



Victorian Music Teachers' Association Inc.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC ONLINE

Technical, Pedagogical & Student Support CHECK LIST

Overview

This document is designed to provide a brief overview of some important pedagogical and technical considerations as VMTA members and their students transition to remote learning via online formats. This document includes summarised content from the free VMTA webinar [Teaching Instrumental Music Online](#), hosted by Katie Wardrobe (Midnight Music).

We are all learning in this new space together, refining our skills and expanding them. You are part of a vast community who understand your frustrations and concerns, who are feeling the same apprehension at having normal routines change so rapidly. The good news is that you do not have to alter your actual teaching approach all that much, merely make adjustments to suit the format.

Aside from the logistical and technical aspects of this new form of teaching, there are other things to be aware of. The inclusions below have been gathered from a range of sources, including documents and links the VMTA has collated and provided previously, as well as summations of several webinars and Q&A's that we have drawn your attention to recently. You can find this information on the VMTA website [here](#).

Child Safety & Professional Boundaries

Be mindful about Child Safety when delivering your lessons, particularly as they are not happening in their usual format. In keeping with state-mandated [Child Safety guidelines designed to minimise risk for students](#), VMTA advises that teachers read the Child Safety guidelines, check privacy issues with parents and guardians, and ensure that anyone under 18 is supervised. Please refer to our VMTA Child Protection policies (p17-25) in our [VMTA Music Teacher Handbook](#) under [Useful Info for Teachers](#).

Supervision could simply mean the parent is in the other room, with the door ajar, or sitting in on the lesson. We understand that parents may not be able to be home at all due to their work, in which case, we would advise against scheduling online lessons during working hours. If this is the case, please read the information below about how you can still deliver lesson content. VMTA recommends you record lessons, enabling you to document the lesson in a transparent way that does not leave you liable.

Very young students, or those who become easily distracted, will likely struggle even more with this format, so definitely separate their lesson time into smaller activities with break-away time - as you would normally - and request greater parent supervision and involvement.



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Technical Checklist (Teacher)

Do not panic! You know your content and you know how to teach. Start with what you have with the option to level up at a later stage. Be kind to yourself. Adopt a “follow the leader” type flow to the lesson (your turn/student’s turn) and consider other asynchronous ways of delivering content.

Equipment

- Start with the tech you already have (including your in-built mic/camera).
- A laptop/desktop enables more features, though tablets are viable options too. We advise against using your phone/smartphone to deliver lessons, though that device and your tablets can also be used as additional cameras. Whatever you use, plug it into the device charger when you are teaching.
- Ways to minimise internet connection issues include hardwiring your device to the router or modem using an ethernet cable if possible, turning off updates/syncing of files and notifications, closing other tabs/programs, and ensuring no other people in the house are streaming.
- Troubleshooting issues while using the platform include making sure audio/video is turned on, that the correct camera/mic is selected, that another app is not already using mic/camera and that no one else is using the internet in the house. Headphones and speakers plugged into set-ups can help fix issues, also.
- You can level up audio using USB mics or XLR mic. Blue, Audio Technica, Shure, Rode are good brands, but be mindful that shotgun mics pick up room ambience. Some mics have different settings too -- omni-directional/one directional.
- You can level up visually using Webcams such as the Logitech HD c920/c922.
- You can also log-in twice to your own lesson on two different accounts (mute the sound on one) in order to run two cameras simultaneously so you do not have to switch camera views (there may be a lag still -- dependent on internet connection).
- A mixer or audio interface enables you to connect multiple external devices such as XLR mics and electronic instruments to your laptop/desktop and can help manage the volume levels. Your platform will recognise this and you can opt for this, which is vital for electronic instruments.
- Do a check/test setup of your equipment every day. A reminder that when you record lessons, you must download and move them to an external hard-drive.



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Online Platforms

Please be aware of a few things regarding online platforms. Firstly, they were not designed for music teaching or performance, but instead are meant for regular meetings. As a result they often try to suppress background noise and automatically adjust volume, which you can adjust in settings. Secondly, irrespective what platform you use, there are always latency/lag issues as a result of internet speed and the quality of the audio/visual technology.

- We advise that Zoom is the best platform for online teaching due to the features included, although Skype is also a good option (though with less features).
- Microsoft Teams & Google Hangouts are used by a lot of school systems and they are also a good option. FaceTime is not a good option unless your students have Apple products.
- In Skype, make sure you go into audio/video settings and disable “automatically adjust microphone settings.” You can also record lessons on Skype.
- In Zoom, make sure you go into Settings/Audio/Advanced and disable “automatically adjust microphone volume”; disable the suppression features and then select “enable original sound”. Then once you are in the lesson, click the button in the top left of the meeting screen.
- Zoom has fixed up lots of the security issues recently however you need to ensure you have the latest version and that you are in-control with your meeting settings.
- In Zoom you can add students as contacts and call each time (like with Skype), or you can schedule a meeting for each lesson with a unique meeting ID. You can also enable a meeting password for added security.
- In Zoom, you can also schedule one meeting for the whole day, though this is not a viable option if you are recording lessons, which we advise for Child Safety reasons (see above).
- The Zoom has a Waiting Room feature that places the next student in line while they wait to be admitted to the meeting.
- In Zoom you can also send them music to play live on their end to work with, view the lesson in “gallery view” (top right) and you can share your screen and switch cameras.



