simply
stations

[planning tools
launching lessons
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• grades k–4 •]

listening and speaking

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CORWIN Literacy

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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Simply Stations Series* by Debbie Diller.

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simply stations

a guide to getting started using the Simply Stations series online

> • grades k–4 •
>
> simple ideas
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> quick tips
>
> encouraging words

debbie diller

Contents

Be kind to yourself and remember to BREATHE!

This guide is a quick reference for best practices to use as you teach virtually. This is a new world for all of us. With the demands of teaching online, managing technology, and assisting parents, it's easy to lose sight of what we already know as effective teachers. You may be feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and even a bit afraid of not doing the job you know you were meant to do. But please know that you're not alone. We need to help each other, lift one another up, and focus on what we *can* do.

This *Simply Virtual K–4* guide encourages you to remember you already know what to do as a teacher and gives you some help based on what I've learned over the past few months teaching online *and* helping my seven-year-old granddaughter during the start of virtual learning this fall.

In this guide, you'll find ideas and photos to help you visualize what you can do with what you already have. I've included references to my new series, *Simply Stations*, to provide you with ideas that can be used virtually and that will transfer to face-to-face instruction when you return to your classroom. I've sprinkled words of encouragement throughout to help you remember that we *can* do this! Thank you for being an educator!

As you approach teaching online, use these three questions to guide you:

① Start with **WHAT**. What do you want your students to learn? What routines will you establish? What might a daily schedule look like at home? Use your state standards and your school's curriculum to think about the big ideas and the habits you want your children to develop throughout the school year. Include standards from the previous grade level that may need to be retaught or reviewed. Examine what you want your kids to know and understand by the end of this year.

② Next, ask **WHY**. This is critical, because it will guide your decisions about what you will teach and how you will do so. Why am I teaching this, and should it be a focus? Why should students develop this habit? Why am I using this routine? By asking why, you'll be able to prioritize the things to spend the most time on.

③ Finally, move to **HOW**. How are you going to teach this? Because our time with students online is limited, we must be intentional. Be prepared to make your teaching points quickly and clearly. Model, model, model, especially in live lessons! Plan instruction and assignments thoughtfully, considering live lessons versus recorded, apps versus pencil-paper tasks. Collaborate with your team, and include parents in your thinking. Include the why in your communication with students and their families.

Setting Up *a* Virtual Teaching Space

It's important to have a well-organized, well-lit space to get the most from your teaching! If you have everything at your fingertips, you can focus on your students (and the technology). Good lighting and sound are critical, so kids can see and hear you to help them focus. You don't need a very big space (mine is 6' x 6'). Organization and a clean space can reduce anxiety.

Where you work matters. You might be broadcasting from your classroom. But you might be working from home. Try to find a space away from household activities to avoid distractions and minimize background noise. Choose a place near your router to ensure a strong internet signal. If possible, work in an area with windows. But don't have a window behind you—too much light will create glare and make it difficult for your students to see you.

It's okay to keep your teaching materials in a separate area. I store mine in my basement, or you might use a closet or garage space. Organize materials in labeled containers for ease of use. Using portable containers will allow you to move things to your teaching space for the day.

Consider using two devices—one to teach from and one to see what students are viewing.

My online teaching space

Tidy up your teaching space at the end of each day. Put everything back into its place. (Labels help me!) Return teaching materials from today that won't need to be used tomorrow (to the closet, garage, basement, shelves, etc.). Start every day with a clean, new slate. It will calm you.

Simply Stations CONNECTION: Getting into the habit of organizing your space and materials will make your teaching go more smoothly. And it can transfer to your face-to-face classroom, too. See pages 9–11 in the books for ideas on mapping your classroom.

Building Relationships

Building relationships with parents and students should be your primary goal as you start the school year virtually or face-to-face. Knowing each other and learning to work together will increase student participation and engagement during instruction and stations practice. It can affect attendance, too. When kids (and parents) know and trust you and each other, they will be more willing to take risks and try new things.

Have fun with your class, *and* set the tone for learning. Kids may be nervous, and parents are anxious. Keep the mood light and the emphasis on getting to know each other. We *can* get to know each other online! Be creative, and pay attention. Involve each student.

Here are a few things you might do to establish and build relationships:

- Meet with students one-to-one, or even in a small group, via video conferencing. (Having two to three kids on the call may help kids who feel lost in the sea of faces in a virtual classroom to get to know each other.)

