

Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

An online, interactive classroom and meeting platform that is accessed via Minerva. It includes audio, video, text chat, an interactive whiteboard, PowerPoint display, application sharing, breakout rooms, live closed captioning, polling and session recording

To use Collaborate Ultra, set up a room in your Minerva module or organisation and then add a link to it so students can access it. If you want to invite participants from outside the University, this is also possible via a guest invitation URL.

Collaborate Ultra is web based meaning you don't have to install any software to access it. For the best experience use Google Chrome or Firefox (versions 49+). Check the full list of [supported browsers](#).

If you want to keep a copy of your Collaborate Ultra Session for students to review you can record it. Remember to check your students are happy to be recorded first though (there is an option to remove students' names from recordings but this has to be enabled **before** the session takes place.)

To sum up:

1. Choose which [Collaborate Ultra Room](#) you want to use.
2. Review the [Session Options](#) (this is when you can remove students' names before a recording is made).
3. [Add a link](#) to Collaborate Ultra and direct students to it in your Minerva module or organisation/create a [guest invitation](#) if required.
4. Adding a [profile picture](#) can make students more comfortable with participating online.
5. Visit the [Collaborate Ultra Test Room](#) before first use, where you can familiarise yourself with the interface, configure audio & video, and add a profile picture..
6. Once the session has finished, direct students to the [recording](#) in your module/organisation if relevant. There is also the option to download an MP4 if you wish to keep a copy of the recording for wider distribution.

Key pointers

- Ensure that students know when the session will run, which Collaborate room it will be in, and what preparation they are expected to do in advance, (including using microphones and webcams)
- If you are setting preparatory reading, make it clear what is required and post as an announcement in Minerva and an email to students
- As with face-to-face teaching, you should design your session in advance
- For a lecture-style session it is recommended you prepare your presentation in advance. Slide decks can be created in PowerPoint in Office 365, or in any presentation software

- Export your presentation as a PDF before uploading to Collaborate to ensure it displays as intended
- You can present using the screenshare facility if you need to use particular software or slides with animation
- You should allow time at the start for students to log in and troubleshoot their settings
- A Collaborate Ultra room can have up to 500 simultaneous users (Note: rooms for over 250 users need to be requested in advance via the Learning Technologies Team).
- If the focus of the session will be on the presenter for the majority of the time it is advisable to turn off participants' microphone and camera access. The audience can still ask questions and make comments using the text chat.
- With large groups it is advisable to have a colleague online at the same time to moderate the chat, answering questions directly where possible or collating questions for the presenter to answer
- Make sure that you tell the students just before you start the recording. Something simple is fine – 'I'm going to start the recording now

There is a list of [tools available](#) and this includes the following that are useful

Interactive whiteboard

The interactive whiteboard can be used in a number of ways:

- Share a simple blank whiteboard and ask students to contribute by drawing and typing directly onto it
- Slides that you share via document sharing can also be annotated by students
- Note that whiteboard annotations are anonymous and the Whiteboard cannot be saved. If you'd like to use the content created on the whiteboard later in a session, take a screenshot (Windows: Use the Print Screen key, Mac: Use the Command+Shift+3 keys) that can be uploaded as shared content.

Polling tool

The polling tool is excellent for checking students' understanding of the content you are presenting, or for gauging students' opinions on a particular topic. Polls can be set up with Yes/No or multiple-choice options (up to five answer choices). You can choose whether to display the aggregate responses to students, and you can see which students have responded and how they have responded.

Chat tool

The chat window can be excellent for encouraging interaction from large audiences or from students who may be reluctant to use their microphones. Chat interfaces are usually fairly informal, and you can reinforce this informality through

Breakout rooms

The breakout rooms tool allows you to send small groups of attendees to separate rooms

within the session. Each breakout room has the same functionality as the main room. You can assign attendees to groups randomly or manually.

When using breakout rooms, remember that you cannot be in all of the rooms at the same time, and the students cannot come back to the main room to ask for help until you finish the breakout. You can go into each group to check that they are working on the task and provide support if needed, but unless there is more than one presenter/moderator, groups will need to be able to manage without you. You therefore need to provide very clear instructions before starting the breakout. It is important to set a clear task for the group to complete, and clear instructions for the output you expect them to return to the main room with.

If you have been recording the session it won't record the breakout rooms, and if the main room is left empty (i.e. is everyone including yourself are in breakout rooms) then the recording in the main room will stop, so remember to click on record again when you bring everyone back to the main room.

For more information see the [Collaborate FAQs](#).