Notes from the Field

A blog focused on supporting student capacity and increasing completion and equity

Guest Author: Maritez Apigo

Distance Education Coordinator, OER Coordinator, and English Professor at Contra Costa College

Humanizing Your Online Courses with Flipgrid

Tone, facial expressions, voice, and other social cues are often lost in online classrooms where interactions are primarily text-based. Flipgrid helps reclaim these vital aspects of communication, enabling instructors and students to have asynchronous video conversations. The magic happens as connections and a strong class community are formed -- even from a distance.

Try it out yourself!

CAP Community Flipgrid
A space to share ideas about using Flipgrid in your classes

Join a follow-up conversation with the author!
Friday, September 11 from 2:00-3:00
Register now!
Humanizing and Equity

Students’ learning ignites when they trust their instructor and form relationships with their classmates. Michelle Pacansky-Brock is helping faculty nationwide to humanize their online teaching. She defines humanizing as “a student-centered mindset that involves recognizing and supporting the non-cognitive components of learning. In a humanized course, faculty intentionally cultivate an inclusive learning environment that fosters psychological safety and trust and forms connections that grow into relationships and a community.” She illustrates that the two key ingredients for humanizing are instructor presence and social presence.

Strengthening the sense of community and humanizing online learning are inclusive, equity-minded practices. Dr. Luke Wood, known for his “Black Minds Matter” webinar series, delivered a keynote entitled “Reaching Underserved Students through Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning in the Online Environment” at the 2018 Online Teaching Conference. Wood emphasizes the need to create a “community-centric” environment where students have opportunities to share their perspectives, stories, and reflections.

This point is echoed by Zaretta Hammond, author of the book Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain, who emphasizes creating “a community of learners” by building on students’ values of collaboration and connection to create intellectual safety and reduce stereotype threat.

Flipgrid supports a strong sense of community and social presence as students interact with each other and as instructors reply to students beyond text alone. Students are speaking and listening to each other, with audio and video enhancing their online exchanges. Tone, facial expressions, accents, and the sound of each other’s voices humanize each person and the whole online environment.

I’ve witnessed quiet and reserved students absolutely shine on Flipgrid because it gives every student a voice. In an on-campus or synchronous setting, you are constrained to the time allotted for your class meeting, so not every student is allowed the opportunity to speak. That is not the case with Flipgrid; students are at the center and have equal opportunities to contribute.

Student Feedback

Students reported on my anonymous feedback survey how much they love Flipgrid:

- “In this course, I like the discussions that we’ve been having on Flipgrid. Flipgrid is really easy to learn and a fun place to interact with other classmates.”
- “One thing that at first I didn't like because it brought me out of my comfort zone was the Flipgrid assignments but now I see them as valuable and think it’s a great part of this class.”
Initially, I thought that I wouldn't like Flipgrid because the idea of posting videos of myself online was not appealing at all. But, after doing our first assignment and receiving comments on my videos, I actually like Flipgrid because I feel that I am actually in this class interacting with my fellow English 1A classmates.

Flipgrid Features

Instructors create prompts on Flipgrid (called “topics”), and students post their video responses to the forum for that topic (called a “grid”). Flipgrid enables faculty to:

- Seamlessly embed video assignments into Canvas for easy student access
- Use Canvas Speedgrader to assess video assignments
- Automatically create and edit closed-captioning for accessibility (Be sure to enable this feature!)
- Enable video moderation for private conversations or testing
- Set time limits for students’ video recordings from 15 seconds to 10 minutes

See the faculty and student resources below for how-to videos. I encourage you to give Flipgrid a try from the students’ perspective. Go to our CAP Community Flipgrid, record a video response to the prompt, and reply to colleagues. (Note that this Flipgrid is not integrated into Canvas.)

Maritez’s Examples

I use Flipgrid to foster a high challenge, high support pedagogy in line with the CAP principles. It is easy to build fun Flipgrid assignments that prompt low-stakes collaborative practice on meaningful and challenging tasks. Just-in-time remediation takes care of itself using Flipgrid when students and the instructor reply to each other with friendly suggestions and support. The result is ultimately a community of learners with affective benefits that encourage effort and persistence.

Consider replacing some of your Canvas Discussions with Flipgrids to prevent discussion fatigue. I have heard of colleagues who alternate between Canvas Discussions and Flipgrids each week. I enjoy sprinkling Flipgrids throughout the semester.

- **Introductions:** During the first week, students in my English courses meet each other through video interactions on our first Flipgrid. They introduce themselves and then reply to each other with greetings, commonalities, and questions.
- **Microaggressions:** After my students read articles from multiple perspectives on microaggressions, they share a situation when they experienced (or witnessed) a microaggression, the implied meanings, and their reactions. I record an example video for my students to use as a model, which Flipgrid allows you to pin at the top. You might also
consider pinning stellar students’ videos as models to highlight. Students and I reply to each other and a fruitful discussion ensues.

- **Research and Writing Challenges:** When my students are knee-deep in their research projects, they share their specific challenges with conducting research and with academic writing, such as finding effective evidence, searching the library databases, and MLA style. Students reply to each other by offering friendly solutions, suggestions, support, and encouragement.

