

academic ideas

As the unusual school year continues, we're all questioning how to focus on academics.

The traditional strategy of planning coverage by subject area may need to go by the wayside. Consider innovative spread topics and a blended approach to covering classes. In the end, you'll share a fresh perspective in an unprecedented year.

Here are 35-plus ideas to make the grade.

SHORT RESPONSES

1. One word – Include even the most reserved students with this simple, but effective module. Ask for one-word answers to school-related topics: first week, virtual learning, hybrid formats, in-person classes, Zoom, freshman year, senior year, etc.

Use the one-word format on a single module or make it a recurring sidebar, featuring different topics each time. Or if you're really adventurous, turn the one-word idea into an entire spread, a typographic layout utilizing various font treatments—weight, size and color for visual appeal.

2. In five words – Expand the idea for a slightly longer answer. Try asking for answers via social media and use a hashtag like #BackToSchoolin5words.

BACK TO SCHOOL

3. First day photos – Whether you were in-person or at home, capturing those first day moments are an important

milestone, especially this year. Gather photos from porches and front doors and run an entire spread of them.

4. Work spaces – For all the virtual students, show off their home school setups. Feature desk settings, with students' computers, desks and school supplies. But don't forget to cover other popular work-from-home locales like couches, beds and outdoor spaces.

5. School essentials – Pencils? Check. Calculator? Check. Backpack? Hmm, maybe not. Think about designing a lay flat spread, photographing and featuring all the necessary tools for the school day. Also, don't forget those other items to survive the school day: digital devices, earbuds and go-to snacks.

6. In-person experience – Back at school, how are classes different? Include the schedule if it's been adjusted to accommodate for social distancing. Feature how learning is happening and discuss the changes, obstacles and any benefits.

CLASSROOMS

7. Classroom changes – Illustrate how room setups have changed with social distancing measures. Consider also discussing the challenges with spacing, cleaning and connecting with students.

8. Teachers' classrooms – Reminiscent of MTV's *Cribs*, showcase your teachers' second homes. Photograph classroom decor, the cozy touches and desk tchotchkes. Pay attention to the subtle touches to their content areas.

CHALLENGES

9. Teaching challenges – Focus on the adult's perspective on teaching in a pandemic. Talk to teachers about juggling virtual and in-person instruction, connecting with students and how they measure successes.

10. Student challenges – Learning is also formidable in a pandemic. Consider a long-story format to feature students' stories or a text-only spread with quotes reflecting the difficulties of remote learning.



Seven Lakes High School, 2019



Staley High School, 2019

STATS

11. School by the numbers – Collect all the interesting facts and figures about your school and use with cutouts, graphics or a compelling photo of the campus.

12. Classes by the numbers – Consider running a similar spread, focused solely on class statistics—think numerically: total courses, AP classes, core classes, electives, languages and time in class.

16. In-school assignments – For those back in person, focus on the lesson plans that involve active participation. Capture students “caught in the act of learning.” Photograph them conducting experiments, working on projects, going to the board and creating artwork.

Also, take advantage of classes expanding past the classroom—hallway scavenger hunts, balcony and outdoor experiments, and meeting outside for instruction.

STUDY HABITS

13. Note-taking – Let’s show off notes taken, especially by students’ with easy-to-read handwriting. Consider creating a whole showstopper spread on note-taking, or feature as a module on a core classes spread. Include mugs and quotes for a personal touch.

14. Studying – School is about more than what happens during the school day. Cover studying habits, favorite spots and late-night strategies.

PHOTO-FOCUSED SPREADS

17. Artist’s showcase – Regardless if you’re at home or in school, let’s celebrate student creativity. Dedicate a spread to student artwork: drawings, paintings and sculptures. Consider adding quotes or mini-stories to tell the behind-the-scenes story of the work. Also, consider art spreads for photography and digital graphic classes.

18. Books – Give the English classes some love with a spread dedicated to reading. Feature books from each grade level, using cutouts of the covers (if you’re in-person, it could be a stack of books; if virtual, try photographing each book separately and use that to your advantage in the design).