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Technical Checklist (Student)

Be mindful that your students may not have a device, or they are sharing devices, or have little or no internet access. Just as this is a learning experience for you, it is for them too. Students and their families are adjusting to this remote learning and social distancing just as you are!

- Consider the tech set-up and challenges of your students/parents at home.
- Tell your students to download/setup the platform, practice their lesson set-up (you will need to be able to see their hands/face) and make sure they have everything they need (pencil, music, notepad etc).
- If the student has trouble hearing you, advise them to use headphones or speakers plugged into laptop/portable devices. Position device with inbuilt mic near the student.
- If possible, ensure your students' set-up is as similar as possible to yours, or that they duplicate any adjustments you make to audio settings in your software.
- Troubleshooting options if something goes wrong include checking the internet connection, making sure audio/video is turned on, the correct camera/mic is selected in the platform or that another app is not using the mic/camera.

Scheduling & Communication

Before sending information to parents, try to define your new parameters so that you can tell them when the new format will begin, your expected timeline, lesson options available, expectations of students/parents and what technology/set-up they will need. You can find a template for this later in the document.

- Once you have decided on your online platform, email students/parents a link to download the app/software and/or a link to connect with you in the lesson. Be patient, positive and supportive with all student/parent communication.
- Allow time at the start to ensure everything is set up correctly for the lesson to proceed.
- You will most likely need to restructure your schedule with 5-10min gaps on either side of lessons, rather than back-to-back as normal.
- Payment should be processed as normal and your rate should not be adjusted for online/remote teaching. See our statement on that [here](#).



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Space & Teaching Environment

Be patient with yourself and the student since this is new to both parties. Try to approach this in a positive way as it is an opportunity to apply what you already know about teaching to this new format. It could even be an option for remote make-up lessons in future!

- If needed, adapt your teaching studio or find a space in your home environment that will suit online teaching. Your teaching space should have good ambient lighting (do not sit in front of a window), be relatively quiet and close to your equipment/resources.
- Proximity to your internet router is also key! Be mindful of what can be seen in the background.
- Ensure correct placement of laptop/portable device near instrument to capture video and sound, position of webcam if available (e.g. overhead view) and position of instrument condenser mic (if available).
- Think outside of the box -- you could put your laptop on your ironing board and adjust the height. Pop your laptop on a stand, raised height/angle screen off to side if teaching piano. An overhead camera is especially good for drums and piano keyboard.
- Avoid using bluetooth headphones, microphones or speakers within the online lesson format as they are not reliable for online teaching.
- Have a practice run with another teacher, or someone else in your household, so you can test functions, audio etc. This would be a great time to find the best positioning for you to demonstrate anything practical.
- Take advantage of this online format to see what sort of practice space your student has at home, as well as a chance to help them improve their set up.
- Ensure you are properly prepared/set-up for the lessons ahead of time.
- Ask the student or parent to have a notebook and pencil handy for taking notes during the lesson. Alternatively you could email notes after the lesson.
- If something goes wrong in the lesson (internet outages out for instance), a plan B which fits in with asynchronous teaching is to use that lesson time to record a bite-size version of what the lesson would have been and send that through to the students.



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Resources & Content

You do not have to change the structure of your normal lesson, but it is advisable to demonstrate more and talk less wherever possible. As playing/singing together at the same time is not possible in this format, this could include you doing more demonstrations (eg. *"I'm going to play this now, and can you tell me what I did differently to the way you just played it?"*)

You can also treat the session like a masterclass by hearing them play and providing notes/feedback, or you could also run a mock exam or audition for students who are preparing for those. You can deliver a live session (similar to your normal lesson) or pre-record a lesson that involves warm-ups, introduction to a new piece, a worksheet/game or other type of assignment that gets them practicing, improvising, composing or listening.

