



# 7 Steps to: Getting the most from Zoom

## Overview

Zoom is a cloud-based platform for 'video and audio conferencing, chat, and webinars' (Zoom, 2020) with a few added extras such as screen-share, a whiteboard and breakout rooms. It can handle large groups of participants and has an intuitive interface. The advent of COVID19 with lockdown in March 2020 necessitated that Higher Education moved online and this made Zoom a popular choice for an online, interactive classroom space (Tesar, 2020). Other Apps (applications) with similar functions are also available, including Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business.

Blended learning, which includes the traditional campus delivery format combined with elements of learning in the digital space, has been steadily on the increase, particularly in Higher Education, since the early 2000s. This blended approach has all the benefits of the social constructivist model of learning founded on the notion that knowledge and understanding are socially constructed between peers and their teachers (Burr, 2007). Much of this happens in the shared classroom when students are engaged in active learning, and the digital platform has largely been used as an asynchronous space for resources, guidelines, and assessment.

With almost all HE Programmes now having online presence (Lederman, 2020) the digital platform needs to be much more than a repository, it must also facilitate the ability to teach, discuss and collaborate online. Zoom is part of the solution. It is most effective if combined with a wider module delivery strategy (Abel, 2005) which addresses how materials previously delivered in the campus classroom can be delivered in other digital formats, thus leaving the synchronous Zoom sessions for engagement and interactive learning practice. This 7 steps suggests some practical pointers for linking research and teaching in the curriculum.

## 1. Design interactive sessions

Zoom is designed for synchronous conversation and collaboration. It is part of a wider digital teaching and learning solution. To make most effective use of Zoom, use a pedagogic design model such as ABC (Younga, 2016) to reengineer your programme or module (Abel, 2005). Take the didactic delivery into other formats such as bite-size Panopto, reading lists, video resources, etc. Then determine what kind of activities you will conduct in the Zoom sessions. These might include: question-led discussion around a journal article, followed by a plenary; scenario based learning in which students work on approaches or solutions to specific scenarios; development of group presentations or artefacts; peer debate on a given topic; triad work including rehearsal, observation and feedback. The activities should be varied to stimulate interest (Hunt and Chalmers, 2012) and clearly align with the learning outcomes of the module and lead towards the module assessment (Biggs and Tang, 2007).

## 2. Give time limits and structure your Zoom activities

Igbaria and Tan (1998) recommend 30-90-minute time slots for synchronous activities. Remember the greater the stimulation, the clarity of the task, and the level of challenge, the more likely it is that students will remain focused (Bender, 2012). Effective management of the technology will also prevent distraction. Draw up a session plan with indicative timings and, before students begin an activity, tell them how long they have to complete it. This will help groups to focus and plan how they will tackle the task. Use the Zoom functions to message the breakout rooms with time warnings. When you close breakout rooms it will give students a 1-minute time-out warning before they re-join the main group.

## 3. Determine numbers

Most Zoom accounts offer 100 participants per 'meeting'. Zoom can show up to 49 people in gallery view although this may vary according to your settings or screen size. It is really important for students to see you and for you to see your students (Han and Johnson, 2012). This visual connection helps to establish rapport, enables you to read non-verbal expressions which will give you and your students immediate two-way feedback, and facilitates lip-reading and explanations supported by gestures. Decide how many students you will have in each session, how many Zoom sessions you will need to cover that cohort, and how many teaching staff/assistants are available to facilitate learning. If you do not have staff capacity to co-teach you may find PhD students who are willing to gain experience and manage the technology (break-out rooms and chat space) - this will enable you to concentrate on facilitation.

