

# Planning and delivering webinar sessions for learning and teaching

This document provides advice and best practice guidance for the planning and delivery of teaching and learning using **Blackboard Collaborate Ultra** for live ('synchronous') sessions.

Technical advice and guidance for the use of Collaborate is provided on the Minerva support website: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/vle/staff/collab/collaborate/>. Links to specific sections of the support website and Blackboard's own support website have been added where relevant throughout this document.

Collaborate can be used to deliver live sessions to groups of students ranging from small group discussions and active learning to lecture-style large group teaching. This document covers session design, set-up, and delivery for all kinds of teaching.

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## 1. Session design

Just as with face-to-face teaching, you should design your session in advance. This will include planning the session structure and any presentation materials you want to share with students, as well as the activities you want the students to participate in during the session. Be clear on the purpose of the session and the learning outcomes that you want the students to achieve.

### Activities

Blackboard Collaborate is an excellent platform for active learning and you are encouraged to think about how to use it to do more than present to students. See [Appendix I](#) for some template learning designs for webinars.

If you are delivering a traditional lecture-style session then remember that webinar attendees have to contend with a lot of potential distractions (email, social media, going to make a cup of tea...) and a low social cost of being distracted (it is harder for the other people in the session to tell if they are paying attention). It is important to plan regular activities that will keep participants engaged, and which allow you to gauge levels of engagement. Simple ideas include using the polling tool for quick questions or asking student to post emojis in the chat window to indicate their current mood.

If the purpose of the session is for students to interact with each other (e.g. in seminar-style discussion or to collaborate on producing a solution to a problem) then you will need to plan how you will facilitate this. This might be in whole-group discussion or using breakout groups. You can set students tasks to prepare in advance and ask them to come to the session ready to present them to their peers.

### Presentation

For a lecture-style session it is strongly recommended that you prepare your presentation in advance. Slide decks can be created in PowerPoint in Office 365, or in any presentation software. You are advised to export your presentation as a PDF before uploading to Collaborate to ensure it displays as intended. You can also present using the screenshare facility if you need to use particular software or slides with animation.

Even if your session is a small group discussion it helps to have some visual prompts to display on screen to help students follow the session structure. As a minimum, this would include a welcome slide (see [Section 3](#)), any discussion prompts (see [Section 5](#)), and an 'Any questions' slide at the end (see [Section 7](#)).

Remember to ensure that your slides are accessible (considering font size, use of colour etc.). See the [guidance provided by OD&PL and the Inclusive Learning & Teaching Development project](#).

### Structure

Have a clear plan for the session with indicative timings for each section. You should allow time at the start for students to log in and troubleshoot their settings. You can encourage students to log on a few minutes early to reduce the time required here, but still be prepared to start the session a few minutes after the initial start time. Make sure you leave time at the end of the session for questions, or let the students know how they can contact you for follow up questions after the

session. For longer sessions make sure to plan a break (for the speakers as well as students!) and also break up long periods of talking with short activities.

*“Don’t be too ambitious about what you want to cover and leave time for discussion. You may need to factor in time for administering breakout rooms (if you plan to use them), and for switching between tools. However it can also be advisable to have some additional material ready that you can use if required, so that you can fill the time if the students don’t interact as much as you have planned.”*

## **2. Before the session**

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. If you are setting preparatory reading, make it very clear what is required reading for the session. Post this as an announcement in Minerva and an email to students. It is good practice to share your slides and session plan with the students in advance of the session to allow students time to prepare. This will help them feel ready to engage in the session rather than coming to it ‘cold’.

Ensure that students know what IT software ([recommended browsers](#)) and hardware (microphone, webcam) they need. If your students have attended Collaborate sessions for other teaching they are likely to need less support, but it still helps to remind them of the basic requirements. Make sure that all students have had an opportunity to join a practice session in Collaborate Ultra before attending a session for learning.

Have a practice session yourself, to ensure that you know how to use all of the tools you plan to employ, especially if you intend to use breakout groups or polls. If you need training or support this is available from the [Learning Technologies Team](#) and [OD&PL](#). If you are presenting as part of a team or with a co-presenter then it is usually easier to access Collaborate from separate PCs in separate rooms rather than to share a PC, microphone and webcam.

### **Session set up**

Each module in Minerva has a ‘Course Room’ set up by default. You can use this or set up separate rooms for different purposes. The best way to set up the Collaborate room (session settings) is dependent on the type of [session](#).

