Holding Classes Electronically

2020
Best Practices

Why

Reach students at a distance

No travel time to class

Allows a consistent message to be transmitted

Can be recorded — Note: You must inform audience if they will be included in any recording

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Many potential students cannot travel to attend classes in person

If you record the presentation, you must inform your audience if their questions or faces will be recorded.

Challenges

Less effective face time

More difficult to illustrate points

Security issues

Some member are challenged by technology

"Open mic" noise

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Remember to introduce instructors <u>and</u> students

With participants being connected only via an electronic link, chances for interpersonal interaction are fewer than in a classroom.

Electronic meetings can be greatly affected by background noise if participants microphones are left open (turned on).
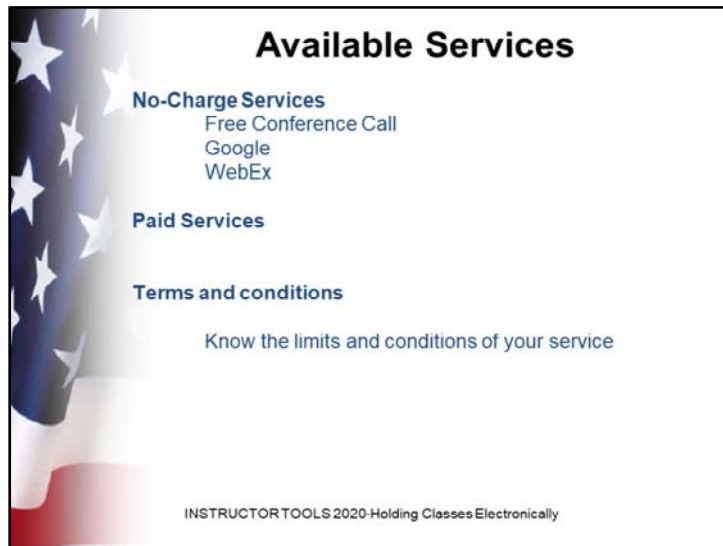
Available Services

Small Audiences

GoToMeeting
Google
WebEx

Large Audiences

Free Conference Call
GoToTraining
Google

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Whether your meeting service is a no-charge service or a paid service, know your terms and conditions, such as

Maximum number of participants
How to use the service's session recording capability, and possible storage charges for retaining previously recorded sessions.
The service's policies on participant privacy issues.
Join by invite only
Password protection, etc.

Best Practices-Prior to Class
<u>Plan Session Durations</u>
90 minutes maximum, 60 minutes better
Cameras- As Instructor, use your camera.

Encourage students to do the same. Employ presentation Best Practices described in Instructor Development 2020

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Prior to Meeting or Class Start

<u>Session Duration</u>

60 minutes online in a classroom session is about the longest that any of us are willing to endure. Go beyond 90 minutes and your audience will begin to drop off.
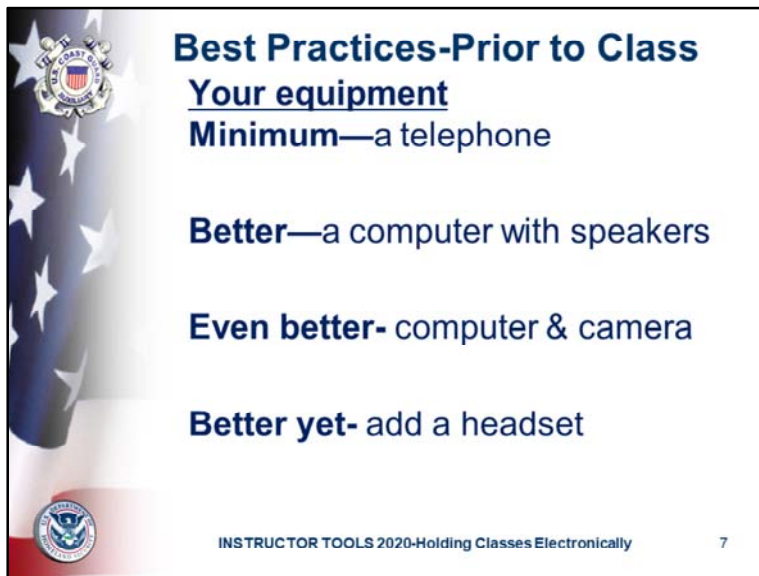
Plan your class session accordingly. Eight hour courses should be conducted over multiple sessions.