## References

- Abel, R. (2005). Implementing Best Practices in Online Learning. *Educause Quarterly* 28(3): 75-77.
- Alexander, G. (2000). Netiquette, or the social conventions of computer conferencing: Extract from a Communications Guide. from <http://sustainability.open.ac.uk/gary/netique.htm>
- Bender, T. (2012). Discussion based online teaching to enhance student learning. Virginia, USA, Stylus.
- Biggs, J. and C. Tang (2007). Teaching for quality learning at university. Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- Burr, V. (2003). Social Constructionism. Hove, Routledge.
- Food and Rural Affairs Committee FRAC (2019). An Update on Rural Connectivity 2017–19. London, House of Commons. Seventeenth Report of Session.
- Han, H. and S. Johnson (2012). Relationship between students' emotional intelligence, social bond, and interactions in online learning. *Educational Technology & Society* 15: 78–89.
- Haythornthwaite, C. (2006). Facilitating collaboration in online learning. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*: 7-24.
- Hunt, L. and D. Chalmers (2013). University teaching in focus: a learning-centred approach. Abingdon, Routledge.
- Igbaria, M. and M. Tan (1998). The virtual workplace. London, Idea Group Publishing.
- Lau, J. (2020) To Zoom or not to Zoom? That is the question.
- Laurillard, D. (2002). Rethinking university teaching: a conversational framework for the effective use of learning technologies. London, Routledge.
- Lederman, D. (2020) Will Shift to Remote Teaching Be Boon or Bane for Online Learning? *Inside Higher Ed*
- Tesar, M. (2020). "Towards a Post-Covid-19 'New Normality?': Physical and Social Distancing, the Move to Online and Higher Education." *Policy Futures in Education* 18(5): 556-559.
- Younga, C. and N. Perovića (2016). Rapid and creative course design: as easy as ABC? 2nd International Conference on Higher Education Advances. València, Spain.
- Zoom (2020) About us. [Zoom.us > about](https://zoom.us/about)

## 4. Set up some 'netiquette'

Most campus classrooms have ground-rules agreed by staff and students. The online environment also needs to be managed so that all students can participate equitably. Expectations of how we communicate and conduct ourselves 'on the net' is sometimes referred to as 'netiquette' (Alexander, 2000). Establish the ground-rules at the start using a friendly tone. It may work best if you integrate it with an outline of the structure of the session. For example, *'Welcome. Today we are going to look at . . . it follows on from your prep reading of . . . and the video and quiz on . . . Our activities today link to the assessment and will help you to . . . After a brief intro we will move into breakout rooms for the first activity. While I introduce things please turn on your camera and ensure that you are on mute. I will take comments or questions before we go into the breakout rooms, so either put your Q in the chat, or raise a hand to let me know you have a Q. When you arrive in the breakout rooms, turn your mic on when you want to contribute, but mute it when you are listening to others to minimise background noise. So, let's get started.'* UoP has developed some guidance on [Zoom netiquette](#).

Add your netiquette guidance to Moodle and include an invitation for students to let you know if there is a reason that they might not use a camera. This might be because their PC does not have a camera, they have an internet connection of limited bandwidth (FRAC, 2019), they have a personal security issue, or they are safeguarding children.

## 5. Consider your tone

Remember this is a classroom, you need all your teaching skills to manage that space, but in an online environment the non-verbal cues are reduced (Haythornthwaite, 2006), so your voice and facial expressions are key. Use a conversational tone, smile, give clear instructions, use student names to promote sense of belonging and community, invite yourself in to challenge ideas or stimulate discussion, or probe for deeper thinking.

## 6. Pre-test and manage the technology

The technology is a means to an end, what you are doing is teaching. But to teach well you need the skills to minimise disruption and maximise the smooth flow of the session. Learn how to set up automatic or managed breakout rooms, or how to run a poll. Learn how to use the whiteboard function, or to share your screen to demonstrate something. If you are co-teaching or have an assistant, determine your roles prior to the session. It often works well if one person is responsible for the technology leaving the other to concentrate on content and facilitation (Haythornthwaite, 2006). If you are the sole facilitator explain how you will handle the session for example, *'if you have questions or comments leave them in the chat, and I will address them after this activity.'* This approach allows you to concentrate on one thing at a time and filter how and when you respond. The 'chat' will disappear when the session is ended, so if you want to capture it, copy and paste the discussion into a word document, make your edits and place it on Moodle.

## 7. Remember Zoom is your contact time

Dedicate most of the session to the students as an opportunity for them to collaborate and discuss (Laurillard, 2002), to clarify their learning from the 'flipped' or preparatory resources, and to develop their understanding. Use the last 3-5 minutes as a plenary.

## Educational Development (ED)

The university is committed to providing information in accessible formats. If you require this publication in an alternative format, please contact [ed@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:ed@plymouth.ac.uk)

To see other titles in the 7 Steps series go to: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/about-us/teaching-and-learning/guidance-and-resources/7-step-series>