A Collaborate Ultra room can have up to 500 simultaneous users (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 session (i.e. one-to-many lecture style), then 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. If it isn’t possible to have a moderator online, then provide clear guidance to the audience to set their expectations at your ability to immediately respond to all questions. You could promote one or two students to act as moderators.

In a smaller group setting you can encourage participants to interact via audio, video and text communication channels as desired. You can use breakout groups to enable small group discussion and collaborative activity (these usually work best with groups of 4-5 students).

### **3. At the start**

As the presenter you will ideally be online at least five minutes prior to the start time of the session, to make sure that you have everything you need ready to go to deliver the session.

Some students will log onto the session before the official start time. This does not mean that you need to start the session early or fill this time with conversation. However it is good practice to acknowledge their presence and let them know that you are waiting for the official start time before commencing the session. If several people have logged on early you can encourage them to use the text chat to introduce themselves to each other before the start. You can post a message to encourage them to use the chat function (to everyone, or to specific individuals) to help build community.

You will see a list of people who have joined the session in the [Attendees panel](#). This can be used to complete the register.

#### **Welcome slide**

Have a welcome, or 'lobby' slide displayed from ten minutes or so before the start of the session to help students know that they have logged onto the right room. This can also be used to prompt them to run through some preparation before the start of the session.

Welcome slides usually include:

- Module code and title
- Session name
- Presenter name
- Recording notice – if you plan to record the session you should include the University's standard notice and link to the [audio-visual recording policy](#)
- Session plan – a brief summary of what you intend to cover
- Prompt to check audio visual settings – this can help avoid technical issues once the session has begun.

See [Appendix II](#) for a template Welcome Slide which can be adapted for your own use.

#### **Introduce the session**

Once you are ready to begin, make it clear that the session is now formally starting, and welcome students. Introduce yourself, and remind participants of the desired session etiquette (e.g. use the raise hand tool when wanting to ask a question, mute microphone when not speaking – see [Section 5](#)).

#### **[Recording the session](#)**

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’. This serves as notice to the students that their contributions from that point on will be recorded.

### **Ice-breaker/warm-up**

It is a good idea to start each session with an informal activity to get the students engaged. The chat tool and interactive whiteboard can work well for these kinds of activities.

If this is the first session with a particular group of students then it is a good idea to give them the opportunity to introduce themselves, but it can be time consuming to ask each student in turn to introduce themselves using their microphone. The chat functionality allows for simultaneous introductions (ask each person to post a short message about themselves). You can also set up interactive ice-breakers such as displaying a blank world map on a slide and asking students to draw on their location using the whiteboard tools.

With groups who you are teaching regularly, it is still a good idea to have a warm-up activity at the start of each session. You can use this as an opportunity to get feedback on how they have found the preparatory work, or on what they have been doing since the last session. An example activity would be to display a slide with a scale on which students can use the whiteboard tools to indicate how challenging they found the material, or which allows space for them to vote on which topics they have found most interesting.

#### **4. During the session**

In a webinar session it is harder to access the social feedback you receive when teaching face-to-face (i.e. through body language cues). You therefore need to take extra care to ensure you have mechanisms built in to get feedback from the students on whether they are following the session, whether they have any difficulties with understanding. This can be simple things such as pausing to invite questions or comments or using a poll to ask a question.

In all types of session, it is good practice to encourage all attendees to mute their microphone when they are not talking, to prevent a build-up of background noise. You should also try to remember to mute your microphone when another attendee is speaking.

Students respond well to seeing the presenter on screen, which can help increase the sense of presence and connection. However, it may be advisable to have your video on at the start, whilst you introduce the session and welcome attendees, but then to turn it off to reduce the bandwidth requirement and lessen the likelihood of technical issues, especially if you plan to use other tools such as screenshare.

#### **Sharing content**

To show and speak over your presentation slides, you will use the content sharing function. Content can be shared via uploaded files (e.g. PowerPoint slides) or via screenshare (i.e. for live demonstration).

##### **[File share](#)**

Files prepared in advance can be shared for presentation during the session using the file share function. If the interactive whiteboard tools are enabled, participants can be invited to annotate slides during the session.

##### **[Screenshare](#)**

Using screenshare enables any software accessible to the presenter to be displayed to the audience.

