

## Teaching Online Lesson Basics 101 by Susanna Sonnenberg

Teaching online lessons can be a very rewarding experience and a practical solution when students are unable to attend lessons in person. I have been teaching online lessons for five years and have learned from trial and error what works, what does not work, and why. I have outlined below the set-up that I find works best with the hope that it will help you to easily get your online studio running.

1. You need to have the highest speed internet available or that you can afford. The speed matters when doing online lessons. The speed keeps your video stream stable and prevents the video from freezing and having poor audio quality.
2. Use an ethernet cable to connect your computer to your router/modem. It provides a more stable connection than WIFI. If your student is using WIFI and the connection is unstable, you can keep your connection and audio-visual stable by using an ethernet connection.
3. You need a computer (desktop or laptop) or an iPad/tablet that has a built-in webcam, microphone, and speakers. Consider using the Chrome browser, because most platforms work well on this browser.
4. Extras: If you want to provide a better experience for online lessons with the clearest possible video and audio, consider doing one or all of the following. These are all USB connected devices that can be used with your computer.
  - A. Webcams - Logitech makes the best webcams for online lessons. Look for the Brio, c930e or the c920 series of cameras. Many have built in microphones that work well and many have software that allows you to adjust the range visible, brightness, color intensity, etc. Also, invest in an inexpensive tripod for the webcam that will allow you to keep a good angle and prevent the camera from moving if minor bumps occur.
  - B. Microphones – The company Blue makes microphones designed for online lessons/webcasting/ etc. Two models to consider are the Yeti and the Snowball. I have used both successfully.
  - C. Speakers – By connecting external speakers either directly or through Bluetooth, you will be able to hear your student's playing more clearly.
  - D. Wireless keyboard and mouse - this makes your life much easier and cuts down on cords.
5. Lighting: You need to have lighting in front of you and not behind you. Lighting from behind makes you look dark to your student. This is the same for your student. Do not have them set up in front of a window with the outside light behind them. It may look as a nice backdrop, but you will not be able to see your student. Consider using floor lamps that allow you to direct the light onto you from the front or above.
6. Setup: You need a space where you can have the screen in front of you and lighting facing you or lighting up above you. Make sure you have enough space to play your instrument and be able to move around the webcam to demonstrate from all angles. One of the biggest challenges to teaching online is learning how to demonstrate and describe everything to your student without touching or physically adjusting your student's form or setup on their instrument. If it is possible, consider connecting your computer to a large screen television that is mounted on a wall, or use the largest computer screen available. This will make it much easier to see your student. You will need to have copies of your student's music before the lesson in paper or PDF form. Frequently, I use email during lessons to send new music in PDF form to students.

Platforms to use for Online Lessons: Skype, Facetime, Zoom, Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger, Takelessons Classroom. There are pros and cons to each platform. Some platforms are just a basic set-up where you can hear and see each other. Others have more bells and whistles which include sharing your screen, making recordings within the lesson or recording the entire

lesson, and/or a chat box where you can type in notes and send attachments or pictures, links, etc. In some of the more advanced platforms, you can have the ability to mute your microphone or turn off your camera or have more than one student on the lesson.

One challenge to teaching online lessons is there is lag time with the internet and you cannot play along with your student. To work around this, you can have your student mute their microphone. Then you can play, and your student can hear you and play along with you. You will not be able to hear them, but you can visually watch them.

Another challenge is that you are not able to touch your student during lessons to correct problems. You will find you have to explain everything concisely and be willing to move around the webcam so your student can see all angles. You will have to give very clear instructions and demonstrations to correct posture, position, etc. However, you will find that teaching in this manner will improve your own teaching abilities and you will find new techniques to incorporate into your in-person teaching.

Finally, it may be useful to have your smartphone around when teaching online lessons. Find a tuner app, metronome app, and a source for students to be able to purchase music and/or supplies online. Amazon tends to be very helpful in finding method books and musical supplies. You will want to share the apps with students, so they have what they need to practice at home. Once you are set up, much of teaching online is like teaching a lesson in person. The more you do it, you will learn to ignore the screen separating you and your student and be able to make connections and build relationships the same way you do in person. The final positive of online lessons is you never have to worry about you or your student getting stuck in traffic trying to get to the lesson and weather does not cancel an online lesson.

So, plug in and have some fun teaching online with your students!

Susanna Sonnenberg is a private studio teacher who teaches violin, viola and cello lessons from her home in Pittsburgh and online. Her students range from 5 years old to 75+ years old and over 60% of her studio is online. Her students are from all over the world.