The students will interact better with you and with others if they can see your facial expressions.

If you are sharing the presentation with other instructors, remember that the camera is live when they are presenting and you are not.

Also. If your students use their cameras, at the very least, you know that they are in the virtual room with you.

Presentation Best Practices can be found in the Instructor Development 2020 Student Guide, downloadable from the E-Directorate website.

A <u>Headset</u> will greatly improve your comfort as you spend an hour or more communicating with people. Holding a phone to your ear for a long time is fatiguing. Also the microphone pickup on a headset is generally superior to that of the built-in microphone above the computer screen, or the microphone built into the webcam. Headsets can be purchased at electronic brick-and-mortar stores, and from many on-line suppliers.

Best Practices-Prior to Class
Your equipment
Minimum—a telephone

Better—a computer with speakers

Even better- computer & camera

Better yet- add a headset

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Prior to Meeting or Class Start

A meeting can be conducted using a common telephone hook-up, described as "teleconferencing". OK for exchanging opinions, but telephones alone (smart phones excepted) do not provide video capability necessary for electronic classrooms. Use non-screen telephones alone only when all else fails.

The standard device for conducting (and attending) virtual classes is a computer with speakers. Most computers sold in recent (since 2010) years come with speakers and a camera built-in. If your computer lacks speakers and a camera, you can purchase them as add-ons from a number of retailers. Cameras and speakers plug into USB ports these days. If your computer lacks USB ports, adapters can usually be found at these same retailers.

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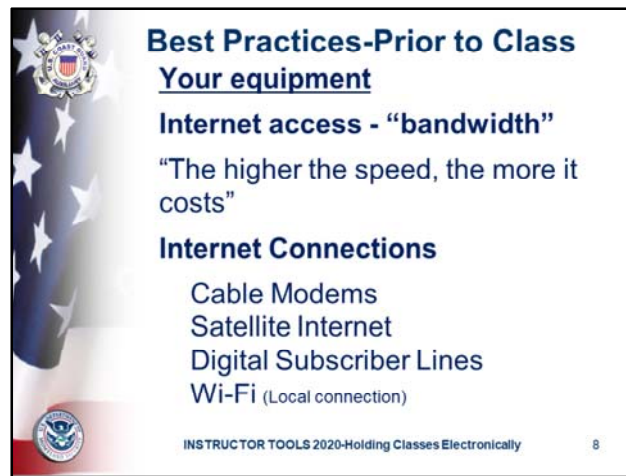
Prior to Meeting or Class Start

Internet Access is crucial for the functioning of the electronic underpinnings which make this technology work. The capacity of your apparatus to move information is called "bandwidth" in this context. The more of it you have, the better. In this world, speed costs. The faster your upload and download speeds (from you to and from the Internet) the more you will pay.

There are several Internet connections in use today. The fastest and the most reliable is employed by corporations, a dedicated "Electronic Pipe" for which the company pays a monthly access fee. Most of us cannot employ these facilities for our personal use, so we are limited to the connections we can acquire to access the Internet from our homes, or from our cars, or from other conveyances, in this case, our boats.

Communications companies who provide Internet services are called "Internet Service Providers" (ISPs). They offer Internet connection service in a number of forms and speeds. Most areas of the country have access to cable providers who provide internet access via cable modems connected to the ISP via copper wires. The "modem" is the interface box that interprets the Internet's signals moving back and forth between your computer and the Internet. Contact your cable provider to find prices and speeds. The bandwidth provided by cable modems is high (often called "broadband"). It is high speed and reliable.

ISPs in some parts of the country offer Internet service over fiber-optic cables. Like copper wire cable service, fiber-optic Internet Service is high speed and reliable, generally even higher speeds than ISPs using copper cable. Remember the adage above—"Speed costs".

Some telephone companies offer Internet service superimposed on their copper wire residential telephone hookups. These are called "Digital Subscriber Lines". They are generally lower speed and less expensive (remember the adage) than cable modem hookups, and their reliability is often spotty.

If you have no access to the above, there are two more choices for Internet access—satellite and "air card".
Satellite Internet--A handful of companies offer land-based Internet access via satellite. "Land-based" meaning your receiving dish must be on land. An even smaller handful offer high-seas Internet service where your receiver is on your watercraft. Satellite Internet, like satellite TV, is susceptible to heavy weather interruptions. Speeds are comparable to fiber optic cable and copper cable.