#### **Technical issues**

If individual students experience technical issues during the session you can sometimes diagnose the issue and provide quick support as outlined below. However, bear in mind that it is frustrating for everyone else if you stop the session to try and provide extended support to individual students.

##### **[Microphone muted](#)**

The attendee panel in Collaborate shows you who has their microphone on and who has it muted. If a student is trying to speak and you can't hear them, gently remind them to unmute their microphone using the microphone button at the bottom of the screen.

##### **[Poor connection](#)**

The attendee panel also allows you to see the strength of each attendee's internet connection. Where a student has a poor internet connection there is little you can do to

solve the problem, however you can encourage them to turn off their video and microphone as this uses increased bandwidth.

### **Background noise / audio feedback**

If an attendee leaves their microphone unmuted, you can sometimes experience a lot of background noise and/or a reverb effect where you hear the speaker's words again through the microphone of the attendee. In these cases, gently remind everyone not speaking to mute their microphones. When students return from breakout groups their microphones will be on by default so you may need to remind them at that point to mute. If an individual attendee persists in leaving their microphone unmuted you can [mute it yourself](#) using the attendee panel.

### **Other issues**

If all else fails and a student is still having problems, encourage them to log out and then log back in again.

If you experience technical issues, don't panic, tell the students what has happened and how you are going to proceed with the class. Maintaining a calm, confident manner will help reassure the students. They are unlikely to blame you and will understand that some matters are outside of your control.

*"Be able to laugh at yourself if you make a mistake, this shows you are human and also that they don't need to worry about it."*

## **5. How to encourage interaction**

Just as in a face-to-face setting, you may find that students are reluctant to contribute and need encouragement. It's okay to have silence but make sure that you signpost this and acknowledge that you are leaving space for them to contribute. Too much silence can make participants feel anxious that they have lost the sound or something technical has gone wrong.

### **Give clear expectations about how you want students to communicate and interact in the session.**

Do you want everyone to use their microphones (best only with a small group), or would you rather they used the text chat (better with a large group)? Do you want people to 'put up their hand' before turning their microphone on, or are you happy for them to jump in? It's important to be very clear and explicit because it will not be easy for them to pick up on any non-verbal cues (as they might in a face-to-face setting).

### **Invite contributions and questions at regular intervals**

Some students will be happy to ask questions without prompting, but others will wait for a specific invitation. If you are presenting, make sure that you pause regularly and make space for questions and comments.

### **Display discussion prompts on screen**

Where possible, plan your discussion prompts in advance, and add them to your slide deck. Good discussion prompts are open-ended, but also specific enough that the discussion remains focused.

### **Enable multi-modal contributions**

For a number of reasons some students may be more or less comfortable contributing verbally with their microphone/webcam. Where possible given the format of the session, it can help to allow and encourage other forms of participation and interaction:

#### **Interactive whiteboard**

The interactive whiteboard can be used in a number of ways. You can share a simple [blank whiteboard](#) and ask students to contribute by drawing and typing directly onto it following your instructions. Slides that you share via document sharing can also be annotated by students using the whiteboard tools, so you aren't restricted to just blank slides. For example, you can set up a slide with the question or prompt at the top and ask students to contribute responses using the text tool. Note that whiteboard annotations are anonymous. This can help encourage freer contributions, but if you want to be able to identify their contributions you could ask them to use different coloured text. You can also set up slides with graphics that you want students to annotate, such as a model which you ask them to label.

Note that 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 encouraging the use of emojis and abbreviated sentences to enable quicker conversation.

### **Call on individuals to contribute**

Just as in a face-to-face session you can invite individuals to contribute who may have been quiet so far. You will be able to see the list of names in the [attendees list](#).

### **Use breakout rooms for small group discussion**

Many students are far more likely to interact if placed in a small group discussion with 3 or 4 other students rather than in the main group. See **Section 6** below for more guidance on the use of breakout rooms.

## 6. [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.

Make sure that you tell the students how long they will have for their breakout activity, and use the [timer](#) tool so that everyone can keep track of how long is left.

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.

If you want the breakout groups to report back, then ask someone in each group to do this before sending them to their breakouts. The breakout room whiteboard will disappear when you bring students back to the main room so you may want to ask the students to take a screenshot, or to record their output using a different method.

## 7. **Ending the session**

Before closing the session take a few minutes to invite final questions and let students know how they can contact you after the session with any follow up questions.

