

31 Ways to Encourage Students to Turn on their Cameras in LIVE Classes

Intro -

Hi, and Welcome back to the EdTechEnergy podcast for episode three, How can we encourage students to turn on their cameras in our LIVE virtual learning classes? Well let me tell you, This challenge has been a real one for the many teachers in the virtual classrooms.

I truly believe the secret to getting virtual learning to work for students is to put our attention on how our students are feeling during our time in virtual classes.

Think back to all the things you did in the physical classroom to make students feel good. You greeted them at the door with a smile, eye contact, probably a “hello” and even a handshake (will handshakes happen again so freely as they had before...). Once inside the classroom, our expressions, proximity, our posters on the walls, and sometimes the little touches like class pets in aquariums, a bean bag chair, decorations on the walls, or flowers and pictures on our desk all had the potential power to make our students feel good.

Now, we turn on our computers, open our Team or Zoom or Google Hangout, and meet our students digitally, where they are, in the place their parents or guardians have control. We teachers no longer control what our students see around them while learning our content. We have lost the control to help our students feel the way we want them to feel in our class—welcome, supported, and part of the community.

I wrote a pretty lengthy blog post where I provided 31 different Ways to encourage students to turn on their cameras during live classes, and I also provided six points to remember when putting students’ hesitancy to turn on their cameras in our online classes into the right perspective. I advise keeping these six points in the forefront will help us create the right energy and understanding in getting our students to turn on their cameras. It won’t be so much of a fight of wills.

I’ll share those six ideas with you in today’s podcast and then I’ll share the most unique five of the 31 Ways to get them to turn on their cameras I wrote about in my blog post. Some of these ways are going to make students feel good, like that handshake at the door. Other ways will be linked to our content. And the ways that are left are going to create fun in the classroom, which is an important influencer to getting students to engage. Definitely head over to this post after you are done listening to this podcast to learn about the other 26 ways.

BODY -

Let’s begin with the six points I want you to understand before planning your camera-on mission.

1. Inside our physical classroom, we had control over the time, place, and task, our students were inside of in our classrooms. This physical space gave us teachers a huge edge over instruction and student learning that we can probably all agree on now, we took for granted when we had it.

2. Anyone can show up differently given where they are in the moment. For example, you probably heard from parents, or you know as a parent, children do not always show up their best at home as they do for people outside the household. When I was in the classroom, parents would email me or text me asking if I

was having trouble with their children in the classroom since the parents were having a lot of problems at home. 99.9% of the time I was not seeing the same disrespect or lack of cooperation these parents were seeing in their teenage child. Now, with students at home doing school, some of what parents see on a daily basis we may see in our virtual classrooms. We are all different people at home than we are out in public. Be cognizant of this dynamic when students are learning from home.

3. Our physical classrooms gave our students a break from home. In some situations, that was a good thing. Children who were living in homes with families that had a lot of problems could escape all that anxiety and negative energy when they were in our halls and walls for six hours a day. Now, they are learning in those same places that sometimes is difficult to live inside as a young human being. To have the mindset to shift and code-switch from living at home to learning at home is a trait that most adolescents would be good at as they are going through a lot of hormonal shifts.

4. The times we are in are not normal. With the pandemic and the social unrest in our society, it's not only tough to be an adult, but also really hard to be a child. What are students are hearing, reading, and seeing in the news, on their phone, or in their community makes them uncertain, uneasy, and possibly unsafe. Remember young people do not have the wherewithal to take control of their feelings and emotions and compartmentalize them to get into school mode in a hot second. Many of us as adults have trouble doing that well. For these reasons, students' social-emotional wellness needs to be our priority as their teacher in our class, so the instruction and learning have room to happen for the student.

5. Remember when we were in the classroom with our students? Do remember knowing the power of your influence and how you could bring out the best in your students? Well, that advantage is harder to grasp since students are learning at home; we've lost at least half of our power of influence, if not more. You know what I mean...being in the presence of someone, you can feel their energy, their support, and their genuine attention to you and what you are doing? Our students are missing our influence and in now, they need to be their own influence, their own cheerleader, time manager, and initiator. And as a young person, that's hard to do.

6. The sixth point to think about is probably the simplest to keep in mind. When we were in the physical classroom, we had the role of the teacher and our students had the role of the student. Now in our homes, we teachers may be teachers at the same time we are mothers, and caregivers, and the cook, and the spouse, and the teacher of our own children. Our students are in the same shoes. They have more roles learning at home while they are learning at home than just the role of a student. They are the child, could be the caregiver of younger siblings while a parent is working, and sometimes they could be the male in the household, keeping everything in running order. See the multi-role person who is showing up as a student on your screen.

I point out these six particulars because meeting students where they are at is the first step in getting them to do what you want them to do in our live virtual classes while they are in their homes and we are in ours.

Here are five ways that work in LIVE virtual classes to encourage students to turn on their cameras. by making them feel comfortable. Some of the techniques are easy and some will take some time talking students into them. But know, one technique, a variety of techniques, or a combination of techniques are all your options to find out what works best with your students in inspiring them to turn on their cameras in LIVE classes.

