

# 5 Tips for Teaching Impact Issues Online

By Michael Rost



*Online teaching can present challenges for teachers, particularly if we feel we have to create a class quickly, or in an emergency. This posting offers five concrete tips for creating a successful online language learning class:*

1. [Provide the right level of leadership](#)
2. [Create a portal for all course content](#)
3. [Set up a simple learning management system for student access](#)
4. [Emphasize creative output](#)
5. [Build a community](#)

*These tips are referenced to the use of the Impact Issues series, though the advice can be adapted to other content.*

So you need to set up an online course quickly? And you're wondering if you can do it successfully? Well, join the club! Many teachers are now in the process of setting up online courses for the first time and are panicking that they won't be able to do it right! Well, here are five concrete steps you can take... after Step Zero, which is: Calm down. Do the best you can. You don't have to do things perfectly – in fact, perfectionism is the enemy of good teaching!

As series editor of *Impact Issues*, I'm referencing these five steps to setting up *Impact Issues* as an online course, but you can easily adapt these steps to other published courses, or to courses that you create on your own.

## Tip 1: Provide leadership

All teaching requires leadership: As the teacher, you provide direction, guidance, and standards. You also provide energy and fuel for motivation, along with emotional support. Don't forget that. Be a leader. Set expectations for your students.

All teaching situations present us with “impossible circumstances” – I remember my first teaching assignment as a high school teacher in the Peace Corps in West Africa, with classes of 80 to 100 students in open-air classrooms, with no textbooks, and no technology. Of course, at first glance, it was “impossible”, but with the proper guidance from my trainers, the right mindset about what could be achieved, and after learning how to garner the students’ energy and enthusiasm for learning into a collaborative venture, the impossible gradually became possible! (One key was to have each student keep a personal notebook, which they took great pride in, copy things from the board, and use their notebooks for in-class and out-of-class practice. That was our “technology.”)

As a leader of the class, decide on how you want to evaluate your students. Think of creative ways to evaluate – including participation and course projects.

## Tip 2: Create a portal for class content

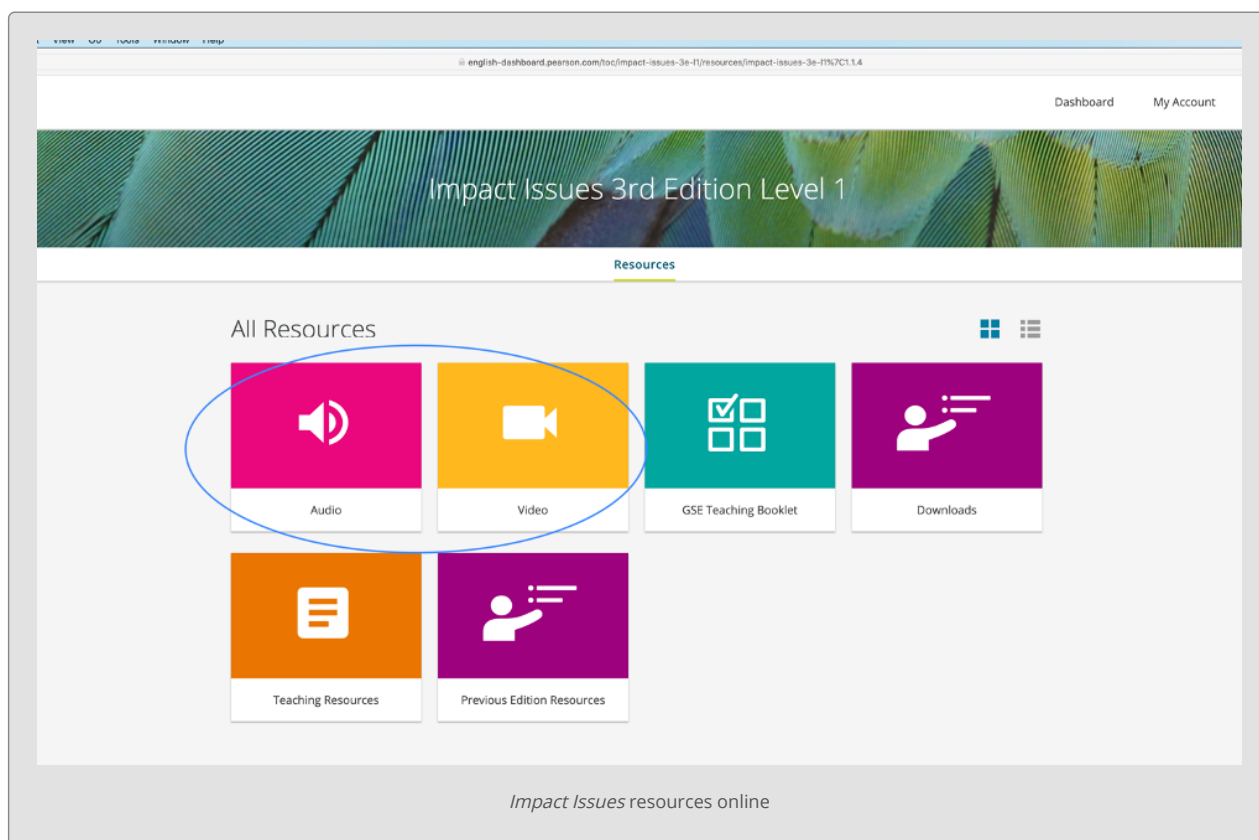
Powerful content is critical for effective online teaching, so choose your content well! It’s a good idea to prepare in advance how much content you will need for the course. *Impact Issues* for example has an online repository called [Pearson English Portal](#) that has all the teaching resources. If you don’t have a published course with pre-set content, you will need to create your own “portal”, such as a Google Drive file that contains all of the text, Powerpoint, video, and audio files that you plan to use.

