it” and “describe it”. [Drawsaurus](#) is a free and simple Pictionary style game online. Finally, I could also use the [random question generators](#) in small groups. Having options for whole class activities and small group activities provides me with more flexibility in my lesson planning. If I need to improvise an activity or buy myself time, all these technology tools can help me with that. Another perk of using small groups is that some students feel more comfortable opening up in a small group than a whole class setting. From personal experience, I sometimes dread having to go into a Zoom breakout room but there have been several times where I had a positive experience and I created friendships in my breakout room. I hope to create that same situation for my own students.

## **Adaptations for Face-to-Face Classroom**

Group work is more streamlined in a Zoom environment since I can automatically move students into breakout rooms. However, in a face-to-face environment, I must establish procedures for group work. One of the ways that I do that is that I designate each group to a different area of the classroom. That way time is not wasted as students try to figure out where to work. Working in teams not only helps students to process content, but it creates an environment where students can practice their social skills.

## **Classroom Norms/Rules**

I have two phrases that summarize the tone that I want to set for my classroom which are “This classroom is meant to be a place of community and compassion” and “Every person in this classroom is to be treated with dignity and respect.” I want my classroom to feel like a second

home for students. The teacher and the students are responsible for treating each other well. This applies in my virtual classroom and my face-to-face classroom.

### **Restorative Practices**

Realistically, there will be disagreements in the classroom, but everyone in the classroom community should work through those disagreements in a respectful way. In the book, *Better Than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Positive Classroom Management*, Smith et al. (2015) explain that behavior typically signals a deeper, underlying issue. A student may be “acting out” because something is bothering them. The issue could be related to the class, or it could be related to another aspect of a student’s life. In general, I would want to avoid outright punishing a student or sending them out of the classroom. Instead, I would want to talk to the student to see what is going on. This is also an opportunity to practice social emotional learning which includes practicing their self-regulation skills or their relationship skills. Of course, students are human; these experiences are not going to be clean and streamlined. I recognize there may be situations where I need help from another coworker to resolve an issue. However, I would rather exhaust all my options to resolve the issue in a restorative way than in a punitive way. If students are in conflict with each other, what I would do is that I would have them separate and take the time to write out their emotions using pencil and paper. This gives the students time to wind down and reflect. I would then bring the students back together and discuss this issue, with the intention of healing and restoration. These restorative practices would be the same in a face-to-face environment or a virtual environment.

### **Classroom Norms in Virtual Learning**

One of the biggest norms that must be taught to the students is that they need to mute their microphone when they are not speaking. Even when one person on a Zoom meeting is



unmuted, it can create a lot of background noise which makes it hard to hear the teacher or other students.

One of the hot topic issues that emerged from distance learning was policies on web cameras. Schools encouraged students or even required their students to turn on their webcams but some students felt uncomfortable showing their private space in front of their peers. (Johnson, 2020). My attitude on cameras is that I earnestly want my students to turn on their cameras and participate if they can. But I also recognize some students may not be comfortable. Ultimately, I just want the students to be here and to do whatever they can to learn. If having their camera off will help them to do their best, then I will support that. However, I want the students to use the reactions and the chat box in lieu of talking if that is the case. Also, if I find that certain students appear to be fully disengaged, I will reach out to them privately to see what is going on and to check in. I would never want to embarrass a student or call them out in front of the entire class.

### **Restroom Procedures**

In a distance learning environment, I would let the students know that they can go to the bathroom as needed if they do it at the appropriate time and are returning to class in a timely manner. If a student disappears for a long period of time more than two times, I will have a conversation with the student.

In a face-to-face environment, my policy is similar. Students can use the restroom at the appropriate moment if they are judicious about it. In a physical classroom, I would keep a sign in and sign out sheet by my door, so I am aware of who has left in case of an emergency. This also allows me to document if any students are going to the restroom for too long or are going too frequently.

In my original classroom procedures plan, I was going to use restroom passes. However, it just feels punitive. Printing the passes would be time consuming a waste of paper. A sign in and sign out sheet feels more humane, especially since I am using it for safety purposes.

### **Procedures for Assignments**

One of the perks of a virtual classroom is that everything is located in a Learning Management System (LMS). Students no longer have to print out their documents and they can upload everything to an LMS like Google Classroom. If students are absent, they can visit the LMS to retrieve the work they missed for that school day. As the teacher, I would need to be diligent about making sure everything is uploaded to the LMS in a timely manner.

