

The Building Blocks of Virtual Instruction: A Diagnostic Tool

What is the purpose of this tool?

This document seeks to clarify and consolidate the elements of strong virtual instruction, by addressing both the content ([what to teach](#)) alongside the pedagogy ([how to teach](#)). By using it, we hope to be able to talk more precisely and concretely about the elements of virtual instruction with each other.

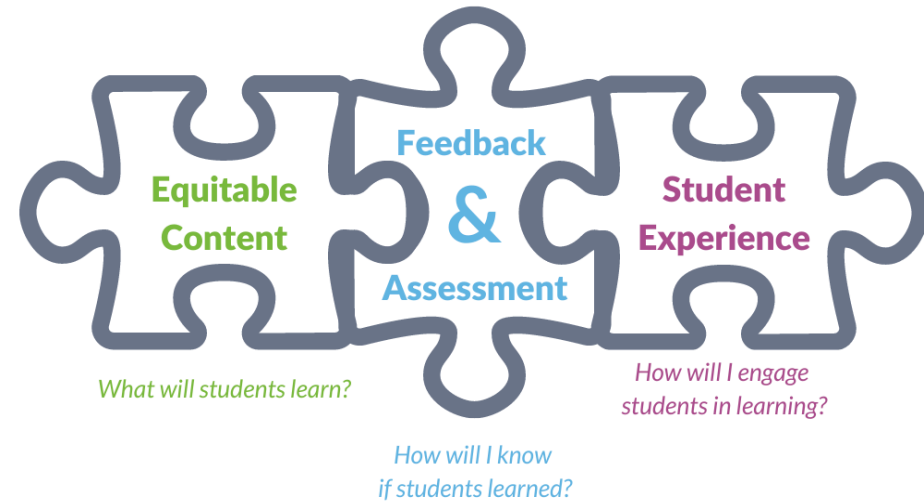
Who is this resource for?

There is a lot of research in the field about virtual teaching -- both content and strategies. The hope is for this document to help [coaches, leaders, and teachers](#), who may be feeling overwhelmed and thinking "I've read a lot about xyz topic. but something still doesn't feel right with virtual instruction."

How might I use this tool?

We have designed the tool to support [reflection](#) on virtual instruction, aligned to three fundamental questions educators answer when planning instruction in any setting. We recommend reflecting across all three buckets first to assess what's going well and where there is room to improve. From this reflection, we hope educators can prioritize areas to continue strengthening virtual instruction, drawing upon the resources included to take action.

Essential Elements of Instruction



Helpful notes:

- These building blocks of virtual instruction are *not significantly different* from building blocks of in-person instruction. At this time, we are simply solving for new barriers to the same challenge of ensuring equitable instruction for all students.
- The anchor image above is meant to help drive conversations back to the most essential elements of instruction. The puzzle image is purposeful to encourage continuous learning.
- Decisions made in one bucket will impact others. For example, decisions about content will undoubtedly impact the student experience. Elements should function together for maximum progress.
- This document does not provide guidance for the systems and structures necessary for launching a robust virtual experience (e.g. attendance, technology etc.). However, we believe that attending to these three elements will maximize student outcomes.

Are you seeing evidence of this in your virtual instruction?

Topic	Diagnostic Questions for Leaders & Teachers	Support Resources	Stop...
Equitable Content <i>What will students learn?</i>	In math, are teachers... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> making appropriate connections to important prerequisites while all students experience grade-level instruction? <input type="checkbox"/> leveraging high-quality task-based lessons? <input type="checkbox"/> gathering, and ideally responding in the moment to, evidence of student thinking? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video: Design & Teach a Task-Based Lesson Blog post: Math Language Routines (IM) Document: Important Prerequisite Standards Report: Math in the Era of COVID-19 (NCTM) 	assigning busy work (e.g. work that will not provide critical information to the teacher or inform future planning).
	In literacy, are teachers... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> spending time teaching students how to read via foundational skills instruction or remediation? <input type="checkbox"/> supporting students to read, write, and speak about appropriately complex texts that build knowledge of words/the world? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity: Teaching Fluency Virtually (SAP) Video: Distance Word Work (Michigan) Tutorial: Virtual Foundational Skills (UFLI) Document: Guidelines: Distance Learning (IP) VLM: ELA Virtual Learning Modules 	overusing media (e.g., many embedded videos or graphics) to supplement text.
Feedback & Assessment <i>How will I know if students learned?</i>	Is the school leader... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> setting vision for and supporting a coherent & adjusted 20-21 assessment strategy (i.e. are you clear on all assessments being given and why they are being given? Have you communicated this with teachers?) <input type="checkbox"/> monitoring time spent on assessments relative to their purpose? <input type="checkbox"/> communicating with families on their child's progress & providing supports? <input type="checkbox"/> reflecting on what's working and what's not? Is it worth doing a mid-year assessment inventory to see what's working and what might need adjusting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checklist: Assessment Planning Guide Document: Assessment and Feedback (IP) Document: Engaging Families with Data 	believing that evidence of learning will only come through direct instruction.
	Are teachers... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> using checks for understanding daily/weekly to get more frequent, formative information? <input type="checkbox"/> sharing regular feedback with students on assignments and assessments, based on tangible work products? If you asked students how they are doing, could they tell you and point to how they know? <input type="checkbox"/> tiering assessment use based on individual student needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video: 1:1 Virtual Writing Conference (Achievement First; we suggest starting at 4:58) Math: Nearpod Real-Time Feedback (SAP; time-stamp 41:00) 	giving static, online quizzes with no feedback to students about incorrect responses.
Student Experience <i>How will I engage students in learning?</i>	Are teachers... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> using synchronous time to develop connections with and between students, attending to social-emotional skills? <input type="checkbox"/> planning explicit means for how students will participate in learning and sharing with others? (ex: they plan their question and how they'll engage students via chat, breakouts, polls, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video: SEL in a virtual world (TransformEd) Article: How to Create Community in Virtual World (Edutopia) Overview: Means of Participation for Student Engagement in Virtual Space (Lemov) 	being the dominant voice during instruction.