

Helping others as a remote Digital Champion: top techniques

12th April 2020

Helping people with digital skills remotely can be a very different kettle of fish to helping them face to face. Whilst some principles remain the same, such as being patient and avoiding jargon, there are other differences you should consider. This guide looks at the essential techniques for supporting others remotely.



"Helping someone remotely is just not the same as helping them face to face. In my first remote session, I found that my learner was naturally asking me - "shall I click here?" - but I couldn't see his hand or where he was pointing to."

Alex
Remote Digital Champion



The essentials

- **Focus and listen.** Because there are fewer visual clues when teaching remotely, it can be easy to miss a subtle change in someone's facial expression or tone of voice so it's important not to get distracted.
- **Don't dictate** the online tool you use to help someone with digital skills. You may have a preference but experiment to see what works best for your learner.
- Email can be useful before or after a session for sending links, questions, guides etc but try not to use it whilst you're helping someone as it **can interrupt the flow**.
- **Location still matters** for both you and your learner. It's important for you both to find a place that can be relatively undisturbed and comfortable for the teaching to be a success.

- Go slowly and **regularly check** in that learner is keeping up as it can take longer to learn compared with face to face.
- **Don't try to do too much** in one go and stick to your agreed session length. It might feel logical to try and cram as much learning into a session as possible. In fact, this could be counter-productive and leave your learner feeling confused and overwhelmed.
- **Don't use jargon.**
- **Encourage** your learner to take notes as you go, giving them the time to do this.

Go slowly!

- Focus the session on one topic or element of the topic you're looking at. You can enthuse your learner and build their confidence about that one element, giving them the impetus to go on and learn more about that topic independently or in a future session.
- Think creatively. Lots of online tasks will feel like a massive step if your learner has never done it before. Rather than launching straight into a task find imaginative ways to introduce key concepts. For example playing an online game could help introduce your learner to a mouse and keyboard - have a look at our guide to [online games](#).



"Many of my learners like to make notes so I remind them to have a paper and pen handy at the start of the session. Remember to give them plenty of time to write things down."

Helping different learners

You might end up helping all sorts of different people. Remember, it's up to you who you help and it's OK to say no to someone if you feel that remote support will not work for their specific needs. There will be lots of other services or websites that you can refer them to such as the [technology guides on the Digital Unite website](#).



Helping friends and family

Many people may find that their friends and family are the first people that they help, and this is

definitely a great place to start.

With people you know well it might be easy to become irritable and impatient, so plan your sessions and have a set time as you would with any other learner.

Also try and encourage them to go away and learn for themselves so that they don't become too dependant on you!



Helping existing learners remotely

Set boundaries about how much support you can offer e.g. setting aside a regular time each week and encourage them to save up their questions to discuss in these sessions rather than throughout the week.

Be clear that online support is different than face-to-face, and you may not be able to cover so much during a session.



Helping a new learner

If you are helping someone you don't know for the first time, you may need an introductory phone call before having your first session. This is a great opportunity to break the ice, explain who you are and the sorts of support that you can offer.

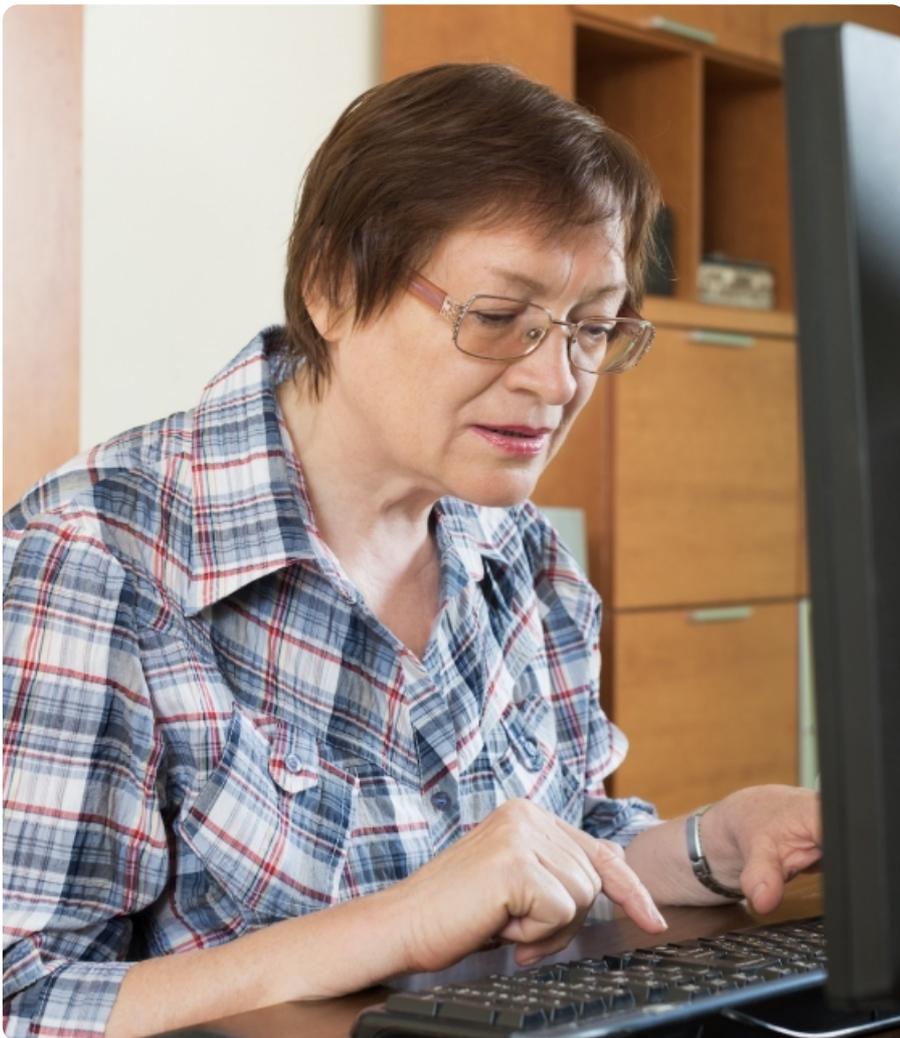
This is the chance to talk to them about what they'd like help with, how they'd like to have the session (by phone or via a video conferencing tool, for example) and what their previous online experiences are.

