



Practical ideas for accelerated learning for students studying exam courses

Here are some practical suggestions to help students catch up and revise after a period of remote learning.

Focus on student confidence

It is important you have a clear plan to help build student confidence. These ideas can be effective:

- Give your students an overview of what they covered in the syllabus before school closed and what you hope they covered remotely.
- Reassure them that they have time to catch up on things they missed and, if your school is running them, that there will be revision sessions available.
- Show them what you will cover in the rest of the course, so that they can see that it is achievable. Return to this frequently, with updates if necessary, to show them what they have achieved so far.
- Be there to listen to their questions and work with guidance counsellor staff too, if you need to.

Use the syllabus as a checklist to help you plan and monitor coverage:

A syllabus works as a great checklist. What have learners already covered? What do they still need to do? It is useful for learners to refer to and gives them confidence as they tick topics off.

If you normally cover more than you need to, consider cutting down to just the requirements this year. For instance, you might normally prefer to teach more literary texts than you need, so the students have choice. Will that be something you still want to do?

Cover skills and content at the same time: Update your planning documents to include the skills you are covering. Make sure that the skills reflect the ones that students will need to demonstrate in their final exam. In your planning, consider topics, questions and skills development to cover each lesson, as well as key assessments.

Then, when you are reviewing your plan, look for opportunities to help students practise the different skills. You may want to colour code them to make them even easier to map.

Develop a student scheme: Use the same key questions, objectives and assessments, but include activities for independent working. This approach already works well for students who miss school through absence but in the



current situation, it eases the transition from online to face-to-face lessons. It can also be useful if there is a temporary lockdown, or if either the teacher or the student has to isolate.

Used flipped learning: Set homework that focuses on getting to know the information, and then spend class time making sure students understand and can apply the knowledge. For example, ask students to watch a video you have made, or use traditional note-taking homework. In class, set a small number of quick questions, with answers that should have been covered in their homework notes. Try spot-checking whether notes are done, and show that accurate note-taking really matters.

You can then focus in class on helping students understand the material and apply it. Research suggests that students catch up more easily if teaching time focuses on the things they do not know, or need more help with.¹

Focus your assessments: Use short-answer tests to check knowledge or completion of flipped learning activities and include informal Assessment for Learning (AfL) in your lessons. For ideas, see our **Getting Started with Assessment for Learning** advice.

¹ <https://corwin-connect.com/2020/04/visible-learning-effect-sizes-when-schools-are-closed-what-matters-and-what-does-not>

Give students the chance to practise exam-style questions. This does not have to be whole past papers – it could be a particular sub-question. Students do not always need to write out their answers individually – you could try these ideas instead:

- the 'pen of power', where students underline key words in the question and explain why they are important
- 'exam wrappers', where students reflect on an assessment task before and/or after they do it²
- writing an answer together as a group
- writing a paragraph.

Break up a topic for students to research together: Ask students to work collaboratively and research different parts of a topic, which they then share with the rest of the class.

This does not just save time – it helps students develop research, collaboration and presentation skills. The sense of responsibility to each other also means they engage with the topic more effectively. Students are often worried about using the work of other students but you can reassure them with these steps:

- Make a set of instructions where your expectations are clear.
- Act as an editor – take in their work, make comments and return it for changes.
- Ask each group of students to produce a factual quiz for their fellow students as part of their work.
- Plan for follow-up – for example, plenary sessions afterwards where you can help the students analyse and reflect on what they have learnt from each other.

- Include a more formal assessment at the end, where you can check everyone's ability to answer on these topics at a high level.
- Remember, some topics are more suitable for this approach than others. It is especially good for topics where students have to cover a lot of similar examples. For instance, where students have to illustrate a process in a number of different sports, or where they have to look at the results of a historical event in a number of different areas.

Do not forget new content

It will be tempting to revise everything in depth, but getting started on a new topic is a good approach – because all students will be on an equal footing in the classroom, whether or not they were able to work well when school was closed. This also gets momentum going again and there is still content to cover.

There is evidence from previous crisis situations that teachers who get started quickly on new content have a greater impact on student learning than those who spent a lot of time revising first¹. If you have a long vacation coming up, that could be a great chance to set up your revision activities.

Focus on your own confidence

Whether you are a new or experienced teacher, you are likely to be feeling overwhelmed. Remember, you are a skilled practitioner – you can do this! Reach out to your colleagues, or to your other teaching networks. Do not forget our Cambridge online teacher communities where you can share experiences and find out what accelerated techniques have worked for others.



1 <https://corwin-connect.com/2020/04/visible-learning-effect-sizes-when-schools-are-closed-what-matters-and-what-does-not>

2 <https://cambridge-community.org.uk/professional-development/gswmeta/index.html>