- Call parents individually. Invite them to tell you anything they might want you to know about them or their child.

- Send a letter or postcard to each student welcoming them to your class. (Kids love mail!)

- Have students tell the class something about themselves or their families. Here are some ideas to get started:

  - *What's your name? Am I saying it correctly? Class, please unmute yourself and greet ___ using his or her name.*

  - *Tell us something about your family. Tell us what you like to do at home.*

  - *What are you interested in (e.g., sports, music, pets)?*

  - *What would you like to learn about this year?*

  - *Do you like to read? Where do you like to read at home? Show us a book you like to read.*

- Teach kids to type their name in the identifier beside their photo used in online meetings, so they can see each other's names and learn them. (Usually there is a "rename" option.)

Build a community of readers and writers!

Simply Stations CONNECTION: There are many EL Tips throughout each book in this series. Use these for supporting kids' talk online.

- Take a screenshot of your class with their names, and share it (with permission) to everyone, so they can learn who is in their classroom. Or teach kids to do this.

- Write a letter to your class sharing your screen, and ask them to write to you. They can write with pencil and paper, photograph it, and post it online. This is a great way to find out what your kids can do as writers! This will become your first writing station activity, too, as kids can write to each other.

- Try a different scavenger hunt daily. Give kids one minute to find something specific, and then have them take turns showing and telling. (Holding something tangible to talk about can give kids confidence and support their language.) Here are a few ideas of things for them to find:

  - an object that tells about them

  - a book they can read

  - something they like to write with

  - a family member to introduce

  - something that comforts them

  - a favorite toy

  - a snack they enjoy, especially a family favorite

  - something red (or another specific color)

  - a certain number of something (e.g., for *five* they might grab crayons or socks)

- Tell (or do shared reading of) a silly joke every morning or when kids seemed stressed. Little kids love knock-knock jokes!

- Give students time to visit with each other unmuted for a few minutes, especially as you transition to a live lesson after a break where kids work offscreen. (It takes a few minutes for everyone to log back in anyway.) Do the same when it's time to leave your class meetings.

- Read aloud books and poems that reflect the cultures of your students. Share fun, silly books, too, so kids can laugh and reduce the stress they may be feeling in this virtual world!

Get kids to giggle. We are all a bit nervous right now!

[Establishing Routines]

Establish routines from the start. Consistent routines go a long way in helping students know and understand our expectations. This structure will help them learn and impact the practice they do at stations independently of the teacher.

Here are my most important thoughts on establishing routines:

- Post and review your daily schedule (with kids and parents) so they know what to expect. If your virtual schedule mirrors the school day, it may make transitioning to face-to-face easier and vice versa. Having a schedule provides structure, which helps kids feel safe.

- Keep it **simple.** Limit the number of apps, passwords, and programs students (and parents) will need to access. Plan to actively involve kids with routines like those you'd do face-to-face, such as read aloud, shared reading, modeled writing, and think aloud.

- Begin and end live meetings on time, but be patient. Give kids a few minutes to log on and settle into your live lessons by saying hello to each other unmuted. Teach them to type in the chat, too.

- Start your day with a class song that matches the culture of your children (e.g., Alicia Keys's "New Day"). Post the words of a refrain so your kids learn to read and sing along.

- Establish a check-in routine where each child is greeted by name by your class. (Ask parents of young children to practice with them to expedite this practice!)

- Set expectations for speaking clearly, listening thoughtfully, and taking turns. Help kids speak in sentences, just like face-to-face!

- Play games that teach kids to take turns, such as:
  - follow the leader (one gives a direction while the rest follow)
  - ask and answer questions (one asks a question and calls on someone to answer)
  - virtual ball toss (name someone, toss a virtual ball to them, and then they "catch" it and name someone else)

- Teach kids how to raise their hands (physically or with an online button) and then unmute themselves to share.

- Some students may feel shy, especially with everyone's faces staring at them online! So provide lots of all-pupil responses where everyone participates when answering. Try these:

  - Shake your head yes or no. (Or give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down.)

  - Type Y (for yes) or N (for no) in the chat. Or type T (for true) or F (for false).

  - Write your response on paper with a pencil, and hold it up to the screen.

  - Show how many with your fingers.

