

Online (Live) Yoga Classes – Part II: Teacher’s and Student’s Perspective

By George Zarnowski, founder of Wind of Prana movement.

In part I, I outline the benefits of teaching Yoga classes and Yoga related courses online. Teaching as well as participating in online Yoga classes and courses requires additional skills, some technical, but more importantly an awareness of the fact that although we are not in the same physical space, we are all in the same energetic and spiritual space, and in the same time, in the present moment.

From the student perspective, the most important is perhaps the technical aspect as it allows the student to join the group in the way that resembles physical closeness. However, to benefit from the class, it is important to embrace the fact that we are not in the same room, that we are in the space that is much larger, and more encompassing than the space of a physical studio. To embrace that there is no separateness on any level, that we are all already connected, or in fact, that we are not part of the oneness but the oneness itself.

First, let’s review the technical aspects and suggested set up of the video and audio on the receiving end at the student’s location. Some of it will depend on the technology or platform the student uses but most of the platforms have similar capabilities.

Here are some of my suggestions for the participants, on the technical aspects of the practice. These are just my views based on my experiences while teaching Yoga and Yoga related courses for over 5 years, and exclusively online for the last two years. I am sure there are other important aspects of teaching Yoga online that you have experienced. My contact information can be found on our website if you’d like to share it.

Suggestions for the students:

- Make sure that your camera is set up so that your teacher can see your whole body as you change its shape during the practice but be as close to the camera as possible.
- Make sure the teacher’s voice comes clear and loud, so you can hear all instructions, but also not too loud so it does not interfere with your focus on the practice.
- You can choose to display only the teacher (speaker) on the screen on your device or all of the participants.
- Some platforms will allow you to spotlight the teacher but to also to see others on the screen.
- If you are using a small screen (phone or tablet), and if you need to see the teacher demonstrating the postures, it is better to spotlight the teacher (speaker).
- Make sure the camera is steady and focused on your mat and on you. Sometimes when you laid down on the floor the camera may focus on the wall behind you, leaving you in the out of focus.
- It is a good idea to connect your device to the power outlet, to make sure your battery does not give up during the class (it happens).

- You may want to mute yourself to block the sounds coming from your space. You can easily unmute if you need to talk to the teacher or the group.
- Make sure the device is firmly set in place, so that it is not moved by a passing visitor (cats like to brush up against things).
- Your teacher will let you know if you need to adjust your camera.

Once you find the setup that works best for you and for your teacher, enjoy the teachings. You can intensify your experience by becoming present and by actively participating in the journey the teacher is taking the group on. Here are just a few suggestions for the participants of online Yoga classes. If you are a teacher, perhaps you can exchange these suggestions with your students.

- As you join the class, acknowledge those who are already there, including the teacher, by saying hello, waving, or bowing, using participant's name as you do that.
- Place your mat in such a way that you can see the teacher when you need to, with a minimal turn of your head or body.
- You can always change the way your Yoga mat is placed, during the practice, as you practice different postures.
- Placing your mat sideways or angled enables you to see the teacher better but also helps the teacher to have a side view of your body. Your teacher will advise you.
- Teacher will occasionally assist you verbally, acknowledge it.

Suggestions for the teachers:

If you teach online or would like to add online classes to your teachings, here are some points for you to consider or just to be aware of.

- You do not need much space to set up your online studio. A small room or a space in a larger room, minimum 8' (2.5 m) by 10' (3 m) will be large enough.
- If you will be teaching courses (lecture type), you can just sit at your desk with the laptop in front of you, using laptop's camera.
- Use a large screen (larger than your laptop) to display all of your students as seeing all of them during the practice is the most important thing for you. It is easy to connect your laptop to a large screen monitor/TV, using an HDMI cable.
- Do not use the audio and video capabilities of your laptop or your phone but purchase a separate [webcam](#), a [hands-free/Bluetooth headset](#) allowing you to move freely, and a [wireless USB mouse](#), allowing you to control the session from where you are. I provided the links to what I have been using.
- Placing your camera/webcam in front of or near the screen allows you at the same time to look into the camera (directly at your students) and at the screen showing them. You appear to the students with your body turned directly towards them. Having the

camera too far to the side of the display will appear as you are looking away from your students when you in fact are observing them on the screen.

- Place your Yoga mat either facing the camera or sideways, or use two mats one in each position, so you are able to demonstrate your students different body alignments, if you need to.
- Most meeting platforms, like zoom will allow you to spotlight one of the students for others to see in the main view (instead of you), allowing you to use a model during the class when the posture you'd like to demonstrate, would not allow you to see the students.
- It is helpful to have the ability to automatically mute those who come late.
- Using 'waiting room' feature rather than the password is easier for the students to connect but it requires you to be aware of those who are waiting for you to let them in.
- 'Waiting room' also allows you to know who is coming to the class before letting them in.
- Make sure your students are reminded from time to time of what the link to the class is
- Muting everyone before you begin removes possible interruption by sounds coming from the students' spaces.

... and

- **AWARENESS, AWARENESS, AWARENESS! Be even more aware of your students than you would be in a physical studio. Your students must feel that you are completely present.**
- Develop awareness that even though you are teaching your students who are physically apart, they are all together and with you, in the present moment following your teachings.
- Realize that you are not talking to or teaching the screen of your display. You are teaching your students who can see you and hear you, just like they would if you were all in one room.
- Keep in mind that we teach who we are, and you are the same person, teaching online or at the studio.
- **Welcome your students individually, using their names, as they come to your virtual studio.**
- As you wait for others, connect with the ones who are already here. Ask a question of each one of them, whatever the question might be. You will learn more about each student as they come to your classes. Reconnect!
- Your students come to Yoga classes to practice Yoga but also to be a part of a group. This is especially true when the students connect from their homes. **Make your classes a bit more of a community gathering.** Bring them into the common space. Welcome them as a group.
- When you have a new student, wait for everyone to enter the studio, and introduce your new students to the group.

- While teaching, be as compassionate and respectful as you would be in the 'same room' studio. **Teaching Yoga is a selfless service to others.** Let your students feel it.
- Acknowledge the students by name throughout the class, to note good participation or body alignment.
- Gently assist with a short advice, using the name of the student the advice is for.
- **Make sure you acknowledge all students by their name during the class, more than once, including those who do not need your assistance, letting them know that you are there with each one of them and that you are speaking to each one of them directly.**
- Acknowledge if the student is confused or tries to do something little differently, always using the name of the student, something like "It's OK Sue". Be present!
- Again, **YOU ARE THERE WITH THEM IN THE SAME SPACE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT!**
- Yoga practice is simple, so do not complicate it, especially that not all your students can see others to concur what you are asking them to do.
- Some of the posture might be new to some of your students, so if you see that indication from the any of the students, demonstrate.
- You can also assign one of your students who is familiar with your teachings as a model for the class to follow, for a part of the class for the entire class. Most platforms will allow you to spotlight one participant for others to see in the main window. You can do that and change it while the class is already in progress.
- End your class by expressing gratitude to your students for sharing the same space and time and for allowing you and others into their homes.
- Send them away just like you would after a class in the studio, with gratitude, respect, and love.
- ... and look forward to the next opportunity to guide them on their spiritual journey.

In the meantime, ...

Be the light and share it.

George has been engaged in teachings and practices of Buddhism and Yoga for over 30 years and teaching online for over 5 years. More information about Wind of Prana and how to contact George can be found on the website: WindofPrana.com