The screenshot shows the Pearson English Portal dashboard for a user named Michael. The URL is `english-dashboard.pearson.com/dashboard/home`. The dashboard has a header with "Dashboard" and "My Account" links. A large blue banner says "Hello, good to see you, Michael!" with "TEACH" and "LEARN" buttons. Below the banner is a "Products" section with tabs for "ACTIVE" and "EXPIRED". A grid of 12 product cards is displayed, each with a cover image, title, edition, and expiration date. The products include English Firsthand Access, English Firsthand Level 1 and 2, English Firsthand Success, Impact Issues 1, 2, and 3, and Pearson English Interactive 1 through 4. A "Teacher Resources in the Pearson English Portal" link is at the bottom.

Product	Edition	Expires
English Firsthand Access	5th Edition	Expires 5 July 2022
English Firsthand Level 1	5th Edition	Expires 5 July 2022
English Firsthand Level 2	5th Edition	Expires 5 July 2022
English Firsthand Success	5th Edition	Expires 5 July 2022
Impact Issues 1	3rd Edition Level 1	Expires 5 July 2022
Impact Issues 2	3rd Edition Level 2	Expires 5 July 2022
Impact Issues 3	3rd Edition Level 3	Expires 5 July 2022
Pearson English Interactive 1	2.0	Expires 4 August 2022
Pearson English Interactive 2	2.0	Expires 4 August 2022
Pearson English Interactive 3	2.0	Expires
Pearson English Interactive 4	2.0	Expires

Be sure to provide everything the students will need to engage in your course. If you’re using authentic, challenging content (such as YouTube videos or TED Talks), be sure to provide learning supports, such as transcripts or translations (these are often built into the

