

Things We Learned Over the Summer Teaching Online

Hi everyone,

The graduate students Marte, Alia, Alexander, and Roel taught intro to dance classes this summer. They did an incredible job. We met weekly to discuss and strategize. Below is a list of things we learned. We hope this will help you this autumn if you are teaching on zoom.

For context: Two instructors taught in the studio, solo, with a musician and two taught at home, with musicians playing in the Meany studio for the most part, or sometimes, Paul played from home.

1. Allow students time to practice adjusting their cameras for different kinds of experiences. If you start on the floor they need to learn how to adjust their cameras, for their spaces, so you can see them. Some of them may be on their beds...but they still need to be visible.
 - a. When you transition to moving differently, give them time to move their cameras, and have them look and see.
2. Ask them ahead of time to spend time figuring out how they can clear things out of the way each day, in preparation for their class. Even two minutes can help. They want to move fans, shoes, clutter, glasses of water, etc.
3. Ask them to not check their phones while dancing.
4. Try to avoid a lot of turning/spinning on one foot (pirouette). Carpets are troublesome.
5. Repetition is a good thing. Repetition is a good thing. Repetition is a good thing.
6. Get them dancing without you right away or it will never happen. Just as in the studio, if you constantly dance with them, they will always rely on you. They need to learn to let go of the camera and frame, and have a dancing experience. It is ok if it looks chaotic – there is learning going on.
7. Take much longer than you think when you ask questions. Also, you will have far more success if you ask very deliberate questions that will elicit specific answers. Asking “do you have it?” or “any questions?” will not get responses. Or, it will take five minutes out of class, (the student evals suggest this too).

8. Allow the students to practice entering/starting with the musician. Take time to practice with the musician and students. Even in the studio, with beginners, we take time to have them work with the musicians – listening for the “one” and hearing counts. We know there is this weird delay, but it is a good thing to take specific time practicing this early on. Maybe day two is a good day to do this.
9. Explain that in order to be evaluated in technique, you have to have your camera on. We can't give you feedback or a grade, if we can't see you. There are some students who don't want to be seen or don't want their homes to be seen, but with technique, there is no way to see them. We are not giving a class. We are teaching a class. With other classes, it isn't always essential they have their cameras on the whole time.
10. I have been asked by people all over the country about what we are learning on zoom. If I had to say one thing, it is “breakout rooms.” They need contact. And shy students will not talk in a big group, but they will with one or two other people. They can do a “get to know you” segment the first week, for ten minutes. They can work on phrase work together – watch each other with specific concepts from the instructor to look for; make a duet with the material and perform it (Josh Yee taught me that everyone else can turn their cameras off and we can just watch the two people dancing). They can work in small groups. They can do classroom norms the first or second day in groups of three and then come back and share to make a combined list. But, most important, is just that sense of community they are missing.
11. After students are in a place where they don't need to watch you, and can just dance, walk right up to your screen, and watch the students very deliberately. Then you can give individual feedback and/or general encouragement to them. It allows you to just focus on them and for students to see our faces, right there, attending to them.
12. Have back up music/play list in case your musician is late, or sick or you have technical issues.

We did evaluations for the second session (Summer B). They were so positive and generous. I asked some very specific zoom questions in the evaluations and a few patterns emerged:

- First, they are so appreciative of the experience and loved their instructors. Their feedback was tremendously positive.
- Two repeat comments:

- The music/instructor blend is still an issue. They mention that they sometimes can't hear the instructor over the musician, or the musician over the instructor sometimes. And with piano, they sometimes struggle hearing the down beat.
- As mentioned above, they want more time with peers.

This pdf can also be found at: <https://dance.washington.edu/covid-19-news-and-resources-teaching>