Poll students on which book they liked or disliked, how long it took to read and how many relied on SparkNotes instead of the actual pages. Gather quotes for meaningful reflection—what they thought of the books, which ones they surprisingly liked and how they felt about the endings.

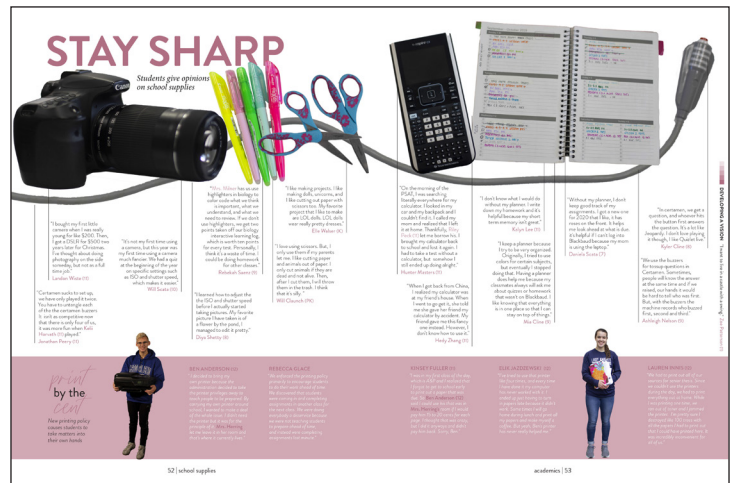
ASSIGNMENTS

15. DIY assignments – One of the most fascinating aspects of academic coverage is how classroom activities work from home. Capture how teachers are sending materials home and how those experiments, projects and assignments are turning out.

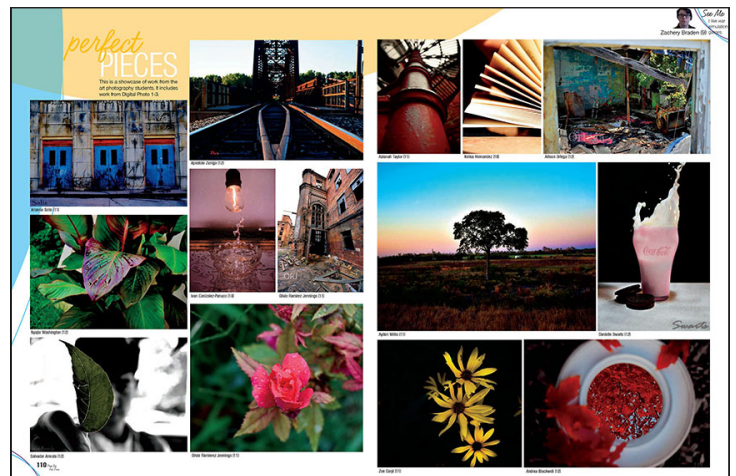
Also, don’t forget about how career technology classes are teaching culinary, auto tech and welding skills, and how physical education classes are conducting fitness activities.



Portola High School, 2020



Hill Country Christian School, 2020



Topeka High School, 2020

COVERAGE IN 2021



Bowie High School, 2020



Episcopal School of Dallas, 2020

19. Cutout creativity – Instead of worrying about non-existent classroom pictures, be innovative with the visuals. Think creatively about what type of objects could represent classes, especially electives, and photograph those items for a spread. Think paint brushes, microscopes, books, iPads, calculators, language dictionaries, etc.

20. Showcase student work – Just like we suggested sharing artwork, consider featuring a spread of student work. This could be a simple, fun way to spotlight math and physics classes. Display notebook paper with equations and formulas, showing the process of learning and possibly analyzing or explaining the work.

In addition to in-progress work, also showcase finished projects and experiments. Cut out the objects to eliminate distracting and different backgrounds. For at-home learners, a focus could be on how they submitted their work and how different it was to work independently at home instead of at school.

INTERACTIVE COVERAGE

21. Match game – Add interactive coverage with a quiz matching favorite sayings to the corresponding teacher. Run the answers small, upside down or in the index.

22. Flowchart & tables – Consider running a flowchart or table on elective choices, AP and IB classes, required classes or freshman to senior course tracks. Add colors, icons or cutouts for a creative flourish.