If you have been recording the session, [stop the recording](#), and tell the students where and how they can access the recording.

## 8. **After the session**

If you didn't complete the register during the session you can [access a report](#) with details of who attended the session.

[Share the link to the recording.](#)

## Appendix I: Examples of webinar learning activities

### Seminar

A tutor uses breakout rooms for students to discuss a case study.

	Description	Timings
Pre-session	<p><b>Minerva announcement</b></p> <p>Tutor posts announcement to Minerva with link to case study and questions to answer in preparation for the webinar.</p>	60mins
During session	<p><b>Sessions starts</b></p> <p>Tutor recaps on the case study and the questions to be discussed in breakout groups. Slides show a list of bullet points describing the structure for the seminar with indicative timings.</p> <p>Students are informed that they will be split into groups and should nominate an individual to take notes and report back.</p> <p><b>Breakout groups</b></p> <p>Tutor splits students into breakout groups. Each group nominates a note taker. Students discuss their responses to the questions about the case study. The tutor moves between each breakout group listen and ask questions to stimulate debate.</p> <p><b>Share and reflect</b></p> <p>The tutor closes the breakout groups and all students rejoin the larger class. The tutor gives each group nominee permission to use webcam and report back summary of discussion. Between each nominee's report, the tutor asks for the wider class to add their comments, questions, responses to the chat. The tutor responds to these questions or invites the nominee to do so.</p> <p><b>Ending the session</b></p> <p>Tutor highlights contrasts, comparisons between each groups' findings and asks for any final questions or comments in the chat. The tutor informs students of the next steps after the webinar and ends the session.</p>	<p>10min</p> <p>20mins</p> <p>20mins</p> <p>10mins</p>
Post-session	<p><b>Minerva announcement</b></p> <p>The tutor posts an announcement summarising group discussion and shares the session recording and slides.</p>	10mins

## Lecture

A lecturer uses polls and chat to engage students in a lecture and get feedback on their understanding of the topic.

	Description	Timings
Pre-session	<p><b>Minerva announcement</b></p> <p>Tutor posts a Minerva announcement with a link to the library with core reading and further reading for students to prepare for the lecture.</p>	90mins
During session	<p><b>Session starts</b></p> <p>Tutor presents an overview of the lecture, with topics to be covered and learning outcomes.</p> <p><b>Poll</b></p> <p>Tutor shares a poll for students to rate what they found challenging about the concepts covered in the core reading. The tutor responds to trends in the poll, and state which aspects of the reading they will focus on and where students can go for additional support after the session.</p> <p><b>Presentation</b></p> <p>Tutor presents their lecture to describe each topic and process. Between each stage of the lecture the tutor poses a question for students to respond to in the chat to keep students engaged.</p> <p><b>Poll: problem</b></p> <p>The tutor poses a problem that relates to the topic covered and shares a poll for students to give their answer to the problem. The tutor responds to trends from the poll and gives the correct answer together with explanation of why this is correct.</p> <p><b>Session ends</b></p> <p>The tutor recaps on the key topics covered and invites final questions from students in the chat before ending the session.</p>	<p>5 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p> <p>45mins</p> <p>15mins</p> <p>15mins</p>
Post-session	<p><b>Minerva announcement</b></p> <p>The tutor posts lecture slides, lecture recording and links to further and recommended reading in a Minerva announcement. This also includes links to additional sources in response to specific student needs identified through the poll.</p>	N/A

## Appendix II: Template Welcome Slide

Module: [Code and Title]

Session: [Session title]

Presenter: [Your name and email address]

### Welcome!

Please take a moment to check your audio and video settings by opening the Collaborate Panel (bottom right hand corner of the screen) and selecting the My Settings icon.

### Webinar Recording Notice

Please note this webinar will be recorded and the recording link shared with all students on the course. Recording is to be conducted in accordance with the University's Policy on Audio or Video Recording for Educational Purposes (see [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/audio\\_visual\\_policy.pdf](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/audio_visual_policy.pdf)). Please read the Policy for further background information relating to your rights. These rights include a right to opt out of recordings and to request an edit of recordings.

### Session aim

[Briefly outline the purpose of the session]

### Session structure

- Warm-up activity
- [Section/topic 1]
- [Section/topic 2]
- [Section/topic 3]
- Questions