

# It's Electric: Evidence-based strategies for successful remote advising

Nudge<sup>4</sup> Solutions Lab

As schools and colleges shift to online learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, academic advising faces a similar transition. An abundance of [evidence](#) suggests that in-person advising can have positive impacts on students' college persistence and success. But advisors may find it challenging to translate their successes from in-person advising to the remote context. To support advisors as they navigate the COVID crisis, we've pulled together a series of remote advising best practices and resources we've developed across several projects. You can also find these resources on our projects page at [nudge4.org/remoteadvising](https://nudge4.org/remoteadvising).

## 1. Using behaviorally-informed content

Behavioral Science is the study of how people make decisions in the context of a complicated world. [Nudge Strategies to Improve Student Success in Online Learning](#)--a quick reference guide we developed with ideas42--provides tips on using behavioral science strategies to support student success in the online context. The guide focuses on four main strategies:

- Encouraging goal-setting
- Prompting plan-making
- Eliminating hassles
- Helping students manage attention

We've also assembled a [guidebook](#) of behaviorally-informed text message templates and infographics which we've created across several projects on our website. You can also find a more comprehensive overview of behaviorally informed nudge strategies for student success in [Nudges, Norms, and New Solutions](#), which we created in partnership with ideas42.

## 2. Reach out proactively - even if you don't hear back

We find that about 30-35% of students will respond to any one message from an advisor, but 75% will respond at least once during the campaign to ask a question or get advice. Our partners also tell us that even students that do not answer are listening - having shared several anecdotes of students finding their advisor on-campus and thanking them for their consistency and helpful reminders.

## 3. Making a personal connection can make a difference

While there is no replacement for the value of an in-person connection, our past interventions have found that making a personal connection makes a big difference in the success of virtual advising. You can create a personal connection through:

- Including an infographic with your name, photo, and short bio in your first message
- Using your name in messages
- Including a photo or a link to your profile on your institution's webpage
- Sending a general check-in message like "how are you doing? Is there anything I can help with?" Our partners tell us that this type of message is invaluable to engage students who otherwise had not previously responded.

You can find examples that incorporate each of these message elements in our [guidebook](#) of message content and infographics.

#### 4. Consider including these additional elements in your messages

While [this guidance](#) on message content was developed specifically for text-message interventions, we think it has more general applicability to virtual advising.

- Try to personalize content to the student's specific needs or circumstances
- Prompt students to use a resource or complete a task
- Reference important dates and deadlines
- Offer one-on-one assistance
- Provide encouragement and positive reinforcement

You can find examples that incorporate each of these message elements in our [guidebook](#) of message content and infographics.

#### 5. Infographics can convey additional information to students

Infographics can convey additional information to students in an easily digestible visual format. Our [guidebook](#) includes examples like graduation checklists, study schedule templates, and guides for using online or on-campus resources. Feel free to use or modify the infographics in our guidebook. There are also many free and low-cost infographic design tools. Our infographics were designed using [Canva](#) (free account available).

#### 6. There are many ways to advise: here are a few examples

We encourage virtual advisors to think of themselves as [trail guides](#), providing a constant source of help and encouragement on the path to success. Using the example of course registration, here are a [few approaches](#) that advisors can take to help a student accomplish their goals.

- [Provide the solution](#): Offer to look up the student's course map through a degree audit tool and provide them with a list of remaining requirements
- [Tell them where to find the solution](#): Provide guidance on how to use the tool themselves, and follow-up to make sure they completed the task
- [Find the solution together](#): Set up a call or video conference to walk through the steps together
- [Tell them who can give them the solution](#): If the task is not within the scope of your role, provide step-by-step guidance on where and how to get course planning assistance

You can find more information about the trail guide model and multiple ways to approach advising in [this webinar recording](#), originally presented during a training to over 170 advisors from the Virginia Community College System. You can find a PDF of the presentation [here](#).

#### 7. Additional tips for text message advising

There are a variety of platforms that allow advisors to interact with students via text message. Most, if not all, use a web-based interface and eliminate the need for an advisor to use their personal cell phone number. Examples include text message modules in learning management software like Canvas and free-standing messaging platforms like Signal Vine. Below are a handful of technical tips that we share with advisors as they embark on text message-based advising:

- [Some systems will let you pre-program messages](#), allowing the advisor to send out a message to their entire caseload with one click. Advisors should plan to be available to field replies immediately following the outgoing message.

- Set aside time blocks to send and receive messages: In previous text message-based interventions, 25% of students responded to a text message from an advisor within 60 seconds, 50% responded within 4 minutes, and 95% responded within 1 day. We recommend that advisors block off one to two hours dedicated to messaging students.
- Message about once per week: Sending a message about once per week keeps students engaged, provides consistency and stability, and prevents high rates of stopping-out due to over-messaging.
- Try to keep messages short. Draft messages and review for ways to cut down information. Try to keep each message within 240 characters.
- Be conversational, but professional, by spelling out words like “you” instead of “u”
- It’s ok to use emojis :)

#### 8. Share resources you find helpful

Help us share resources by sending them to us on Twitter at @nudge4solutions or via email at info@nudge4.org.

### Quick reference to all resources referenced above:

Nudge<sup>4</sup> webpage encompassing all resources below

Website: [Nudge4.org/remoteadvising](https://nudge4.org/remoteadvising)

Recorded Webinar and Presentation: Remote Advising & Online Learning

A training for over 170 Virginia Community College System (VCCS) advisors on best practices in remote advising and nudge strategies to improve student success in online learning

Recorded webinar: [nudge4.org/onlineadvisingtrainingvideo](https://nudge4.org/onlineadvisingtrainingvideo)

PDF copy of the presentation: [nudge4.org/onlineadvisingtrainingpdf](https://nudge4.org/onlineadvisingtrainingpdf)

PDF quick reference “Advisor as a trail guide”: [nudge4.org/trailguide](https://nudge4.org/trailguide)

PDF quick reference “Suggested message structure”: [nudge4.org/messagestructure](https://nudge4.org/messagestructure)

PDF quick reference “Ways to approach virtual advising”: [nudge4.org/waystoapproachvirtual](https://nudge4.org/waystoapproachvirtual)

Nudge Strategies to Improve Student Success in Online Learning

Short 3-page overview of behaviorally informed nudge strategies for student success

3-Page PDF Document: [nudge4.org/onlinelearning](https://nudge4.org/onlinelearning)

Nudges, Norms, and New Solutions

A comprehensive overview of behaviorally informed nudge strategies for student success

Website: <https://nudge4.ideas42.org/>

Accompanying PDF guide: [nudge4.org/nudgesnormsnewsolutions](https://nudge4.org/nudgesnormsnewsolutions)

Guidebook of text messages and infographics for remote advising

A compilation of sample text messages and infographics that advisors can use to inform their virtual advising via text or other communication methods.

Website: [nudge4.org/remoteadvisingtexts](https://nudge4.org/remoteadvisingtexts)

*Nudge<sup>4</sup> Solutions Lab at the University of Virginia applies behavioral insights, data science, and interactive technologies to develop scalable solutions in education and public policy. Visit our [website](https://nudge4.org/) to learn more.*