  - Act out a word or phrase (e.g., *courage, vanished, strolling down the lane*)

- Use break-out rooms with kids in Grades 3–4 for small group work and to build community; dip in and out of their rooms to check in.

- Start with teaching kids how to do independent reading. See *Adapting Literacy Stations* on page 16 of this guide. Be sure students are actually *reading* during literacy time!) Ditto for writing.

[Teaching *in* Whole Group]

Many of your live lessons will be taught in whole group. Here are some ideas for getting the most from whole-group time (for synchronous and asynchronous lessons):

- Be clear and focused! Post and state your objectives at the start of each lesson. (I write mine on a dry erase easel placed behind me.) Tell **what** students will be learning about today and **why**. Point and refer to objectives before, during, and after the lesson for clarity.

- When you record videos, match the number of minutes to the number of years of the child (e.g., five-minute videos for five-year-olds; ten-minute videos for ten-year-olds).

- Live lessons (with lots of interaction) might range from fifteen to thirty minutes, depending on the age of the child.

- Model, model, model how to read, write, and think using engaging texts your kids can relate to. Choose books intentionally.

- When possible, connect read-aloud books and articles to social studies, science, and math!

- Screenshare a PDF or use a document camera for read aloud to make pages easier to see online (rather than holding up a book like we do face-to-face). I use PDFs from Kindle Unlimited or Epic! or an ebook from the public library.
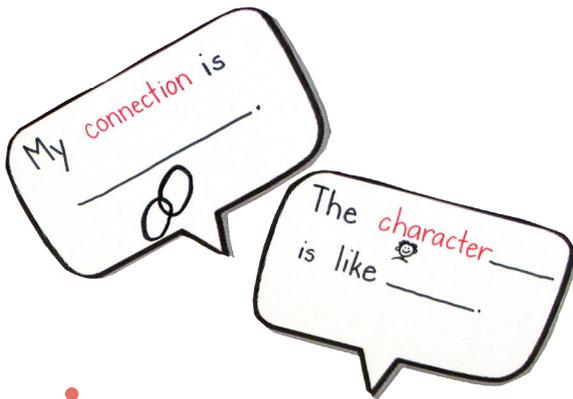
> **Slow down to speed up. Take it one day at a time.**

- Do shared reading of poems with your class in live lessons. Read aloud a poem, and then ask kids to join in with you. You can teach comprehension (especially inference), word study (phonics and vocabulary), fluency, and writing with these short texts. Also over time, kids can work with these same poems at stations doing exactly what you modeled in whole-class lessons.

- Invite kids to answer questions and participate in online discussions in multiple ways. (Not all children will feel comfortable raising their hand.) Try these:

  - nonverbal responses (e.g., thumbs up or nod; use reaction tools like a heart or clapping hands to show you like an idea; show a number with your fingers; show a character feeling with your face; write your answer on paper, and hold it up to the screen)

  - type responses in the chat

  - act out vocabulary words or scenes from stories you're reading aloud

- Make your live lessons interactive by using conversation cards—speech bubbles with sentence stems including academic vocabulary you want your students to use in whole group, small group, and eventually when they practice independently at stations. Have kids use these cards in discussions about texts you're reading.

- Likewise, make anchor charts with your class related to your standard. Model how to take a screenshot of the chart for reference. (Ask parents of younger students to sketch the chart or help them take a photo.)

- Model how to use sticky notes or graphic organizers to help children think about their reading. Then have them use those same materials when working independently.

Conversation cards for making connections

[Teaching *in* Small Group]

Virtual teaching in small groups is not only possible—it's essential. Use this time to get to know your students as readers, writers, and thinkers as you support them instructionally. What you do in small groups online is similar to what you do teaching face-to-face in small groups. Consider the following as you plan and teach in small groups:

- You might plan for fifteen minutes for kindergarten and early first grade, twenty minutes for Grades 1–2, and twenty to twenty-five minutes for Grades 3–4.

- Don't be frustrated if you don't finish everything you planned. There's lag time when teaching online, so things may take a bit longer than in face-to-face settings.

- Don't start small groups the first week of school, even if it's built into your grade level's daily schedule!

- Meet with each student one-on-one before beginning small groups (ten- to fifteen-minute meetings for about four kids a day the second week of school). Talk with each child about their interests and reading and writing preferences. Use simple assessments provided by your school system, or simply listen to kids read. Use this information to form small groups.