"Air Card", sometimes called "Wi-Fi Hotspot" Several ISPs offer mobile Internet service using a small battery-powered portable modem as the link between a "Wi-Fi" signal which your computer can receive, and a wireless phone network. They come at a variety of speeds, prices, (remember the adage) and phone networks .
Also, as they employ the wireless phone network of one wireless provider or another, your ability to access the Internet in any one area will depend on the phone company's wireless signal strength and quality in that area. You may be able to use your "Smartphone" as a "Wi-Fi Hotspot" but beware of the extra charges and data rates you may incur by using your phone in this manner.

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Finally, the term "Wi-Fi". **Wi-Fi** is the name of a wireless networking technology that uses radio waves to provide wireless high-speed Internet and network connections. Wi-Fi is used to connect your computer to your ISP wirelessly, rather than by using a physical wire between your computer and your internet access point (cable modem, DSL modem, or other internet gateway.) Wi-Fi alone will not connect you to the internet if you don't have some other connection, such as a via cable, DSL, Satellite or other means.

A common misconception is that the term **Wi-Fi** is short for "wireless fidelity," however this is not the case. **Wi-Fi** is simply a trademarked phrase that means IEEE 802.11x format. Wi-Fi radio wave signals have a limited range from a Wi-Fi transmitter, measured in feet, or yards, or tens of yards, but not in miles.

That means that your Wi-Fi air card or Hotspot (the Wi-Fi transmitter) must be within a few yards of your computer. The air card possesses two transmitters which operate almost simultaneously—one which transmits Wi-Fi signals to and from your computer, and the other which acts like a wireless phone and transmits those same signals from and to the phone system. Your cable modem provider may also include Wi-Fi signal capability from and to their modem, and this is for your convenience at home. If you use Wi-Fi signal service between your home modem and your computer, you need not bother with stringing Internet copper signal cable between the two. The trade-off is in occasional interference with the Wi-Fi signals and usually a decrease in bandwidth.

Of course, to send and receive Wi-Fi signals, your computer must be equipped with its own Wi-Fi Receiver/Transmitter. An IEEE 802.11receiver/transmitter may already be built into your computer. If it is not, a WiFi receiver/transmitter can be readily purchased either on-line or at a brick-and-mortar store. They typically plug into one of your unused USB ports (the little rectangular thingys on the side or back of your computer).

Best Practices-Prior to Class
Your presentation space
Your camera setup
Backlighting

OK, but could be better

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Prior to Meeting or Class Start
When you conduct a meeting or class, you are using a "set", just like a movie set or a TV set. In addition to being the star performer, you are also your own set designer and camera operator. The goal is to minimize audience distractions. Distractions can be both visual and audio. Think "Bland" for the visual set and "Soundproof" for the audio set.

When using a <u>webcam</u>, sit a comfortable distance from the camera, 2 to 3 feet, or so. Your face will fill the screen if you are too close, and your audience will be distracted by your close-up facial features. Too far away and your audience will wonder why you are in the next room. Best to sit at a distance where your head and shoulders are visible, with a bit of space between the top of your head and the top edge of the picture frame.

<u>Backlighting</u>--Consider shadows and mitigating them. Your face being partially in shadow will be distracting to your audience. A table lamp placed next to and behind your camera can be a big help in mitigating shadows.

Wear your <u>Uniform</u> shirt when you are leading a seminar or class whose audience is composed of Auxiliarists—Tropical Blues if the public..

Best Practices-Prior to Class
Your presentation space
Your camera setup
With Backlighting

Better lit, but is that a lamp?

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Prior to Meeting or Class Start

Background Distractions In addition to you, the star, the camera shows everything behind you in its range. Anything interesting on walls or shelves behind you will distract your audience. The blander your background, the better. If you must use a space where you are backed by artifacts like bookshelves, pictures on the wall, lamps, or whatever, best to move these items out of camera range. Folks conducting classes have hung sheets over a set of distracting bookshelves.

Best Practices-Prior to Class
Your presentation space
Your camera setup
Background

The lamp is gone, but still a chair and a plant

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Prior to Meeting or Class Start

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Also, the backlighting on the instructor's left is being lit by a yellowish light. Better to use a white or clear backlight so the stripes agree I color.
One less distraction.

