Preparing for your session

1. Physical space

For learners new to computers and the internet it's important to reassure them that everyone has differing levels of ability, and to make sure that they feel comfortable in your sessions. Peer support can help with both factors, so where possible, set up the room in a way that encourages learners to share and discuss more easily. Setting up 2 or 3 tables where 3 or 4 learners can work together is better than individual spaces.

Have equipment available but consider the possibility that people will want to bring their own devices. This should be encouraged as it is more likely they will continue to practice at home if they become familiar with their own device in a supported environment. If learners do, then get them to set up in a comfortable position near a power source to avoid power issues later.

Most groups will have learners at various levels so having materials for several sessions to hand will help. After initial discussions with learners on arrival, consider making smaller groups within the session with learners of similar abilities working together.

Visual cues and reminders will help learners, so have flipcharts or whiteboards and appropriate markers available. Check marker colours show up clearly.

Actions for a first session:

- Agree ground rules with the group, for example, turning mobile phones off. Adult learners will appreciate being considered and included in forming the rules for the session.
- Set a space for any jargon to be recorded by learners, so that at any point you're going to use jargon you can flag it up, or if they hear you use jargon they can add it for you to explain. There is also a **Using a Computer Glossary** available on the Be Connected website which learners may find useful.
- Learners are often keen to make notes and will like take away materials as reminders, have paper and pens available and copies of session specific materials.
- Prior to the session check that the websites or accounts you plan on using are working on the devices you plan to use with them. Creating bookmarks to online resources also saves time during the session.

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2. Arrival of learners

As people start to arrive ask them if they're here for the Be Connected session. Explain that during these sessions you'll be supporting people to get started on a computer, starting with the basics and covering key topics like searching and browsing the internet and registering for an email address.

At this stage, it's advisable to check that learners are at the right level, and to consider which sessions would suit them best. Use the following questions as a guide to help you identify the learner's needs:

Diagnostic Questions

1. Have you ever used a computer/laptop/tablet?
2. Have you got a smartphone?
3. If someone showed you how to use a computer, what would you do with it?
4. Do you have a computer or device at home? (even if someone else uses it)
5. Do your friends or family use computers?
6. What stories have you heard about computers in the news recently?
7. How long do you think it will take to learn about computers?
8. What made you decide to come along today?
9. Can you think of something that you couldn't do recently that you wanted to?
10. What do you want to learn from these sessions?

You may find out that some people who attend the sessions already have basic digital skills. These learners may appreciate the chance to practise, or you could ask them if they would like to support others during the session.

If they're here for the basics, then ask them to sit down and get comfortable. Whilst they're waiting, ask them to identify topics they're interested in or can identify with. Let them know that you'll be finding out a bit more about what they want to get from the session before getting going with Be Connected.

Tip: **Make people feel at ease by keeping it informal and chatty. If only a few people attend the session, you could work with an individual one to one.**

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3. Identifying the needs of learners

At the beginning of every session, welcome everyone and outline the learning objectives. The session plans on the Be Connected website always begin with questions to start. These will help you to gauge the current ability and confidence of each learner in relation to the topic being covered in the session.

Tip: Consider an alternative way of assessing initial ability and gathering end goals. Provide the group with post-it notes and flipchart paper. Encourage learners to be reflective about their own personal goals by asking them to note down one of two things on a post-it note under the headings **'What I can do now'** and **'What I want to be able to do**'. You don't have to review each goal as a group, but summarise, for example, "*A few people say they've used computers but aren't confident.*".

Learners with little or no experience / low confidence

There are a few ways you can support those who have never used computers before, or learners who are less confident

- **Peer supported learning methods**: This works well in groups with mixed ability and confidence. Pair learners so that those with higher ability can support those with lower ability. You may need to coach the supporting learners to 'not do it for them'. The skills they pick up from supporting others are also valuable.
- **One to one support:** During every session you deliver, ensure that you are on hand to support learners individually. Some learners will feel reassured that there is someone on hand to guide them through activities and courses if they need it.
- **Learner led sessions**: Allow learners to work at their own pace. If something sparks their interest or they have something in particular they want to be shown, explore it with them.

Suggested resource: **'Creating a positive learning experience'**
This resource is available on the Be Connected website. It provides suggestions and ideas to to help tutors break down some barriers to learning, deliver engaging learning sessions and ensure that learners are getting the support they need.

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4. Using the session guides

The guides can be used to to teach groups of learners or individuals on a one to one basis. They can be used for one-off sessions, or as part of a longer digital skills course. Guides cover approximately 90 minutes of content, and have a variety of learner resources which are available for you to download and print from the Be Connected website.

5. Varied activities

Throughout the guides you will notice that learners are asked to do a variety of things:

- Discussion about their prior knowledge
- Warm up activities to begin sessions
- Be Connected online courses
- Online and offline practice activities, completed individually or in pairs
- Answering questions and reflecting on what they've learnt as a group

Including a variety of activities is deliberate. The variation triggers learners to think about the topics in a number of ways which in turn makes it more likely that they will be able to recall and apply the skills they're learning. This is a technique known as blended learning.

You may have other ideas for how to teach particular topics, and this is great. Do use ideas and techniques of your own either in addition to or in place of parts of these sessions. There isn't just one way to learn or teach any of these topics, different things work for different people.

Tips for running an engaging session:

- Be **responsive**, not **prescriptive**. If someone wants to learn about social media during a session on searching,consider how you can support them to make this happen. This might be at the end of the session or as a break-away group activity.
- Encourages learners to ask questions, and create an open and friendly learning environment that learners will want to come back to.
- Be **creative** with your sessions and learner resources, and don't be afraid to try new activities if you think it will benefit your learners.
- Ask for feedback from learners - what did they enjoy the most during your sessions, and what elements did they feel taught them the most?

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Top tips for managing a group

- Try to avoid touching the equipment yourself. The more learners hold, touch and control the devices themselves, the quicker they become familiar with them.
- For absolute beginners, don't assume that anything is obvious. Demonstrate before asking learners to do things, even the most basic like how to hold or switch on their device.
- Learners may be reluctant to share what they do know due to lack of confidence. Share any real world examples that you know. Case studies that you can use are available at: **https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/news-and-blogs/case-studies**
- Continue to review learner ability, and suggest moving on quicker for learners who have a grasp of a subject.
- Security is almost always a concern, build in time to reassure learners at every stage, especially when they start to input any personal data.
- Conversation between learners can be supportive and positive, but does need to be managed to keep on subject. If you're concerned first approach learners by checking that they're or need any help. If this continues to be a concern, ask learners to explain the topic they've been covering. If they're unable to, gently encourage them to continue and chat in the planned breaks.
- Explain when breaks are planned up front (normally after around 45 minutes of a session) but encourage the group to break as they feel the need. Learners breaking early can be a sign they need more challenge or they're struggling.