- Be mindful that anything you send them in the chat function on most platforms during the lesson is only available in that session. Alternatively you could email resources after the lesson or create a Google Doc in your Google Drive and provide each student with a link to read the lesson notes each week.
- You can also screen share during the lesson and this is a great way to go over new concepts/pieces. Students can see your screen so make sure nothing sensitive is there.
- Consider using lesson time to introduce or consolidate areas of your students' general musicianship which mitigates some of the issues with playing/singing practically.
- You can use the same method book / material you have been using, but you must have a copy of this to refer to in the lesson. Make sure you have printed resources for things you would normally explain verbally that you can use via screen-share.
- Playing duets or working with a backing track will be extremely difficult due to the audio delay factors. Instead, if your students are practicing duets, you could record yourself performing one part and send it to them to practice along to.
- Maintain your normal sequential, gradual, scaffolding approach to teaching. For instance, you can still use a Kodaly approach by filming yourself doing the hand-signs and rhythm names and then asking your student to sing/sign along with you at home.
- You can use [Screencastify](#), [Loom](#) and [Flipgrid](#) to make teaching videos. All platforms are free and you can send students a link to watch the video.
- Use existing online resources such as the [tonal energy app](#) or others, including [Musition & Auralia](#), online [AMEB Theory of Music exams](#), free material at [Deborah Smith Music](#) and other sites that provide further activities for students such as [teoria](#) and [musictheory.net](#).



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Online Support & Communities

There are online social media groups, pages and communities that you can look to for further support, suggestions and troubleshooting. Additionally, if you are not a VMTA Member, you can [join](#) and access [COVID-19 support](#) and be listed on our [teacher directory](#).

- Facebook Group: [Music Educators Creating Online Learning](#)
- Facebook Group: [eLearning in Music Education](#)
- [Midnight Music Facebook Page](#)
- [Midnight Music Community](#)
- [VMTA Facebook Page](#)
- [VMTA Member Forum](#)

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Disclaimer: These resources, suggestions and information are provided in good faith and have been obtained through research using reputable sources. The material is purely of an advisory nature and is intended to provide general guidelines for music teachers including VMTA Members. Individuals and schools are advised to contact the relevant authority and government source regarding any specific matter relating to the content in this document. The VMTA accepts no legal responsibility for any of the material provided.



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REMOTE TEACHING TEMPLATE FOR VMTA MEMBERS

Dear Student/Parent,

As a member of the [Victorian Music Teachers' Association](#), I am required to follow the conduct and ethical guidelines as outlined by the organisation. VMTA is the peak advocacy body for the instrumental music teaching profession in the state.

In response to COVID-19, the VMTA has released a statement regarding maintaining its recommended teaching rates, which you can view [here](#).

I care deeply about the health of my community including all parents and students. I am committed to measures that prevent or slow the spread of COVID-19 and adhere to the most recent government guidelines and school closures.

As such, I will be providing lessons online via **[insert platform]** until social distancing restrictions have been lifted. Online lessons will begin **[insert date]** and will be scheduled as close to your normal lesson time as possible, although start times may be adjusted by 10-15mins to allow for a sufficient transition from one lesson to the next. Following advice from the government, conventional lessons will be reinstated at a later date.

Things to consider for our online lessons: **[delete/include as relevant to you]**

- Any students under the age of 18 will need to be supervised, though this could simply mean parents leaving the door ajar and being in the adjacent room.
- For child safety and professional indemnity reasons, I will be recording the lessons.
- For students under the age of **[insert]** I will require parent presence and involvement.
- Students should have music stands positioned so that they can see the teacher screen as well as their music. This might mean standing up when you normally sit down (if practical), or repositioning/raising the viewing device.
- Once download/setup of the platform has happened please practice your lesson set-up (I will need to be able to see their hands/face) and make sure you have everything you need (pencil, music, notepad etc).
- In Zoom, make sure you go into advanced audio settings and disable "automatically adjust microphone volume", disable the suppression features and then select "enable original sound". Then once you are in the lesson, click the button in the top left of the meeting screen.
- In Skype, make sure you go into audio/video settings and disable "automatically adjust microphone settings."
- Ways to minimise internet connection issues include using an ethernet cable if possible, turning off updates/syncing of files and notifications, closing other tabs/programs, and ensuring no other people in



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the house are streaming.

- Students should avoid using bluetooth headphones or microphones (use plug-ins). Troubleshooting options if something goes wrong include checking the internet connection, making sure audio/video is turned on, the correct camera/mic is selected in the platform or that another app is not using the mic/camera.
- If something goes wrong in the lesson, such as internet outages or equipment failure, I will allow 5 minutes or so for trouble-shooting. If the problem cannot be resolved, I will record a bite-size version of what the lesson would have been and send that through to students to allow further progress.
- Be mindful that anything I send you (notes, pictures, files etc.) in the chat function during the lesson is only available during that session. Make sure you have downloaded/transferred/saved this before the 'meeting' ends. Alternatively I can email notes and resources to you directly or make them available online.
- I will be using **[delete as required]** [Screencastify](#), [Loom](#) and [Flipgrid](#) to make teaching videos. All platforms are free and students will be sent a link to watch the video.
- An online lesson format is also an opportunity to foster general musicianship skills such as theory, general knowledge and aural training and to continue to prepare for exams.
- We can use the same method book / material we have been using in lessons, however I will require that you email screenshots of this material to me as we progress.

I thank you for your understanding, patience and support as we come together in these times to maintain as much routine and connection as possible.

Sincerely,

[insert your name]