- **Student Lounge:** To support student-initiated contact with other students, I create a Student Lounge Flipgrid as an ongoing space for students to chat about non-course related topics. Flipgrid can be utilized for your course Q&A where students can reach out with questions. I’ve also applied it at the end of the course for us to say our goodbyes.

### For the Camera-Shy

Students may be hesitant to record videos of themselves or show their faces on camera for various reasons related to their cultural background or comfort level. It’s important to practice inclusivity in our teaching and provide alternatives for students to still participate in our courses.

Show your students the features in Flipgrid such as using the rear-facing camera (on any device that has one), pixelating their face with a filter, or inserting a large emoji over it. Similar to screen sharing, the Flipgrid camera is filled with new powerful features including a series of boards - whiteboard, blackboard, graph paper, lined paper, and more - which allow your students to share their voice either with or without their face being on camera. They can still successfully participate in Flipgrids by contributing their audio recording with alternative visuals.
Flipgrid “Topic” Ideas

Flipgrid provides many opportunities to make learning authentic and communal by asking students to actively process course material, apply concepts to their lives, and collaborate with each other.

All Disciplines

- **Introductions:** Having students introduce themselves or do icebreakers at the beginning of a semester is a simple way for students to first learn Flipgrid.
- **Discussions:** Asking students to respond to an open-ended prompt and then reply to their peers is a great opportunity for low-stakes, collaborative practice with course concepts.
- **Think alouds:** A technique from Reading Apprenticeship, this activity asks students to read a passage and describe what is going through their mind, building metacognitive understanding of reading processes and strategies.
- **Presentations:** Students share slides and deliver speeches on course concepts.
- **Storytelling:** Students share experiences from their lives that connect to the class topic.
- **Debates:** Students practice argumentation, with half the class assigned to one side and half to the other side.
- **Muddiest points:** Students share the most challenging or confusing part of a lesson/unit and receive clarification from peers.

**English**

- **Reading groups:** Students discuss assigned readings in small groups, supporting both reading comprehension and critical thinking. (Set up a separate Flipgrid for each group.)
- **Golden lines:** Another Reading Apprenticeship technique asks students to share important quotes from a text, explain why they were important, and reply to peers’ golden lines.
- **Summaries of found content:** Students find their own reading, film, poem, etc. related to the course topic and provide a summary to the class.
- **Socratic seminars:** Students discuss spoken responses to an essay prompt before writing.
• **Peer review or critiques:** Students share a draft (or part of a draft) of their work and receive feedback from their classmates.

**ESL**

• **Vocabulary charades:** Students act out a vocabulary word and peers reply with their answers. (You can also have students teach the class new words and peers reply with their use of the word in a sentence.)

• **Interviews:** Students work in pairs to practice question formation and responses.

• **Clap the word:** Students practice pronunciation by clapping the syllables of a word with the stress on the correct syllable.

• **Grammar lessons:** Students deliver a presentation on a grammar point to the class or tell a story from their lives using the targeted verb tenses.

• **Reading and writing activities:** Students discuss their personal responses to a reading, enabling them to talk through ideas in preparation for a formal writing assignment.

• More [ESL ideas on the Flipgrid site](https://www.flipgrid.com) and under “English” above.

**Math**

• **Number talks:** Students deepen their learning by explaining their math reasoning and problem-solving processes and seeing how other students approached a problem.

• **Tutorials:** Students create mini-lessons on different math skills using the screen record, whiteboard, or graph paper features.

• **Challenges:** Students create their own math problems for classmates to complete, then reveal the correct answer in a later reply.

• **Real-world math:** Students share math experiences from their lives, helping them understand that math is all around us.

I hope that my ideas have inspired you to think about the kinds of discussions and interactions you would want your students to engage in Flipgrid. If you intend to create an online course with a strong social presence and community, Flipgrid is a powerful tool for applying student-centered, equity-minded pedagogy.

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**Faculty Resources**

**VIDEO:** [Flipgrid in Canvas by Maritez Apigo](https://flipgrid.com)

**VIDEO:** [Edit Captions on Flipgrid Videos by Flipgrid](https://flipgrid.com)

**WEBSITE:** [Flipgrid Help Center](https://help.flipgrid.com)

**WEBSITE:** [Flipgrid Blog](https://blog.flipgrid.com)
Student Resources

VIDEO: Flipgrid Demo: Student View in Canvas Using a Computer by @ONE

VIDEO: Flipgrid Demo: Student View in Canvas Using a Mobile Device by @ONE

About the Author

Over the last two decades, Maritez Apigo has had the honor of teaching English and ESL in community colleges, high schools, and middle schools in the Bay Area, California and in Hawaii. She has been teaching online since earning her M.A. in English and TESOL from SFSU in 2012, and she holds an @ONE Certificate in Online Teaching and Design and an @ONE Advanced Certificate in Online Teaching Principles. Currently, she is the Distance Education Coordinator, the Open Educational Resources (OER) Coordinator, and an online and hybrid English Professor at Contra Costa College. She trains faculty in online teaching pedagogy at the college, district, and state levels. She is an @ONE Online Course Facilitator and a CVC-OEI Online Course Reviewer. Maritez's passions for social justice, equity, innovation, and student success are illuminated in her teaching pedagogy. When she’s not teaching, you might discover her behind the turntables DJing, in the dance studio working on her dance technique, or at the park playing with her two young children.