Teaching with Zoom Breakout Rooms: Best Practices

For tutorials on setting up and managing Breakout Rooms, click here.

Why Use Breakout Rooms?[1]

- Create a sense of community amongst students
- Foster Active Learning
- Increase student interaction
- Allow students to practice skills in different formats
- Break up Zoom classes

Using Breakout Rooms to Facilitate Discussion

- Provide groups with clear discussion guidelines and goals.
- Utilize discussion groups as a "Knowledge Building" activity by having each group tackle a different problem and then report their findings to the whole class afterwards.
- Require groups to designate a "spokesperson" for reporting back to the whole class.
- Move between rooms to check in with students. Ask questions that will help drive their conversation further; both in the breakout rooms and in the whole class follow-up discussion.
- Vary groups sizes to make discussion dynamics more interesting: partners, small groups, large groups.
- Timed breakout rooms can be used to facilitate quick-fire discussions, or simply to help keep the class on track.
- Keep in mind that students can use Zoom marker board or screen share to collaborate or share media with one another to enhance their discussions.
- Breakout rooms can work well with traditional discussion activities such "Think/Pair/Share" or Jigsaws. Here are some great resources to consider for creating breakout room activities:
  - Small Group Activities for Breakout Rooms
  - Teambuilding Activities & Icebreakers for the Virtual Environment

Using Breakout Rooms to Facilitate Collaboration

- OneDrive files (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) can be shared before breaking into groups, allowing students to add to their section of the document as they complete group work. This works well for both synchronous and asynchronous activities.
- Instead of having students use Zoom's whiteboard, consider having them use Microsoft Whiteboard or another app like Google Jamboard to have them collaborate in a shared space and then save the work to share out.

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[1] Source: "Using Zoom Breakout Rooms: Guidance for Faculty" from the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning at Princeton University

- Foster collaboration through community building activities that invite students to share various media or to physically get up and move through their space. Example might include "show and tell", sharing photos/videos/music, or even physically moving (such as a scavenger hunt or a coffee break).
- Breakout rooms is a great tool for facilitating peer review activities and allowing students to provide constructive feedback on each other's work.

Best Practices for Teaching with Breakout Rooms:

- To ensure students are doing their work while in breakout rooms, consider these options:
  - Have students work within a shared document so you can see live edits.
  - Randomly join breakout rooms to check in with groups.
  - Require students to report back to the class after breakout rooms end.
- To ensure that students are getting the help they need during group work, consider these options:
  - Make students aware of the "Ask for Help" button in breakout rooms.
  - Create a clear method of communication for getting questions answered: Will there be time for questions after groups meet? Should students leave the breakout room and come to the main room with questions? Will the instructor be joining the breakout room to answer questions?
- Always be clear about objectives and goals of breakout room sessions. Be sure to communicate the following:
  - The purpose of the breakout room session.
  - Any time limitations being set upon the breakout room.
  - Expectations surrounding deliverables to be reviewed, collected, or presented pursuant to the breakout room sessions.
- Long or repetitive breakout room sessions can lead to a loss of focus in a class session. To avoid "Breakout Room Burnout", consider:
  - Varying the time length of breakout room sessions
  - Varying the number of group member
  - Varying the roles of group members
  - Varying the types of activities being conducted in the breakout room
  - Providing specific outcomes to generate a clear sense of purpose within breakout rooms