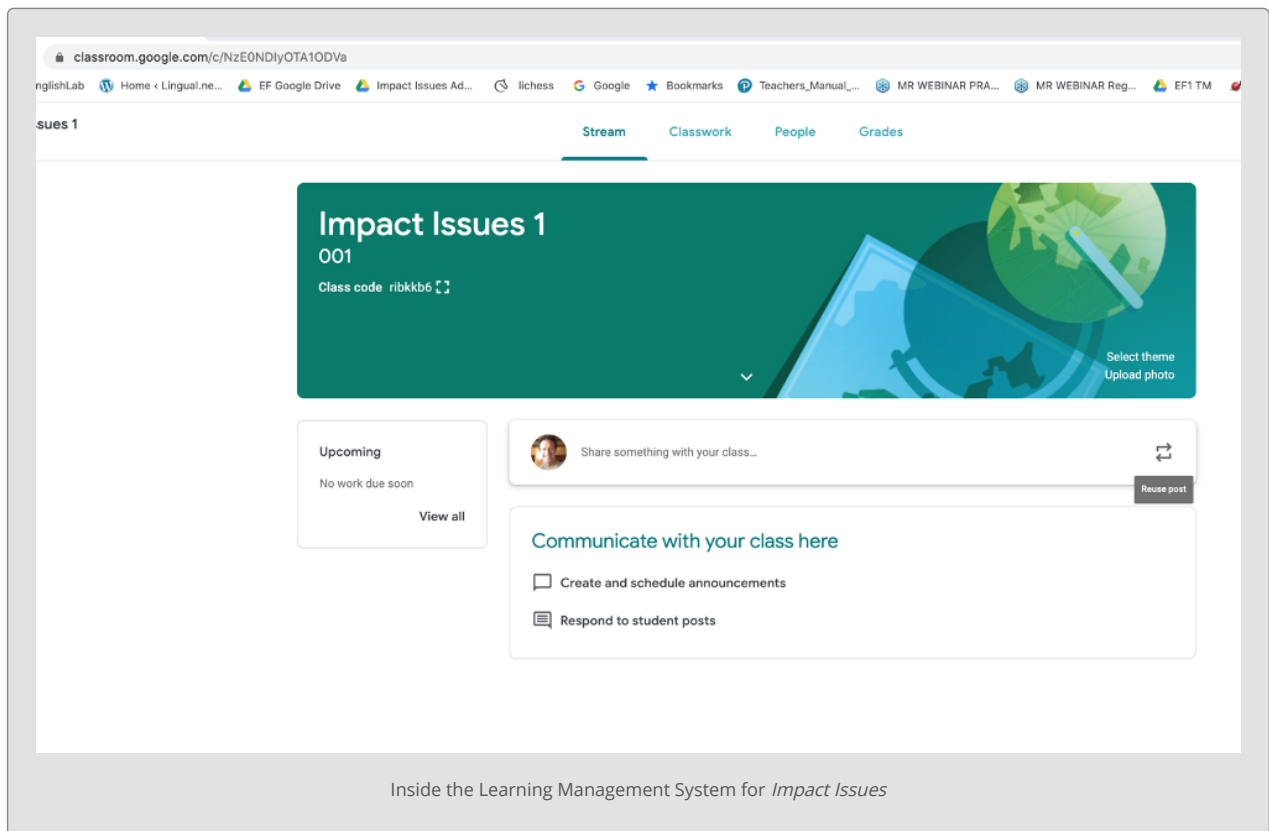
sources themselves), along with study guides and comprehension checks. (Impact Issues Teacher's Resources includes 3 stimulating YouTube videos, selected for length and appropriateness for each topic in the series.) The *Impact Issues* course is based on thought-provoking stories that present differing points of view, along with discussion and presentation activities that promote critical thinking, idea exchange, and thoughtful personal presentations. If you're creating your own material, I would recommend erring on the side of having more challenging content than you may think is appropriate — engagement is the key! And your students are likely to rise to the challenge.



As the course “conductor”, be sure you’re happy with the content of the class you’re going to teach. Happy, engaged teachers are important for conducting an effective course.