> **Try writing instead of guided reading in online groups.**

> **Let kids talk in small group instead of just listening to you.**

Here are several types of small groups you might use online to get started:

KIND OF SMALL GROUP FOR LITERACY	WHO NEEDS THIS AND WHY	VIRTUAL TEACHING TIPS
Oral language	Kids who need language development, including ELs; this will improve their speaking and writing over time	Keep kids unmuted. Have them take turns talking about a photo, an object, or a page from a book. Use conversation cards to help them speak in sentences.
Phonological awareness	Kids who have difficulty hearing and blending sounds; this will help them with decoding over time	Keep it playful. Use a puppet that "whispers" sounds into your ear, and have children take turns telling the word they hear.

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KIND OF SMALL GROUP FOR LITERACY	WHO NEEDS THIS AND WHY	VIRTUAL TEACHING TIPS
Letter ID and Names	Kids who have low letter identification or can't write their names; foundational skills are needed for decoding	Print and deliver an alphabet arc to each student with a set of magnetic letters if possible. Or have parents make a set of letter cards. Keep it simple and playful.
Writing	All students will benefit from being in writers' groups to read, write, share, and learn from each other	You might write together in small group. This is a great opportunity for young children to read *and* write! Share a virtual whiteboard or Google doc. You might also have kids meet in writers' groups and take turns reading aloud their work for feedback. Screenshare their writing (with permission). Meet with groups to focus on something they all need.
Guided reading	Kids who are paying attention to print and need help with phonics, comprehension, and/ or fluency	Introduce the new book. Use an online provider of leveled books. Mute kids as they read on their own with their volume off. As you listen to each child read and prompt 1:1, have that student turn the volume up. After reading, unmute all and discuss what they read.
Book club	Kids who read on or above grade level and can work more independently of the teacher; improves comprehension, book choice, and reading motivation	Especially in Grades 2–4, form groups of three to five students who want to read the same book. Give them open-ended questions for discussion. Schedule meetings for them to talk about their books. Visit these meetings to help, as needed.

Ask students for their ideas. Follow their lead!

Simply Stations CONNECTION: Use conversation cards from whole group in small group, too. **Book club discussion ideas** are included in Timeless Standard 4 of the *Independent Reading* book.

Partnering *With* Parents *and* Caregivers

While teaching virtually, we have an unprecedented opportunity to help family members support their children's learning at home! Establishing a strong relationship with parents and caregivers will build trust and respect. Investing time in patiently and frequently answering questions and sharing information with parents will go a long way in helping children feel safe and learn at home. Caregivers' anxiety affects the emotional state of their children. Calming and reassuring parents sets a foundation for smooth transitions to our new way of teaching.

Here are my top tips for working with caregivers, based on my experience as a teacher and caregiver during virtual learning this fall:

- Use brief text messages whenever possible. It's quick and easy! You might get a Google phone number for school use.

- These words can comfort caregivers who are unsure about this new way of doing school:

  - *I know this is a lot.*

  - *I'm here for you.*

  - *It's going to be okay.*

  - *I understand.*

  - *I agree with you 100%.*

  - *We can do this! Let's help each other.*

- Learn about each child's culture and home language. You might ask caregivers to teach you a few words in their language.

- Share your daily and weekly schedule in advance. Recommend that caregivers create and post a (flexible) daily schedule in their child's learning space to help them know what to expect. They might add a small clock there if they have one. (I've included samples to share.)

> **Simply Stations CONNECTION:** Use conversation cards from the books as you're modeling in live lessons (asynchronous ones, too). Share these with caregivers, and ask them to have children use them as they practice and do assignments.
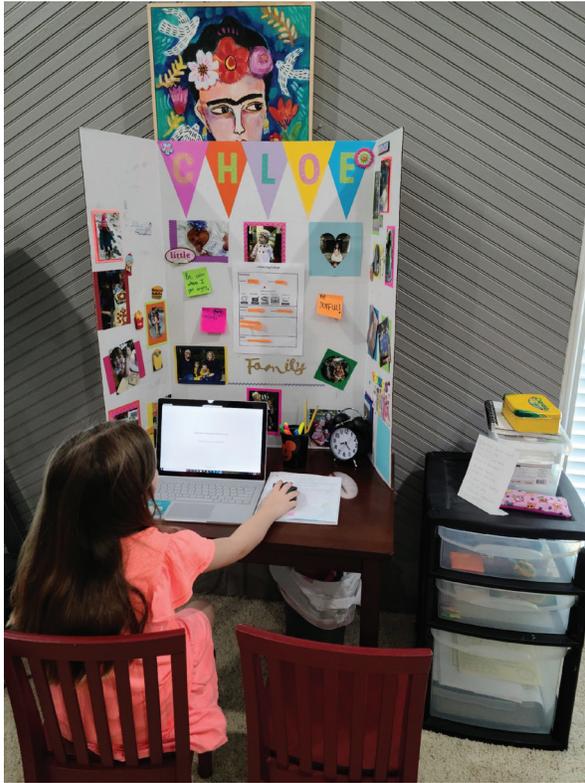
Student online learning space with all materials at the child's fingertips