SENIORS

23. Early graduates – Feature seniors who opt to graduate at the semester.

24. Post-graduate choices – It's not just about high school. Document the senior journey and what it takes to get into college. Photograph seniors in college gear.

Don't forget about seniors choosing a different route: trade schools, military and gap years.

VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION

The whole reason we're in school is academics. But most of us aren't in school right now. With the prevalence of online learning and video teleconferences, we're focused on how to cover virtual learning.

1. Zoom selfies – This is a no brainer. Snap screenshots of students meeting via Zoom, Google Meet or the video service your school uses (*Tip: have each of your yearbook staffers do this in their other classes and ask teachers to submit shots too*).

Run screenshots for an entire academic spread; consider placing them in a computer monitor or laptop graphic for an extra design boost.

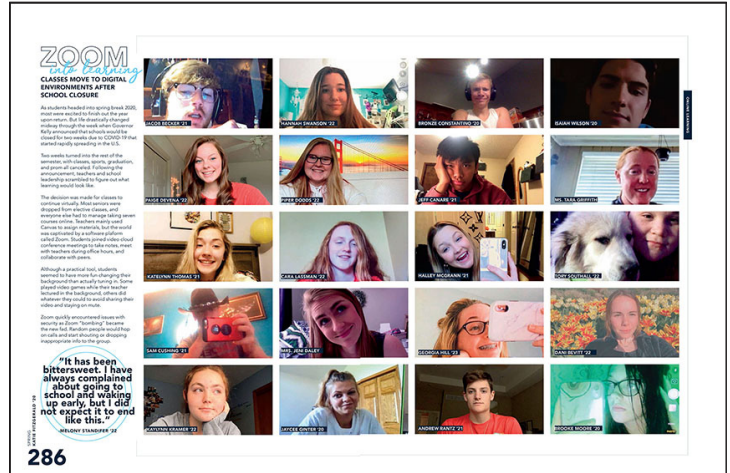
2. Funny stories – What goofy things happened during online classes? Any embarrassing moments? Surprising ones? Humorous tidbits?

3. Technical snafus – Virtual learning comes with the obligatory technical challenges. An infographic could display survey results

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Suncoast High School, 2020



Shawnee Heights High School, 2020

of the most common pitfalls. Add quotes and mugs for a personal connection.

4. Bueller? Bueller? – One of the dilemmas of online instruction is the lack of interaction. Talk to teachers about online obstacles with video communication.

On the opposite end, ask students about their camera decisions (be conscious that some online learners may have cameras off because of a lack of privacy.)

5. Match the ceiling fan – Take a fun approach to the camera shy. Create an interactive quiz, matching ceilings and fans to the corresponding student. If some offer a partial face, consider a foreheads and eyebrows matching quiz.

6. Zoom fatigue – If there's one thing we've learned from the pandemic, virtual learning is exhausting. Consider a whole spread about this relevant topic. Include personal stories and polls to show the stress and weariness.

7. Surprising benefits – In contrast, what's the upside to virtual classes and video meetings? This could be a module or an entire spread, possibly a typographical layout with cool fonts and colors or cutouts and mugs with the answers.

8. Fun background options – One of the pluses of online classes is getting to goof around with your background. Feature different students and the fun choices they make.

9. Analyzing backgrounds – We're curious animals. Turn that fascination to the objects behind students in virtual meetings. Have online learners x share the stories behind the paintings, posters and books around them.

10. Digital tools – What tech tools are teachers using to keep online classes engaging? Feature Kahoot, Quizlet Live, Poll Everywhere, Padlet, etc. using photographs, illustrations, quotes and surveys.

11. Byte-size equipment – Chromebooks, iPads, cell phones and other digital devices have become mandatory in a virtual learning environment. Cutouts and lay flat design could make this technical spread terrific.



Feature quotes and mugs with each device for a personal connection.

12. Virtual starters – Teachers are trying to keep remote learners engaged with starter activities and virtual bonding. Find out the fun and introspective ways classes are starting at your school.