

LSA Technology Services Teaching Tips: Tricks and Tips for Teaching with Masks

Above and beyond masking policies for indoor spaces on campus, [University of Michigan Face Covering Policy](#) requires all people to wear masks in any classroom or classlab. This also includes spaces where classes are being held, such as conference rooms and lab spaces.

Teaching with a mask on does present a number of challenges, especially if the instructor has back-to-back courses or multiple sessions on a single day. Here are 24 Teaching Tips for Teaching with Masks:

1. Wear a mask that allows you to move your mouth and lips easily while remaining protected. You may want to consider a [sport cage insert](#) that creates more room under the mask, but make sure your mask fits well over the cage and doesn't have gaps.
2. Use a microphone attached to your collar, lapel, or lanyard around your neck. Lavalier mics should not be close to your mouth. It will function best if you position the mic near your collarbone, about a hand-span distance (20-30cm) from the mouth. Never hold the mic in front of your mouth or place it against the mask material -- sound quality will be distorted because of the closeness to the audio source.
3. If you don't have a microphone, speak just a little bit louder than you normally would. Without a microphone, you will also want to avoid talking while facing the board -- practice writing on the board and then speaking. Some may find the silence awkward, but with practice it will feel more normal. Don't be afraid of small silences.
4. More important than volume are speed and clarity: slow down just a little more than you normally would speak and enunciate carefully to help the students process what you're saying.
5. Remind the students to do the same: regularly ask them to project their voice so that you and others in the classroom can hear.
6. Professor Pam Beddor, UM Dept of Linguistics, shared several articles on effects of masks on speech intelligibility (One from the [Acoustical Society of America](#) and [one from the National Library of Medicine](#)). Surgical masks are better than cloth, but all do ok with lapel mics (ie: the lavalier microphones that LSA has in our classrooms.) Instructors who choose *not* to use a lapel mic or faculty in the small classrooms without a microphone should probably not use a cloth mask. There will be extra surgical masks in all classrooms.
7. Protect your voice: slowing down and using a microphone will help, but it is also important to avoid straining your voice. Some suggest [diaphragmatic breathing](#) to project your voice and avoid strain.
8. If you teach for a long segment of time or teach multiple courses on a single day, schedule regular voice-breaks throughout the day and drink water whenever possible.
9. Consider images to supplement your lectures and lessons (images, charts, tables, bullet points) to help reinforce content. This could be in PowerPoint or on the document camera.
10. Add body language and facial expressions and consider vocal tone to help get your message across. Smile under your mask -- a smile is reflected in your eyes and in your tone of voice.
11. In addition, check with students that they can hear and understand. Pay particular [attention to students who are deaf or hard of hearing](#). Encourage them to contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities if they need assistance. Get recommendations from SSD staff, if you need additional assistance.
12. Introduce yourself to the class in a short video of you without your mask and share the video with them before the first day of class. Also consider using video to run through class expectations and other syllabus tasks can also reduce the number of times you need to explain something during the first week as people drop and add.
13. Learn your students' names and help students get to know each other:

- a. Have the students identify themselves when they talk.
 - b. In smaller classes, have everyone introduce themselves with memorable information or create ice breaker activities to get to know each other;
 - c. in larger classes, break into small groups for the get-to-know-you activities. You may want to do this for a couple of minutes at the start of class for several weeks so more people have a chance to interact with others. Other ideas might be to encourage more “personalized” masks or even visible name tags.
 - d. Some instructors may find it useful to create connections between instructor and students, as well as between students, by assigning a short “introduction video” to each student and then having students practice discussion tools by asking questions and commenting on each other’s videos.
14. Ask your students to interrupt or wave, if they can’t hear you. Some faculty are returning to asking students to raise a hand if they have a question or comment, as facial expressions are often a critical cue for turn taking in multi-person conversations.
 15. Check in with your students more regularly and ask for in-class feedback: ask for a thumbs-up or a head nod; Some instructors might use humorous pictures and iClicker questions to reduce the stress and increase response rates.
 16. Consider more regular check-ins and anonymous mini-surveys. Some faculty do a check-in at the end of each class or even at the start of each class with “How’s it going? What would help?” questions. It is best to not add these questions to the end of high-stakes assessments, as it can add more stress to students who struggle with timed exams/quizzes.
 17. Repeat students’ questions to the entire class after someone asks a question. It will be more difficult for students sitting in the back of a crowded classroom to hear their peers.
 18. Consider flipping your class by putting longer lectures and demonstrations on videos and then using class time for questions and discussion. Adding more active-learning and student-centered teaching techniques will also give you and your voice mini-breaks throughout the class session.
 19. Hold on-line office hours over Zoom where you and your students can talk without masks. If you are finding students reticent to attending Zoom office hours, offer some extra bonus points in grading for attending. If you have lots of students wanting to attend, consider offering sign-up slots for specific times.
 20. Be patient with yourself and with your students. Ask your students to be patient with you. We’re all going through this together.
 21. Encourage “active listening” in seminars where people confirm what they heard before adding the next point. It may be necessary to remind people that listening is all the more important when there aren’t visual cues to rely on. They’ve been wearing masks for months and months, but not everyone has taken an in-person class with everyone wearing masks. The listeners will have to engage more, as well as the speakers working to connect more.
 22. You may want to consider having the members of the class [create their own community guidelines regarding how they will care for each other and create a caring community](#). The LSA Inclusive Teaching site also has [activities on creating discussion guidelines as a class](#).
 23. Practice, practice, practice. Don’t wait until the first day of class to see how it feels to teach with a mask on. Contact LSATechnologyServices@umich.edu for access to classrooms and for training on the new equipment in the classrooms. You may also call 734-615-0100 to schedule an appointment.
 24. Meet with a Teaching Learning consultant in Technology Services or the Language Resource Center with questions or to discuss any of these options. Contact LSATechnologyServices@umich.edu or call 734-615-0100 to schedule an appointment with Technology Services or lrc.contact@umich.edu for the LRC.

Sources and Resources:

- Masking in the Classroom [UM Dearborn] <https://dearbornhub.net/?p=938>
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/08/26/effective-ways-teach-person-mask-opinion>
- <https://news.iu.edu/stories/2020/08/iupui/inside/17-tips-for-instructors-professors-teaching-with-masks.html>
- <https://theconversation.com/7-tips-for-making-masks-work-in-the-classroom-164777>
- Video from Tri-County Technical County <https://vimeo.com/444695728/5a6b9e9aee>
- <https://coe.uga.edu/news/2020/10/from-the-expert-tips-on-lecturing-with-a-mask>
- <https://www.tes.com/news/school-march-8-masks-classroom-pupils-teachers-advice>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7417296/>
- <https://asa.scitation.org/doi/10.1121/10.0002279>
- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33261397/>