For a physical classroom, my assignments procedures would depend on whether they have access to computers or not. If the students have access to computers, then I can continue using the 100% digital format from virtual learning. However, if the students are still using traditional pencil and paper, then I need to make copies of my materials for each class period. I would still give the students the option of submitting homework and major assignments online. A reason for this is because I have terrible handwriting. I can give clearer feedback using software like Microsoft Word or using an audio service like Mote, where I can audio record feedback. Another option is using a screencasting software like [Screencastify](#) to give feedback to students in a video format. If I asked students to submit their work in hard copy, I cannot as easily use these technologies to provide feedback.

My late work policy is the same in a virtual environment or physical environment. Students are expected to turn in their work on time. However, I will still accept late assignments. Students get three late assignments with no questions asked. After three late assignments, the teacher will have a conversation with the student. The reason why I do not take off points or

refuse to accept late work is that this could cause massive conflicts with students and parents. I want to teach responsibility, but I do not want to create an environment where it feels like it is the teacher versus the student or parent. Therefore, I will accept late work, but I will grade late work when I reasonably have time. I would communicate to the students that late work may not be graded as quickly as work submitted on time.

## **Communication Procedures**

### **Student and Parent Communication**

My communication procedures are the same for students and parents. My primary tools for communication are email and phone. Hopefully, I can access my office phone from my laptop. In my current job as a Human Resources Coordinator, I can access my office phone using WebEx Teams. However, if I cannot access my office phone, I would use [Google Voice](#) to provide a phone option. I would also provide weekly office hours where I am available over Google Meet or Zoom. Finally, I would use [Remind.com](#) to send text reminders to students and parents' emails and cell phones. Students and families can use email, phone call, or [Remind](#) to set up appointments with me outside of my regular office hours. However, I reserve the right to respond to all communications within one to two school days. If I am unable to respond to a student or family member and it results in an issue on a homework assignment, then I will work with the student to provide a solution, such as an extended deadline. It is never my intention to trick students or put them in a difficult situation. However, it is unreasonable to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. My one to two school day response policy is fair and consistent.

### **Agendas and Class Website**

For each class, I will always post an agenda showing what we are doing in class that day and what homework is assigned that evening. I will make the agendas available in the LMS and

the class website. This is another way that I can keep students and families in the loop about what is happening in class.

Website design is a hobby that I enjoy. I am not a programmer, but I am able to construct a website in WordPress or Google Sites with proficiency. This is a great place to provide resources. Usually, a school website is public facing so students can share the link with other caregivers that may not have access to the LMS. This also provides an alternative option in case a family member cannot access their login for the LMS. On the classroom website I would post daily agendas, class syllabi, and tutorial videos.

### **Conclusion**

My distance learning plan and my physical classroom procedures share a common theme of providing structure up front so that the students have clear expectations: but I also provide flexibility to accommodate the needs of my students and their families. I know what it is like to be a student or an employee and to have a teacher or boss act inflexible. I never want to make my students or families to feel those same emotions, at least as much as I reasonably can.

In my distance learning plan, I use a variety of technology tools that are simple, accessible, and user friendly to help build relationships in the classroom. Technology can help with enhancing the virtual classroom. However, technology cannot replace my communication skills and organizational skills that are key to running my classroom. Even though students and teachers are returning to a face-to-face classroom in Fall 2021, elements of the distance learning classroom can be transferred over to improve the physical classroom. I see myself using a mixture of strategies from this distance learning plan in my student teaching.

## References

Johnson, S. (2020, August 26). *On or off? California schools weigh webcam concerns during distance learning*. EdSource. <https://edsource.org/2020/on-or-off-california-schools-weigh-webcam-concerns-during-distance-learning/638984>

Smith, D., Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2015). *Better than carrots or sticks: Restorative practices for positive classroom management*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD].

## Appendix A – List of Technology Tools

### Teacher and Student Introductions

- Google Slides – About me collage
- Google Drawings – About me collage
- Google Docs – Letter from student to teacher
- Google Forms – New student form

### Class Building

- [Mentimeter](#) - Polls
- [Nearpod](#) - Polls
- [Brightful](#) - Games
- [Random Question Generator](#) – University of Washington
- [Random Question Generator](#) – Teambuilding.com
- Google Forms – For requesting topics for class meeting agendas

### Team Building

- [Brightful](#) - Games
- [Random Question Generator](#) – University of Washington
- [Random Question Generator](#) – Teambuilding.com
- [Drawsaurus](#) - Game

### Classroom Norms/Procedures

- Zoom
- Google Meet
- Learning Management System – Google Classroom, Canvas, or Blackboard. Depends on what the school offers.

## Communication Procedures

- Email – Outlook or Gmail, depends on what the school offers.
- [Google Voice](#) - To access a phone number from home without giving out my cell phone number.
- [Remind](#)
- Classroom website – WordPress or Google Sites