Strategy 1:

At the beginning of class, ask students to turn on their cameras and **greet one another**. Ask one student to start it off, so a student looks at the screen, for example, sees “Sally” to the left of him, he actually turns and looks left (not looking into the camera), waves, and says, “Hi, Sally.” Then Sally does the same as the first student, finding a student on the screen to say hello to, turning in that direction of where the student is on the screen from her place on the gallery view, and waves hi and says, “Hi”, and the name she is waving to. She has full freedom to wave hi to someone who is all the way on the other side of the screen. Students need to watch who was waved hi to until every student was welcomed and waved to as well as hearing their name. This greeting gets everyone paying attention to detail at the beginning of class, gets everyone’s cameras on, and makes all feel good when they hear their name at the beginning of class.

Strategy 2: Teach students how to communicate using **American sign language gestures** in your class. There are so many reasons why using sign language can help students communicate to the teacher, and to their peers, without disrupting anyone who is speaking, which is another common situation in the LIVE virtual classroom. Again, I like to take part in a class to explain ASL (American Sign Language), the benefits of using ASL in LIVE classes, and then teach them a different sign each day. Also, create a graphic that shows the ASL signs you want students to use in the classroom. Students need to have their cameras on for us to see their sign language gestures. Look for the tip on how to do this in my **31 Ways to get your Students to Turn on their Cameras FREE Guide**. I’ll link it in the show notes

Strategy 3:

On Fridays, hold a **Theme day** for class, such as a Sports day when students can wear their favorite sports apparel, or a school celebration or spirit day where they wear school colors or a HAT day where students wear their favorite hats. We would never probably do that in school so having school at home where they can wear hats is kind of special for our students!

Strategy 4:

Hold a **freeze dance** exercise as a transition inside your lesson to get students up and moving. Ask your students to stand up, you start playing music, and ask students to dance, move, jump up and down, run in place, whatever they want to physically do. Play music as the students are moving and then when you stop the music, everyone freezes. You could also connect it to content, when students are frozen in place, read out a definition of a vocabulary word they just learned prior in class before this physical transition, and the first person who shouts out the vocabulary word gets a point. Again, find ways to get students up and moving, with their cameras on, and insert learning when you can. Mixing it up like this inside the lesson is a welcomed transition for students. Think about how much students moved around in your physical classroom inside one class period to sharpen their pencils, walk up to your desk, participate in a gallery walk, pair up with a friend, the list goes on and on. It is critical we get our students moving inside our LIVE virtual classes whenever we can.

Strategy 5:

Take **camera breaks** and encourage students to look away from the screen to a farther distance for eye health, and yes, I would teach them why this practice is especially important now, with all the time our eyes are focused on the screen. Make lesson transitions about getting out of their seat, doing jumping jacks, or running in place. If your transitions now between learning segments in your lessons get students active and looking away from the screen, when you need them to come back, they come back keeping their cameras on.

Strategy 6:

Here is a way to end the class with everyone's cameras still on. **Hold an Exit Ticket Round.** Ask the student whose face is in the upper left corner of the screen to share with everyone what is one point he learned today OR one point he wants to learn more about tomorrow. Students will go in succession, left to right, top to bottom, stating one thing the student learned today or what the student wants to learn tomorrow. This gives them a reason to look at the screen. Students have to watch the screen to know when their time is up. Also, it gives everyone in the class a chance to speak before the class is over and at the same time, it is a great review and an awesome segue into tomorrow's lesson.

Overall, encouraging students to turn on and keep their cameras on help make online learning more personable, more appealing, more stimulating, more social. We, teachers, need to use ways to make our students feel comfortable and safe in our LIVE virtual classes. Creating the right energy at the beginning of class is so important in virtual learning as well as throughout class to the end of our LIVE virtual classes. Planning a strategy at the beginning, middle, and end of class is best for the best camera results.

Grab my FREE 31 Ways to Encourage Students to Turn on their Cameras Guide to read about the other 25 ways to turn on those cameras. Some of those strategies are: Comedy Central bellringers, student teachers, meal prep demo, getting parents involved, badges, class leaders, virtual backgrounds, pet show and tell, and more. Again, it's all about making your students feel comfortable and safe in your virtual class.

You can find the link to this FREE Guide in this week's episode's show notes. This FREE Guide is ONLY available on my Podcast, again, one more reason to subscribe so you never miss a teacher freebie from me.

Again, I'll place a link to this FREE 31 Ways to Encourage Students to Turn on their Cameras Guide in today's show notes. You can access this episode's show notes at edtechenergy.org/listen3 or at melanie.education/listen3.

Please comment below—Question... What is one way you are going to try in your next live virtual class to encourage more students to turn on their cameras? Find EdTechenergy on social media and share with me what works!

And, before we go, What is next week's episode?

I'm going to talk about the power of instructor presence in our online learning environments such as Canvas, Google Classroom, and Moodle, and what we can do to exponentiate our power to make students feel welcome in our classrooms and content.