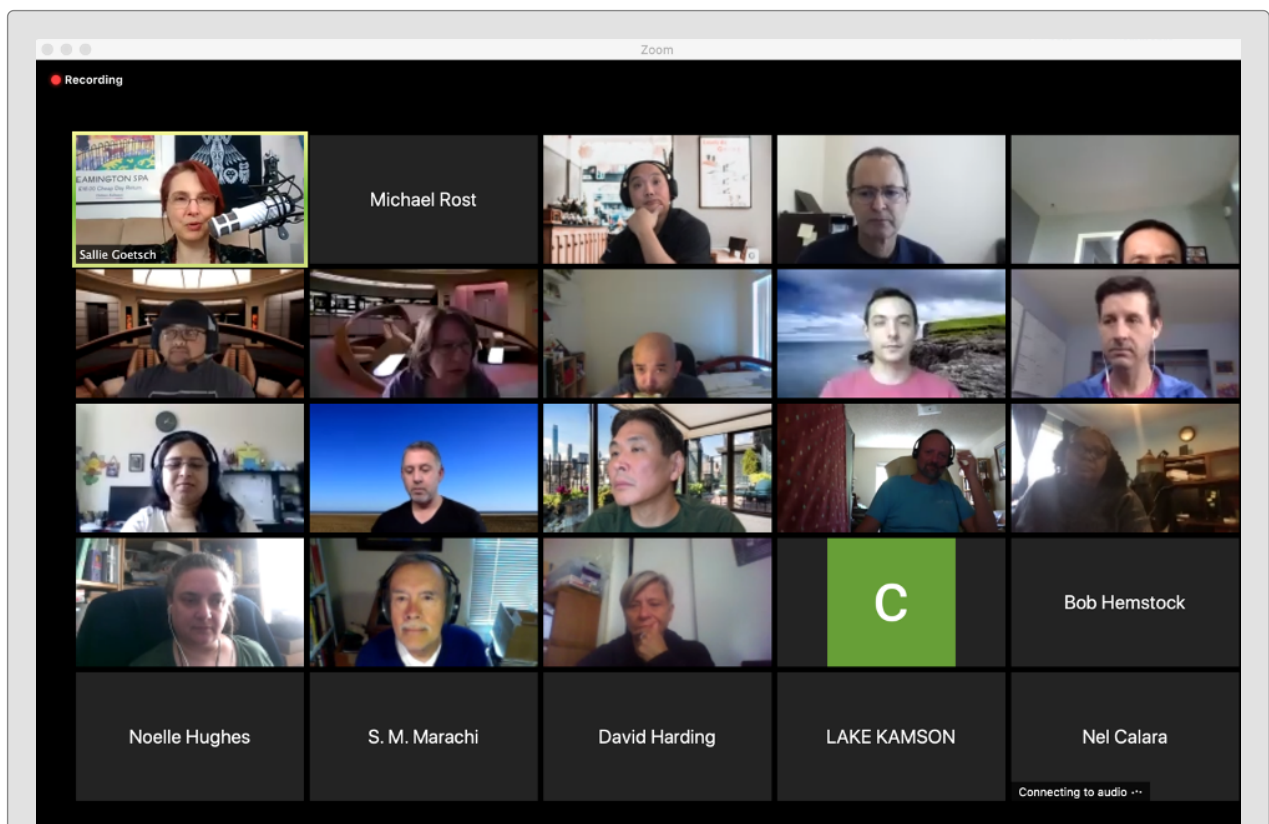
### Tip 3: Create a “learning management system” for each class you teach

Again, if you have purchased a published course, you are likely to have some kind of built-in LMS (learning management system) that will allow you to set a schedule, post assignments, send emails to students, receive assignments, and possibly even have video conferences. If you do not a built-in LMS, create a basic one of your own, through Google Classroom ([classroom.google.com](https://classroom.google.com)) or something comparable. You can create a class, enroll students, upload material you are going to use, give students access to material and a place to post their assignments and feedback.



Inside the Learning Management System for *Impact Issues*

Speaking from experience, to create maximum efficiency, you need to have boundaries. You do not want to mingle your personal email correspondence with classroom-related e-mails. Just as you may want to keep a separate home/office workspace for your classes, you also will want to have a separate cloud storage space for your class files.