<u>Other parties in the background</u>
Pick a presentation space which is free of background traffic—people passing by. If they are part of the presentation, fine. If not, they (or anything else that may move in your presentation) create enormous distractions for your audience.

Best Practices-Prior to Class

Your presentation space
Your camera setup
  Backlighting
  Bland Background-Distractions
Your computer's desktop
Available Documents
A session manager
Trial Run
Uniforms

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Prior to Meeting or Class Start

Your presentation screen (your computer's desktop) also needs to be free of as many distractions as possible. You sometimes will use full screen presentation mode, but when you do not, whatever else the audience may see on your screen is distracting. Eliminate as many as possible for the duration of the session.

If you are going to use illustrations or documents from you computer's files, make them available for one-click display before you start. Rooting around in your computer's file system as you find something to show the class is distracting. Avoid it if possible.

Session Manager

Have a second interested party serve as your session manager as you conduct the class. While you lead the class through the content of the class subjects, the session manager helps audience members with the "mechanics" of the session—logon issues, muting and unmuting, etc.

Generally we are using computer audio when we conduct classes and meetings electronically. Know that many parts of the "electronic pipes" that bind us together in this format can fail without notice. These may include Internet network congestion, discharged batteries in critical components, and other "hiccups". If you have such an issue, your first reaction will be to remedy the situation from where you sit. As you do, your audience will be "at sea", wondering where you went, and what is (or is not) happening. Your session manager may be able to take over the session in your place, should you experience unforeseen issues. For this to work smoothly, your session manager must:

    a) know that you are having issues and
    b) be able to act as the session host

If you were using ONLY computer audio before the issue occurred, you may not be able to communicate with your audience (including your session manager).

Arrange with your session manager to be alert for a phone call from you, should such failures occur. Better yet, make a phone call to your session manage in advance of the session start and keep the phone call open while the session is underway. When on-line, a minute of "dark time" seems like an hour to your audience.

Trial Run

Do at least one "Trial Run" before "showtime". Set your camera, your space, your lighting, etc, open your meeting software, see how everything looks, and make adjustments as necessary. Have your session manager login as a participant and see how you come across, both audio and video. Adjust as necessary.

Wear your Uniform shirt when you are leading a seminar or class whose audience is composed of Auxiliarists—Tropical Blues if the public.

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Below are some suggestions authored by GoToMeeting.com

"If you plan to share your entire desktop, turn off any instant-messaging applications, notification software or other programs that may interrupt or distract from the meeting.
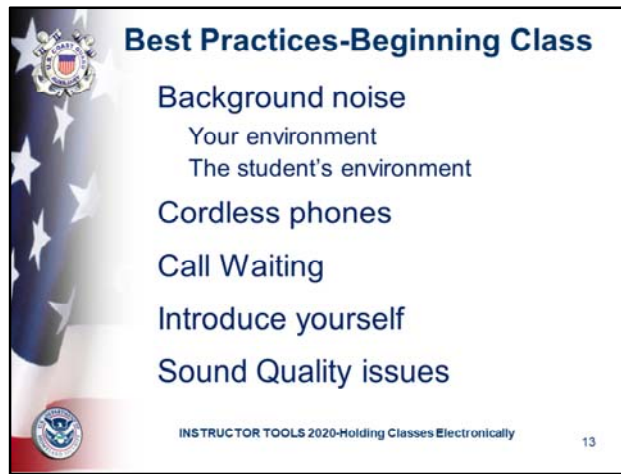
-Turn off any streaming media applications that may take up bandwidth and resource-intensive applications that may be taxing to your computer.

-Set your desktop display to a neutral background and adjust display settings to a mid-range resolution (e.g., 1024 x 768) to improve the display for attendees with lesser settings. This is also the optimal setting for recording a meeting.

