

You are suddenly charged with working from home. You have a toddler running around (maybe one or two), or some active teens. Even sharing a home office space with one significant other can present a challenge when you need to plan, focus, and get your work done in the home. In addition, not all of us have the discipline, and anything can distract us (a cup of coffee, cleaning, television newscasts...etc.).

Let's start with a checklist of those essential necessities for online/distance teaching, learning, and planning:

1. High speed internet – 4G, 5G
2. Access to a high functioning learning management system
3. Access to working collaboration tools that include conference calling, desktop sharing and whiteboard tools that allow for face-to-face contact
4. Knowledge of, and access to, open source tools
5. Access to Microsoft Office Suite
6. Curriculum with learning goals and objectives for your learners
7. A designated spot to work and focus without interruption
8. Knowledge of best practices for online and blended learning

### **No. 1: High speed Internet – 4G, 5G:**

Internet is essential, and speed is everything. If the Internet is running slow due to heavy traffic, it will slow our work down, and only frustrate (been there!). Try to link into a 4G or 5G network first, and when possible use direct-connect via usb cable or another Internet cable provided by your service provider. This will ensure you get as much speed as possible from your network, despite traffic – though no guarantee it won't be slower with high traffic.

If speed continues to be a challenge, contact your Internet service provider and inquire about a higher package that would include greater speed. Often they have plans for businesses, or for a little more you might upgrade to a higher speed plan. Internet speeds range from 200 Mbps to 940 Mbps.

Of course, if you are not on your own network and using a local café's Internet for example, upgrading isn't an option. Consider going there when usage will be lower, such as early in the morning or later in the evening.

### **No. 2: Access to a high-functioning LMS (learning management system):**

A learning management system – or “LMS” - is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, and delivery of educational courses, training programs, or learning and development programs. The learning management system concept emerged directly from the e-Learning industry. Learning management systems are especially useful in utilizing analytical data, and reporting that data for multiple purposes. They can also house massive content, as well as support live online activity across multiple platforms.

***Below are examples of LMSs that are free and open source:***

**Moodle:** Community-driven, this globally supported effort makes one of the largest open source teams in the world. Moodle comes with a full kit of features that allow not only corporates but also educators to create a private learning space online, filled with tools that easily create courses and countless activities – all optimized for collaborative learning. <https://moodle.com>

**Kornukopia:** Learning Management System (LMS), Student Information System (SIS) and Learning Content Management System (LCMS) is the first cloud-based platform to be offered 100% free to the general public. <https://kornukopia.com/>

**Coursesites:** a free version of Blackboard and Canvas found at <https://coursesites.com/>

**Open edX:** Supports online campuses, instructor-led courses, degree programs, and self-paced courses using a single platform with interactive forums, discussion boards, live video conferencing: <https://open.edx.org/>

**Chamilo:** Developed in Spain by the Chamilo Association: <https://chamilo.org/en/>

**Claroline:** Available in 35 languages <https://claroline.net/>

**Formalms:** award-winning Learning Management System, used to manage and deliver online training courses. Designed for corporate training, born to fit your company needs and processes: <https://www.formalms.org>

**No. 3: Access to working collaboration tools that include conference calling, desktop sharing and whiteboard tools that allow for face-to-face contact:**

**Heyspace:** Task and project management software with communication and collaboration features. Coordinate and organize projects with clients, vendors, colleagues, employees. <https://hey.space/>

**Clinked:** Client-facing teams with mobile application. <https://clinked.com/>

**Monday:** monday.com, ranked No. 1 for productivity, helps teams manage and execute projects. <https://monday.com/>

**Trello:** Organize teamwork, manage projects, assign tasks, manage due dates, attach files, create checklists, and more. <https://trello.com/>

**Hive:** <https://hive.com/>

**GoToMeeting:** Virtual team meetings, video conferencing, calendar management.  
<https://www.goto.com/meeting/>

**Zoom:** Virtual meetings, video conferencing, desktop sharing, calendar management <https://zoom.us/>

**Skype:** Online meetings, conference calls, desktop sharing <https://www.skype.com/en/>

**Google Hangouts:** Team video calling, conference calling, calendar sharing <https://gsuite.google.com/>

#### **No. 4: Knowledge of, and access to, open source file sharing tools:**

**Google Drive:** Permissions can be set up for viewing or editing, and others outside the organization can be invited to view, download, and collaborate — no email attachment required. Documents, images, spreadsheets <https://www.google.com/drive/>

**Onehub:** Secure online document and file sharing with bank-level encryption in transit and at rest, role-based permission system, secure file sharing and collaboration. <https://www.onehub.com/>

**Microsoft Onedrive:** Hosts over 270 file types with 5GB of storage space free of charge. Cloud storage that replaces [SharePoint Workspace](#). Your data can be stored and shared either on your own on-premise server or purchased as a Cloud-based subscription from Microsoft. <https://products.office.com/>

**eFileCabinet:** Offers full-Text Search, folder templates, pre-defined file names, portfolios with up to 5 TB of storage, additional space available <https://www.efilecabinet.com/>

**Dropbox:** Documents, images, spreadsheets, collaboration in realtime <https://www.dropbox.com>

**Box:** Workflow and collaboration with advanced security controls <https://www.box.com/home>

**Wire:** Added features that some other file sharing platforms lack, such as team chats that can involve external partners, high quality video calls, integrated voice conferencing and other ways of encouraging collaboration and making it highly interactive. <https://wire.com/en/>

#### **No. 5: Access to Microsoft Office Suite:**

Here is where to find and license the suite:  
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/products/office>

This is an article with a number of ways to obtain free access:  
<https://www.foxnews.com/tech/all-the-ways-you-can-get-microsoft-office-for-free>

**No. 6: If teaching, a curriculum with learning goals and objectives for your learners. If working with colleagues, a working plan:**

If you are an educator, there is plenty of curriculum in cyberspace, especially now with our challenges. As a worker displaced from a home office, you'll need planning documents and collaborative environments. Here are some resources to get started with (also see no. 3 on the checklist):

Teaching *curriculum	Collaborating *planning tools
<a href="https://elearning.org/">https://elearning.org/</a>	<a href="http://lucidchart.com/">http://lucidchart.com/</a>
<a href="https://www.edutopia.org/">https://www.edutopia.org/</a>	<a href="https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence">https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence</a>
<a href="https://www.kqed.org/mindshift">https://www.kqed.org/mindshift</a>	<a href="https://jira.atlassian.com/">https://jira.atlassian.com/</a>
<a href="https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/">https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/</a>	<a href="https://try.airtable.com/">https://try.airtable.com/</a>
<a href="https://www.tolerance.org/">https://www.tolerance.org/</a>	<a href="https://www.smartsheet.com/">https://www.smartsheet.com/</a>

**No. 7: A designated spot to work and focus without interruption:**

Despite the interruptions, the commitments, the multi-tasking, and just being thrown into a “new normal” seemingly overnight, it is crucial to have a working place that is free from interruption. A bedroom, a designated office, a finished basement, or a café – you must have a quiet spot to work in; somewhere free from the potential of interruption.

**No. 8: Knowledge of best practices for online and blended learning:**

This is where we can step in. Go here to learn about best practices: <https://blended-by-design.net/blog/> and/or [contact us](#) for more information on, or assistance with, getting started with your own online learning environment. From consultation, to setting up your own open-source LMS, repurposing documents from live learning for e-learning, and more:

Go to [www.blended-by-design.net](http://www.blended-by-design.net) (845) 380-3437 [bestblendedlearning@gmail.com](mailto:bestblendedlearning@gmail.com)

