

THURSDAY GUESTS

Prof. Alastair Creelman from Linnaeus University, Sweden, is answering our questions about online learning.

On July 9th, our Thursday Zoom class had a distinguished guest from Sweden: Prof. Alastair Creelman. Prof. Creelman, a specialist in online learning at Linnaeus University, very kindly agreed to answer some of our students' questions. Three topics stood out among the OUC students' questions: how to stay motivated; how to feel relaxed and enjoy online classes and how to avoid falling behind with assignments. As exams are approaching, these issues are becoming more and more relevant. I share here some highlights from our chat with Prof. Creelman in the hope the information could be helpful to everyone but most of all to our first year students.

*The text in this document is based on the transcript of our Zoom chat. I am grateful to Prof. Creelman for his very informative and patient answers. All the error in the text are my own.

Do you have any idea how to keep motivated to learn online? Because I feel so bored to stay in my room. I have tried changing clothes to change my mind in the morning. (Risa)

It is hard and depressing for me to study online. So could you tell me how to keep my motivation for online learning? (Takeshi)

How should we enjoy e-learning? Because, to be honest, I feel pressure when I take an online lesson. (Momose)

Please tell me how to keep the members of a group in an online class from being embarrassed and how to have a great conversation with them. (Otoha)

Online learning is not really so different...

Some people think that e-learning is a special sort. It's learning! It's education! It's just that we're not in the same room, we're in a virtual room. But I'm me, you are you. I'm not virtual, I'm not strange, I'm not different. It's just that we're in a different space and that takes time to get used to. Enjoying e-learning, it's not enjoying e-learning it's enjoying what you're studying whether it's e-learning or whether you're reading a book, whether you're looking at a computer or whether you're sitting in a classroom, if you don't enjoy the subject it's not very interesting no matter where you are. But we can do a lot of things together without actually looking at each other.



The key to relaxed, enjoyable online learning is creating a virtual community

I think the secret with online meetings is if you can get a good class feeling, if you trust each other. And this is a challenge for the teacher and for everyone: to develop trust, and the feeling that we are doing this together, and we are going to succeed and we're going to help each other. If you don't have that trust, then it's a very nervous situation...

So it's very important to get a good group feeling. And teachers can do that. I think it's wrong in an online course to go straight in and start teaching, start doing the learning. You should have social activities, the same as you would do in a classroom. Get people into small groups. Breakout groups give you a chance to talk to each other in a relaxed way, then you go back and meet the teacher and say what you've been talking about. I think the breakout groups are where you can get together and build up a trust relationship. It's important that the teacher has these fun activities, you can do quite a lot of fun activities, you can put in quizzes, you can put in little creative activities. Each person can post a profile of themselves... As some part of an assignment, you have to go to some special place and you have to tell us why that place is special, show it on the mobile, then answer the question. And then you post it in your forum or wherever you have classes online. And so we get a gallery of everyone in their special place. When things are more normal people can record it in a cafe they like. or a park that they like, or beside a lake, or maybe they've got a garden, or maybe it's outside their favorite shop. We get a chance to see a bit of that person's life and, when you can't meet each other on an online course, getting a bit of personality is good.



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...you can create your private group where you can share films and videos as you do normally but it gives you a chance to get a feeling of group together and that group doesn't have to have the teacher there at all. If you can set up a group and ask people to join ... then you have a place where you can share ideas, you can say 'Oh, I don't understand this, can somebody help me? I find this very, very

difficult.’ or ‘What do you think of this subject?’ or just how you’re feeling. Because it’s amazing how in social groups on the net we need these symbolic acts : liking something, putting little like signs, hearts and thumbs up. It’s the same as we do in every day life when we smile at somebody. We say ‘I see you. I know you. I recognize you. I like you. That was good.’ so we nod and we smile and we do all these gestures. And in the digital world, the thumbs up means the same thing and it feels good. 👍