-Clean up your computer's desktop before a meeting. Eliminate wallpaper and icons that may distract your attendees.
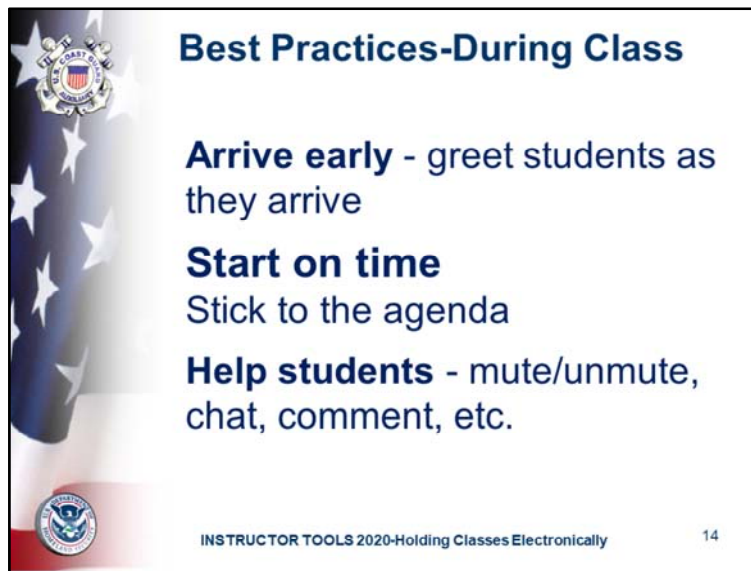
-Make the documents you wish to share easily accessible.

-Run a trial meeting with a friend to anticipate questions and to familiarize yourself with the format of your online presentation."

Best Practices-Beginning Class

Background noise
    Your environment
    The student's environment

Cordless phones

Call Waiting

Introduce yourself

Sound Quality issues

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Managing the Session
- Call in to the meeting from a location where there is little or no background noise.
- Ask students to create a dedicated space for participating in online classes. Encourage them to coordinate with others in the same household so that they aren't competing for network bandwidth when attending a class.
- Consider globally muting participants at the start of the meeting to avoid noise issues.
- Turn off system prompts and sounds for when attendees join or leave a meeting.
- Avoid using cell and cordless phones because of static and use the phone handset or a headset instead of speakerphone because of background noise, tunnel effect and sentence clipping.
- Turn off your call waiting. The beep of a new call on another line is heard by everyone on the teleconference.
- Avoid putting your phone on hold during a teleconference. Your hold music will play into the conference call, and make it impossible for the other attendees to continue the meeting.
- Introduce yourself when you begin speaking and ask other attendees to also identify themselves before speaking. Not everyone in the meeting may know everyone else's voice. Ask participants to use large name tags if they don't know each other. Before you begin, introduce everyone if necessary and provide a bit of background information so that everyone knows how the other members can potentially contribute.
- If you find you are having a sound quality issue, hang up and dial back in. Sometimes these problems clear themselves up when the bad connection is terminated.
- Ideally, use a headset and microphone

- Start the session with instructions on the screen that read similar to these:
    - Mute your device by clicking your mute icon.
    - Make sure you are in a quiet room so you can focus and without background noise.
    - If you have questions, submit a comment by clicking the comment or chat icon.
    - Class/Instructor will be starting soon.
    - Include instructions for re-logging in if outages occur.

- Prepare a videoconferencing etiquette summary for your participants so they know not to tap their pens on the table, shuffle papers, place materials on top of the microphone, as well as when they should mute their microphones and how you would like them to interact with the rest of the class.
    - Don't interrupt a speaker.
    - Don't shift and move about etc.
    - Don't lean into the camera, towards listeners; this will look too aggressive.
    - Keep reasonably still and refrain from hand gestures to avoid creating distractions. Use slower and smaller movements than you would in normal face-to-face conversations.
    - Have a predetermined procedure for asking, acknowledging and dealing with questions.
    - Remember: people can see you even if you aren't the one talking. Mind your body language.

- Hint: send out a reminder of the webinar/virtual training session the day before, and again one hour before the session starts. This will reduce the number of people who will email you at the start time of the training.

Best Practices-During Class

Arrive early - greet students as they arrive

Start on time
Stick to the agenda

Help students - mute/unmute, chat, comment, etc.

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Managing Session
• Arrive early to greet the attendees as they arrive and start the meeting on time. It also helps to have a welcome presentation running during this time. Your presence in these opening minutes can help establish the tone and direction of the meeting.
• Provide an agenda at the start of the meeting, including estimated duration, and stick to it.
• Inform attendees what the purpose/goal of the meeting is, what to expect and when and how to ask questions and participate in the meeting.
• Provide information on how to use equipment or services and how to get assistance if needed. It can be challenging to engage remote participants. This is exacerbated by the nature of those who may be technically challenged or who are having difficulty connecting.