Making your learner feel comfortable

- **Build trust.** Learning something new can be nerve-wracking and people may be fearful of looking foolish or being too slow. It's really important to spend some time chatting generally in sessions and building a bit of rapport. It can be harder to build trust when you're working with them remotely, especially if you are on the phone and can't see them.
- **Barriers to learning.** Important questions to ask when you are talking to your learner is whether they have an accessibility need or are specifically worried about online security, as this will help you to plan and adapt your sessions. We've got guides on [online security](#) that will help you to help them, and if you'd like to continue your Digital Champion training on the [Digital Champions Network](#) we have some fantastic bitesize courses on accessibility, .
- **Learning styles.** We all like to learn in different ways. Some people like to play around with something before asking for help, others like step-by-step written instructions, others like to talk things through... Ask your learner how they like to learn new things and then factor this into your approach. You'll find an overview of learning styles [here](#).



"Take time to understand their fears and work out together what aspects of digital technology they can learn to help alleviate some of their concerns. Even if your whole Digital Champion session is about checking in and just having a chat, that's more than enough."



What does your learner need?

Whoever you are helping, it is likely that they will have something specific they would like to be able to do online. If not, try to find out what your learner's interests are. If they like cooking, for example, you could show them how to research recipes online.

You could find yourself helping with almost anything but some typical examples include...

- Connecting with friends and family using video tools
- Online banking
- Online shopping
- Registering on a GP website for repeat prescriptions
- Joining virtual exercise classes on Zoom or YouTube
- Accessing free audio books or TV programmes.

We've got plenty of guides on all these topics [here](#).

Running sessions

Starting a session

- **Agree a session length** or if you've already agreed this, restate it. However, if, during the course of the session you find that you've done the thing you set out to do, you can always end the session early.
- **Set expectations:** learning virtually takes longer than it does in person. It's worth flagging this and reducing any pressure that the learner feels. There's no time limit on learning and you'll



Top tip!

You'll get a feeling for how long you want your remote session should be. We suggest 30 minutes is a good place to start.



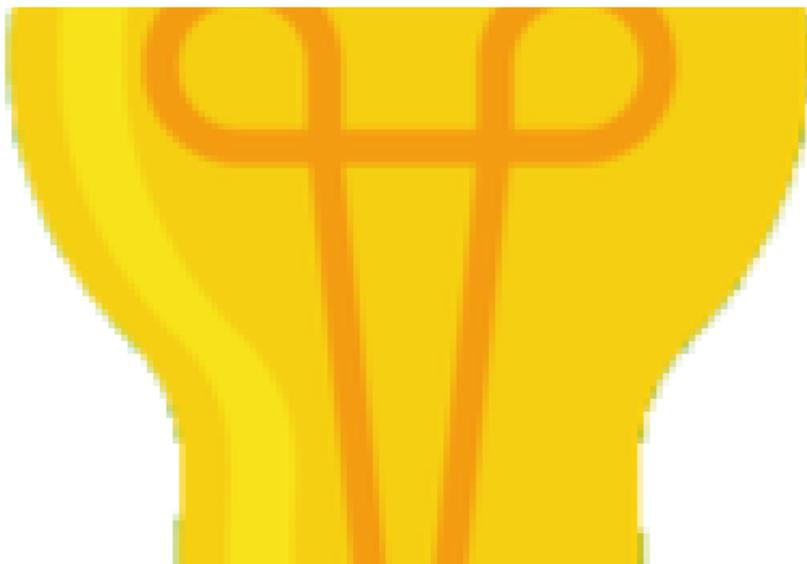
“It’s important to help people feel comfortable with what they’re doing online before they actually do it. For example, ordering an online shop is a massive step for someone who has never done it before... Start by helping someone get familiar with the whole concept of online shopping to build their confidence. They can look around a supermarket’s website, comparing products... even create a shopping list they can use themselves or give to a neighbour. Then when they understand it a little more, they’ll feel ready to place an order.”

Caspar
Remote Digital Champion

Ending a session

Spend a few minutes at the end of a session to:

- Summarise what’s been covered in the session and ask your learner how they feel about it.
- Talk to your learner about how they plan to put their learning into practice.
- Enthuse them about the other, fun ways that being online could enrich their life, such as: pursuing hobbies, staying in touch with family and friends.
- Book in your next session!



Top tip!

[Share resources](#) with them that can support them to keep learning independently.

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