Live classroom meetings with video conferencing are now easier than ever. Choose a reliable platform and schedule regular meetings. Make live meetings with you, and "break out groups" among students a regular feature of your class if the platform has such an option. Even 30 minutes a week can help maintain a community atmosphere, which can really boost learning

Unless you're a tech wizard, you're going to have tech problems and frustrations as you proceed through your course, along with the usual problems we teachers have with classroom management and content presentation. Don't let those tech problems discourage you. Again, you don't have to master all the nuances of the technology to be an effective teacher. Keep learning as you go and don't be afraid to ask for help.

## Tip 4: Emphasize creative output by the students

"Pushed output" is essential for language learning, and especially for online language learning. This means that you want to "push" students to produce language, to go beyond what they usually do, beyond what they will do if they are just "studying on their own." In the case of *Impact Issues*, we want to have the students identify points in the story that they find interesting and explain why, we want them to express their opinions about the story-conflict, we want them to exchange opinions with classmates and challenge each other to explain their point of view, we want them to give their own short oral presentations based on the ideas in the unit. This is much more "output" than just asking them to read and listen to the story and answer comprehension questions. That's way too passive for classroom learning, and it's way too unengaged for online learning.

Think in terms of what the students can contribute. Don't worry about evaluating everything they do or providing a score! Don't worry about correcting every language error – creative output is about self expression and exchange of ideas. And it's about building confidence and "ownership" of their learning.



Self-expression in front of the camera

Be sure to have students submit written assignments (such as journal entries), audio assignments (such as opinion monologues), and video assignments (such as short presentations) to you – via the Learning Management System you have set up (See Step 3). Try to give some supportive feedback (rather than corrective feedback) for each student on a regular basis. You may also wish to consider having students comment on each other's assignments.

## Tip 5: Build a collaborative learning community

Think of ways that you can increase collaboration among students. In the Impact Issues course, we consider that there are three main “collaboration” sections: Think about the Issue, Explore the Topic, and Present your Ideas. For each of these sections, it is important that the students not only “do the work” on their own, but that they complete the activity by exchanging their ideas with their classmates and responding to what their classmates express.

You can create class groups of 4 or 5 students to work together, through e-mail or phone or social app or web conference exchange (such as Zoom or Skype), and even submit assignments and presentations together. In the early days of Communicative Language Teaching instructors were reluctant to have students do pair work because they couldn’t monitor and correct mistakes. Gradually we realized the benefits of “real communication in the target language” in which students are exchanging information and ideas and opinions. It’s a similar resistance in online education. No, we can’t monitor or correct what the students are doing. But the value of the collaboration extends beyond language feedback.

Have the students read each other’s written assignments and provide personal feedback. Have them audio record themselves doing a dramatic reading the Engage sections (the stories) in Impact Issues (most are 2-part conversations). Have them audio record their responses to the questions and the opinion prompts in Think about the Issues. Have them audio record their discussions in Explore the Topic and then do a collaborative summary of their opinions in the Group Exchange. Have them prepare pair presentations, using visuals such as PowerPoint slides, and then video record (via the record function in Skype or Zoom or Camtasia) their presentations in Present your Ideas.



By having “break out groups” for learning activities and by having regular video conference meetings with the whole class, you will build a collaborative community that is so important for meaningful learning. And if you are using “real content”, as with Impact Issues, be sure to include your own opinions and experiences. Your personal input helps build the learning community and keeps you engaged and fulfilled.

## Summary

Online teaching presents many challenges, particularly if we have to plan classes under duress. But if we remember the basic principles of teaching, and remind ourselves of the reasons that we chose teaching as a profession, we will find a way to make online teaching rewarding and memorable. Learning appropriate technologies is helpful, but the success of your class will depend on your leadership and planning, as well as on your empathy with your students and the challenges they face. The five “tips” presented here can be used as guidelines for helping you prepare and carry out your new classes. Good luck! We’re all in this together!

## About the Author



Michael Rost is the series editor of *Impact Issues* and other ESL/EFL series published by Pearson, including *English Firsthand* and *Contemporary Topics*. He is also the principle author of Pearson English Interactive, a four-level fully online course. Dr. Rost has written widely on language education, particularly oral communication development. You can access his academic publications at [Google Scholar](#).