- **Model how to** access online learning platforms and apps by sharing your screen and moving slowly step-by-step in live meetings. Doing this right from the start will save you tons of time (and keep you from having to answer so many emails.) You probably will need to model this more than one day!

- Also take time at the end of each live lesson or class meeting to show assignments you want students to complete. Review what you want kids to do (just like you would do face-to-face). Don't assume that because it's online they should just read and do it on their own. Modeling will help caregivers *and* students! Do this daily.

- Be prepared to provide tech support.

- Don't take grades at the beginning of virtual instruction. It stresses everyone out! Take a participation grade, and give kids credit for showing up.

- Model by using **academic vocabulary** as you teach. Also encourage caregivers to use that same vocabulary with their children as they work on assignments independently of you. If caregivers use the same talk as you, this will help kids connect what they're learning at school to what they're practicing at home (and at school, over time). Use the Teacher Talk sections from my *Simply Stations* books.

- Be sure students know what this academic vocabulary means by talking about it and showing examples as you teach (e.g., independent reading, character traits, comprehension).

> **Simply Stations CONNECTION:** Use the Teacher Talk section in each modeled lesson that accompanies a timeless standard in Section 3. Share with caregivers and ask them to use these same words with their kids while practicing and working at home.

Here's a sample of "teacher talk" for independent reading time that can be shared and also used as "parent talk." This is from *Simply Stations: Independent Reading:*

> **TEACHER TALK:**
>
> - There are many books to choose from! I must think when I self-select or choose a book to read.
>
> - First, I look at the cover and think, *Do I want to look in this book? Why? What do I want to find out?*
>
> - Then I look at the pictures and words and think, *Can I tell or read the book?*
>
> - If I can't read the words, I can talk about the pictures.
>
> - When I'm done, I think, *What was it about?* And I tell someone about my book.

Adapting Literacy Stations

Practice in a Virtual Setting

What Is a Literacy Station?

A literacy station is a small, confined space (stationary or portable) where students practice with a partner. Students work together on things they can do, using familiar materials and tasks to practice reading, writing, listening, speaking, and/or working with words. The children use previously taught academic vocabulary as they engage in meaningful work that has been modeled previously in whole- or small-group instruction.

—Debbie Diller, *Simply Stations*, page 4

Literacy stations aren't just activities to keep kids busy. These aren't assignments to give students something to do by themselves. Instead, literacy stations should be thoughtfully designed for *practice* with *partners*. This gives children opportunities to talk with another learner and interact using academic vocabulary while reading, writing, listening, speaking, or working with words.

Assume nothing; model everything!

My work with stations has been centered around meaningful practice for children to do with a classmate while the teacher works with a small group. However, when teaching virtually, there may not be other kids for students to work with at home. Because of this, I've been thinking about **having a parent, caregiver, or a sibling be the child's partner for literacy stations time**.

Here are some ideas for literacy stations to be adapted virtually:

- Start with independent reading in K–4 during the first few days of school.

  - Make anchor charts with your class, and teach kids how to choose a book. Model how to talk about the pictures (in K–1). In Grades 2–4, show how to read the title and think about the covers as students think about their interests, favorite authors, and the level of difficulty.

  - During read aloud, model how to read the title and predict what this book might be about. Show how to think about why they chose a book and what they want to read to find out.

○ If kids don't have books at home, arrange for pickup of books from the school library. Or set up book delivery to neighborhoods. Or work with your librarian and grade-level team to set up a virtual library starting with enough books for the first few weeks of school. Epic! is free and has many good trade books.

