

Breakout Rooms in Zoom

Using “breakout groups” in Zoom is important for several reasons. First, learning is a social endeavor. Students need to connect with their peers, and even in a small class, being in a breakout room can allow for more voices to be heard. Second, in a face-to-face environment that is online, students need cognitive breaks. Simple things like writing something in the chat, doing a free-writing exercise, using the white board, or responding verbally can be good switch-ups. Breakout rooms afford an additional opportunity for all students to be engaged with each other and the content, which can lessen feelings of isolation and help create community.

Pedagogically

- Consider the rule of thirds for time use in an hour to 90-minute session. What will you do in each third of the time you have, and where breakouts might be useful? Think of each session as having a story arc, with the breakout representing the beginning, middle or end of the story.
- Plan a little extra time for getting breakouts set up, for student to get into their group’s breakout room and then later for all students to return to the main Zoom session.
- Make sure students know what to expect as you send them into breakouts - exactly what they are to do, and what will be expected when they return. (see Debrief below)

Decisions to make

- What would be a good use of breakout group time to help you accomplish your objective(s) for the day?
 - First day of a course – use a "get to know each other" ice breaker. Ask students to talk about what they want from the course or what they are anxious about.
 - Beginning of a class – have students reflect on the reading, diagnose common problems or respond to questions from the homework.
 - Mid-way through a class – do an activity related to some content you just shared, an analysis of a text using specific prompts, or a collective problem-solving exercise.
 - At the end of a class – offer a summary of the class, collect remaining questions, etc.
- How much time will students need in the breakout rooms?
- How many people can you put in a group and still allow the students to accomplish the goal in the time they have?
- Do you want to use assigned groups (paying attention to the composition) or random groups?
- Do you want to use the same groups in the same session? This is recommended.
- Do you need to send students reminders of when to switch if they have been asked to take turns sharing?

Transparency and clarity guidelines

In any classroom, the prompt and directions can easily be forgotten unless posted and available, and groups can flounder a little or go off topic. How do you avoid this?

Virtual Teaching Tip

- Post prompt or directions: Put the instructions or prompt in the chat, in Canvas, or in a document. Note that once students go into breakout rooms, they can't see the whiteboard from the main room, but their individual chats will follow them.
- Prompts should be open-ended, but not so open-ended that students will come back with completely different responses or not have the time to wrap up.
- Community building: Remind students in a small class to introduce themselves in breakout rooms the first few times, and perhaps every time in a large class.
- Group process: Always have the group select a reporter for the debrief.
- Let students know they can call you into their breakout room for questions or clarifications.
- Remember to send reminders of the time remaining for the breakout room

Structures / strategies while in breakouts

- [Google doc](#): Have a Google doc set up with the prompts for the breakout group - once everyone is in the room and you are ready for breakouts, put the link in the chat. Make sure you have chosen the setting "Anyone can edit" - this is nice because you can actually see what is going on in the groups. If they are part way through and have not written anything, you can send an announcement.
- [Whiteboard](#): Students can use the zoom whiteboard in break outs, BUT they need to save it before returning to the larger group if they want to show it. They may need to practice this once or twice so they know where to find where they saved it.
- Games: The breakout room assignment can be in game format, a scavenger hunt, jeopardy, a single prompt, a problem to work on (ask for their reasoning).

Debrief in some way

- You can decide whether a whole group debrief is important or how much time it should take if it feels important to wrap up.
- When students return, there are a variety of ways they can report back on the most important discussion points depending on what is important and the amount of time you have. Some common strategies are:
 - ask for verbal reports from a reporter per group
 - use the whiteboard - have them draw, write, vote using a stamp
 - ask them to put their learning or group themes in the chat
 - ask them to highlight their two most important discussion points in a shared Google doc that they worked on

Technology Support for Breakout Rooms in Zoom

- [ETS User Guide How do I use break-out rooms in Zoom?](#)
- [ETS Recorded Trainings](#)
- [Managing Breakout Rooms in Zoom](#)
- [Find an upcoming training session](#)
- Email edtech@tufts.edu for 1-1 support

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