Give students an overview of how everything will work, provide them with technology support and rules.

Materials (print, video, video streaming, online) relevant to the topic should have been provided to participants in advance. This will also include a recommended agenda for the live videoconference link.

• If at all possible have another instructor available to monitor and respond to the chat or comments log when someone is presenting.
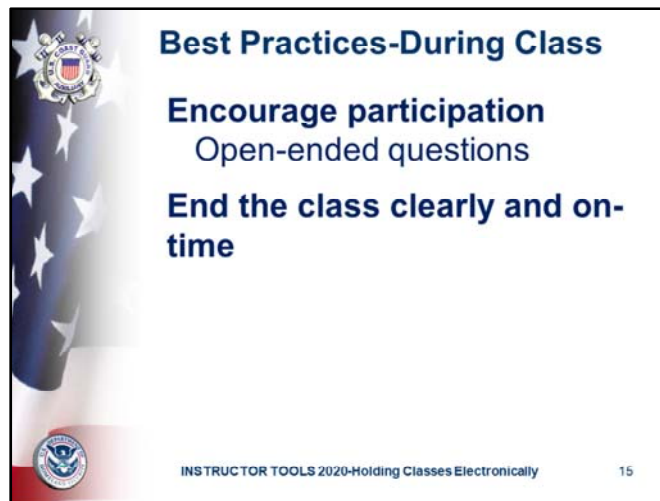
Online classes can be a bit more challenging because there is more distance between the student and the instructor. Remind students to:
- minimize distractions, but they will need to prepare themselves to follow along with the lecture.
- take breaks between sessions to move around also helps.
- take class notes just as they would if they were sitting in a classroom. In other words, treat it as much as possible as if each person were in class with the instructor in front and surrounded by other classmates.
- practice active participation and holding themselves accountable for their own success.
- use the same etiquette that they would during a live class.

- Encourage participation by using open questions such as "What would you suggest?" and "How do you feel about?"
- The instructor will need to continue to engage participants and re-engage. To do this, ask questions to specific attendees. Ensure that visuals are engaging and text is kept at a minimum.
- The more active engagement the instructor has, the better the learning experience will be. The instructor shouldn't speak at them for the duration of the training. This is a lecture and for many disengaging.

Participants are expected to meet for the whole allocated virtual training time (ideally under 2 hours). The instructor must maintain that schedule to keep consistent student participation.

End the meeting clearly. Make sure all the attendees know that the class session is formally over and stay on the line to address any last questions.

Class Management
Auxiliary Specific

Roster - Record Keeping

Payments

Attendance

Testing

Completion Certificates

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Online classes take substantial pre-planning and time. Once members sign up there needs to be time to gather payment and get the course material to the students

ROSTER: Use the standard course registration form that your flotilla uses, with special emphasis on email addresses since this will be the standard method of communications other than the actual class. Confirm street addresses since you will be sending course books to the student prior to commencement of class. Many flotilla have developed spreadsheets to keep track of student information, grades, payment, birthdates, etc. for internal uses, transfer of information to state agencies, and marketing to the student base of other courses.

PAYMENTS: Be flexible with accepting course payments. Consider adding additional costs for postage of sending the course book and the completion certificate
• PayPal
• Square
• Checks

ATTENDANCE: Prior to each class session take attendance. If there is enough bandwidth to allow student video, this is another way to take attendance and to assure the class member is still engaged.
NOTE: classes will have to be broken into "bite-size" pieces – one day ABS classes or even two-day ABS classes won't work in an online environment

TESTING: There are several avenues of thought on testing:
• Trust the integrity of the students to take the exam at home and not look up answers in the text. The exam may be mailed to them or presented as a PDF for downloading
• Depending on the state and if they offer a correspondence course themselves, then use the same instructions the state uses:
    • One state uses the following instructions: *all answers must be your own and you may not use any reference material while taking the exam*.
• Place the exam online in a program like Survey Monkey or Google Forms – this takes some technical expertise to accomplish
• Dedicate a class session to the final exam – place up a question on the screen, have the student write down their answer and then move on to the next questions. This is difficult to achieve ideal timing since some students take longer than others to think of an answer or may even have to translate the question if English is a second language

COMPLETION CERTIFICATE: Once it is determined that the student has passed, either mail the certificate to the student or send a PDF file that they can print out