○ You might suggest that parents set up a basket with books for independent reading from which their child might choose. If they have more than one child at home, each child might have a labeled basket with their name on it. Kids can help to make the labels!

○ Build time into your daily schedule for kids to read books they choose on their own. Students can stay online to read if you want to watch what they do as readers. Or have them read offline and make a brief recording to post on Flipgrid or SeeSaw. Have them show and name the book and, tell why they chose it and what they found out—just like you modeled.

○ Invite a few kids to share what they read with everyone next time you meet with your class. This creates a community of readers and keeps kids reading!

○ Gradually add response tasks for independent reading. For example, as you teach kids to make connections, they might use sticky notes to jot down their connections and tell how these help them as readers.

○ When you return to face-to-face teaching, your students will know how to do independent reading time *and* an independent reading station.
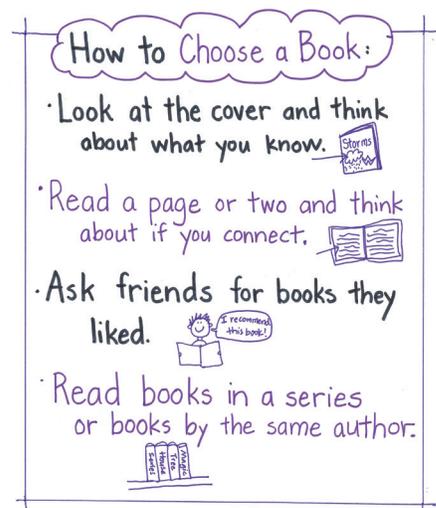
> **Simply Stations CONNECTION:** Introduce the routine of independent reading the first week of school. Use Launching Lessons from the *Independent Reading* book.
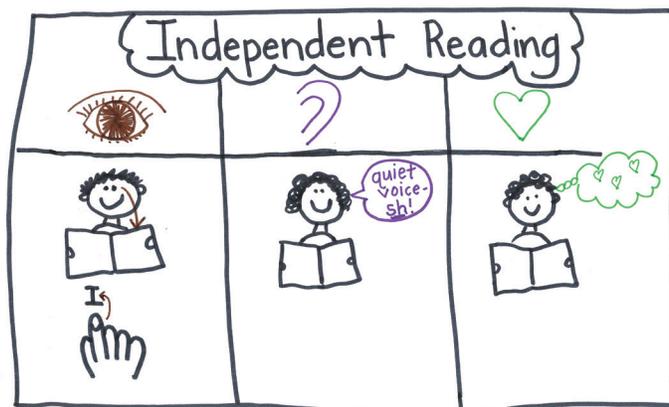
Sample anchor charts for independent reading from *Simply Stations*

- When kids know how to do independent reading well, the next station I'd introduce virtually is the Listening and Speaking station. This is an easy one to set up, because kids can listen to recorded texts online. You could even record a chapter book for your students to listen to. Post one short chapter a day for them to listen to. If you use a book in a series, it may prompt students to seek out other books from that series for independent reading! See *Simply Stations: Listening and Speaking* for more teaching ideas. (Series recommendations can be found on pages 158–161 in *Simply Stations: Independent Reading*.)

- Next, introduce partner reading, just like you would do face-to-face. Make a video with another teacher or two students (grab kids whose parents work in your building) showing what this will look like. Then have kids practice with parents (or siblings) during a live class meeting. Use *Simply Stations: Partner Reading* for lessons.

- Start independent writing, too. Model how to get ideas for writing by making a heart map in front of your class. Then invite them to make their own. Use your heart map to model how you get an idea for writing, and then write in front of your students. Schedule time daily for kids to write on their own and share their writing with the class, too. When you get back to school, students will already know how independent writing time works. And you can have children work at the independent writing station, too, doing the same kinds of things.

  - For your first writing station activity, have kids write notes to each other. Model how to tell about themselves and ask questions. They can do this multiple times, writing to someone different each day.

  - You might model how to write notes to a friend in small group. You will be helping kids apply phonics and grammar as you do this, too.

  - Model how to post notes to friends with virtual tools such as Flipgrid or Padlet.

  - Children also love making books! They could write books to introduce themselves to their classmates and post these. Be sure to model the process before expecting kids to do this independently of you.

Think virtual + face-to-face. This will help kids transfer learning when we return to our buildings.

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