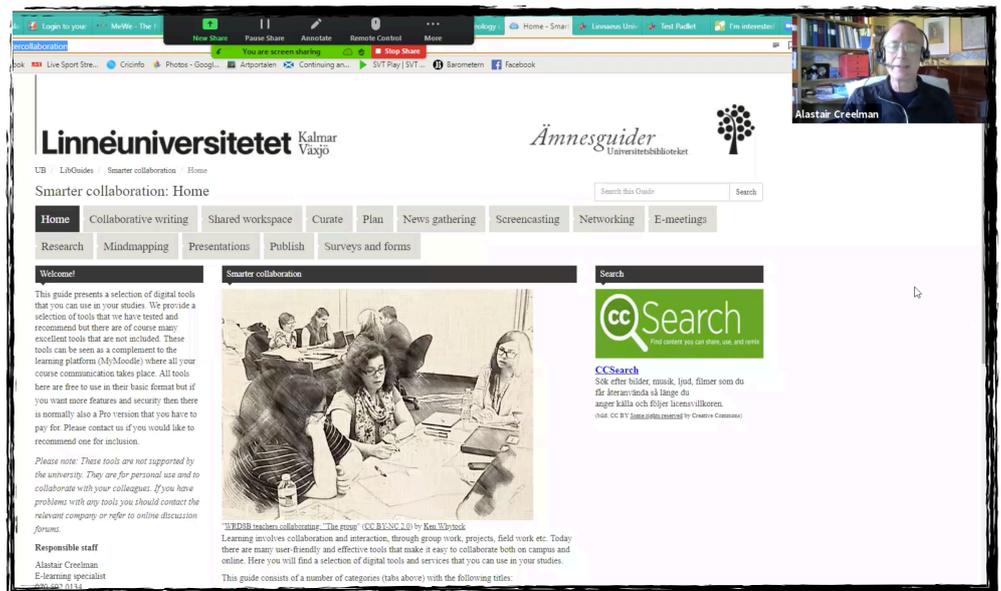


The worst thing you can do is to sit all day like this in Zoom because that’s tiring. I think you have to remember that you have to take breaks. I know many people who book up meetings after meetings. There’s no gap. You’re sitting in one Zoom meeting then, two minutes later, you’re in the next Zoom meeting. And that’s stressful. I get sore in my ears because of my headset, and I’m tired of sitting down. You have to get up, you have to move around, you have to do different things.

Q: You have mentioned collaboration. I know some tools like Google drive that we can use Google to write a document at the same time as multiple people, but do you know any other tools that we can use online to learn?

A: I do and I’ll show you. In fact, that was a dream question. I felt I was telepathically telling you to ask me that. At my university we have a site and that’s called Smarter collaboration.

There's a lot of fun things you can do with tools like that. It takes time though. You have to play with them, you have to sort of work a bit and make mistakes and try again.



*Linnaeus University: Smarter collaboration <https://libguides.lnu.se/smartercollaboration> has different tools for different types of activities

Q: In online learning, we have a lot of assignments. What can we do to prevent us from putting off assignments? (Moeka)

A: This has nothing to do with e-learning this is about study techniques. This is about learning how to study and make sure that you do try to time yourself. A good idea, especially when you are online, is to have a weekly schedule. Plan your week. Put in classes that you've got to attend, but also plan blocks . Here, Tuesday morning from 9 to 12, I'm going to read that article . And then later on 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock I will start writing my assignment. Put it on a timetable and stick to it. But remember to give yourself time for a break, time to go outside, time to breathe, time to smile, Don't just sit there all the time concentrated. And give yourself a little bit of social media time, a few minutes just to catch up with what's going on. Then close it down, focus and try to plan your day with a little bit of variety. And it's always nice to plan the day where somewhere in the day there's an hour where you're gonna do something nice. And that keeps you motivated.

Other things to try:

- A nice thing for exams is to create a Padlet page for the whole class and everyone posts their notes. All your notes are on the same page and you can benefit from each other's.
- You can make little videos at the end of each week where students summarize what they've learned from the past week and you take turns.

Another point about online learning: this is something that, in your working lives, you will probably be doing a lot of.

Everything points to this. Already, in big international companies you work in virtual project teams where you've got colleagues in Japan, USA, France, Australia, China, and you work together and you never meet physically. But you have a project and you have to do the project and you work together and when you're asleep the Americans are working and when they go to sleep you're working. And you're collaborating online and that is normal in many, many international companies today. And you need to learn that when you're at university, so that when we get a jobs at these companies we can do this.