

Tips for Running Online Tutorials

Setting up your tutorial with security and access in mind

Our students learn best when they feel they can safely contribute and that they will be respected in the learning environment. To mitigate zoom bombing and similar security threats, and to ensure that all your students have equal opportunity to contribute in class, review the recommended zoom settings and potential access measures you can take.

Recommended Zoom settings

- Be the host - setting up the zoom yourself, or having the instructor assign you as an alternate host - ensures that you'll have full access to features like break out rooms and whiteboards
- Limit access to just Western students and staff – under “Meeting Options” click “Only authenticated users can join” and then select “Western Accounts Only” from the drop-down menu
- Enable the waiting room if you have a small enough class that you can admit students as they enter
- Select “Mute participants upon entry” to ensure your session is not overwhelmed by background noise, but leave students the ability to unmute themselves
- Select video off on entry
- Disable private chat between participants
- Enable private messaging with host (you)

For more information on how to plan for safety in an inclusive virtual learning environment, see this [handout “Mitigating and Responding to Security Risks in Synchronous Zoom Sessions”](#) and consider registering for the asynchronous eLearning module “Fostering Respectful and Inclusive Online Environments” [click this link to learn more about the TA eLearning series](#). Registration is available via Western Connect.

Western Technology Services has also created this handy [Best Practices Guide for Zoom](#)

Access Measures

- If using PowerPoint or Google Slides, consider using the live caption feature - this will provide closed captioning for what you say, but will not capture audio from the rest of the class

- Don't require students have their cameras on. Many students have limited bandwidth or have other legitimate reasons why the requirement to share their video would significantly limit their access to the classroom.
- When possible, provide PDF versions of PowerPoint presentations either before or after class
- If putting videos on the OWL site for students to engage with asynchronously, consider embedding them as YouTube links rather than uploading the raw Mp4 or .avi file, This way, students can access the closed captions automatically generated by YouTube.
- When creating handouts, use the "accessibility checker" feature in your word processing software, to check that the document can be easily read by a screen reader
- If the visuals on your slide are relevant to the learning outcomes, describe them so that students without access to vision or to video can still engage with them.
- Consider distributing a survey to students about their level of access to technology, asking about the following:
 - Reliable high-speed Internet
 - Ability to watch online video
 - Ability to record audio or video
 - What device they will be using to participate remotely (smartphone, tablet, laptop, telephone without Internet access)
 - Limits to phone plans (data, minutes, local calling)
 - Access to particular software or apps

Helping Your Students Participate in Your Online Tutorial

Finding your tutorial, navigating re-grade requests, submitting assignments and finding the weekly readings may all seem simple to you, but you likely have more experience navigating learning management systems than your students do, and may be more comfortable going to the professor for clarification than your students are. In distance learning, it is important that students use their cognitive energy on your course content, not on learning a whole lot of new software or navigating your course site.

Once your students have accessed your tutorial, its then important that you make the most of your time together by providing students multiple ways to engage with the material, with you as the instructor, and with their peers so they can co-create knowledge and apply what they've learned.

Lighten the cognitive load, minimize technical issues

- Early in the term, consider sharing an introductory video/guide to your course site, introducing yourself to your students and showing them exactly how to navigate to the resources they need for your tutorial
- Ensure your tutorial is easy to find by including it in your course's OWL site. Students will be able to click on the "zoom" tab within OWL and see a list of upcoming meetings
- Encourage students to test zoom prior to tutorial. You can even ask them to use zoom to record a quick introduction for you by having students log on to zoom and start a one person "meeting" which they then record. This can be an easy way to get students to test their zoom, while also sharing with you their preferred name, their pronouns, and something they want you to know about them as a learner.
- Consider opening tutorial 10 minutes early to give students time to test their microphones, cameras, or screen shares (whatever they'll be using in your tutorial)
- Prioritize consistency over novelty when choosing digital tools or platforms. Consider choosing just 1 or 2 tools outside of zoom or OWL that you can use multiple times throughout the course. Allow extra time for students to learn how to engage with the new tool the first time you use it. This will save you time in future lessons, and will lighten the cognitive load on your students, allowing them to focus their energy on course content, not on learning new software and platforms.

Western Technology Services (WTS) has put together [a page on tools available through OWL](#). They have also created a [Catalogue of Centrally Supported eLearning Tools](#) to help you decide which tools and platforms will best integrate into your class.

Build Community and Learn About Your Students

- Provide avenues for students to introduce themselves to you and one another publicly. Flipgrid and Voicethread allow students to record video and audio respectively, and can thus put more of a human touch on the typical "get to know you" questions. Some questions might include "What have you already learned about this topic or about online learning that you'd like to share?", "What is one boring fact about yourself?", or "In 3 gifs or less, tell me how you feel about taking this course online?"

- Use this introduction activity to get students familiar with tools or platforms that you plan to use. For example, if you will be asking students to create and present slideshows to the class later in the term, or to work collaboratively on documents, your introduction activity could be asking students to introduce themselves via a collaborative slide show (using google slides or a powerpoint in onedrive). Ask each student to add a slide that introduces themselves and see how creative your students can get!
- Provide an avenue for students to introduce themselves to you privately. Consider distributing an introductory survey or asking students to make a recording just for you wherein they answer questions like “What do you want me to know about you as a learner?”, “Tell me about a particularly memorable assignment you’ve done in past. What about it made it a good (or bad) experience?” or even “What time zone are you joining class from?” You may also want to use this avenue to ask student about their access to technology and if they foresee any limitations in taking part in synchronous sessions or accessing content on OWL.

Create a More Human Experience in Distance Education

- Whether or not attendance is mandatory, it is useful to know who is in the room each week. Use attendance or an opening ice breaker question to get students to testing the tools they need to participate (such as microphone or access to the chat box).
- Upload a photo (of yourself, your pet, your favourite coffee cup) to your zoom profile and your OWL profile to help students associate you with a visual. Encourage your students to do the same, especially if they won’t be turning their cameras on during lessons
- Create opportunities for students to interact with each other through small group discussion, using break out rooms. This will help give students the much-needed social factor in your virtual classroom and will also provide a space where students less likely to speak in front of the whole class can still participate.
- Consider if there is asynchronous work that can be done in groups. If so, try creating study groups and giving time during tutorial for students to exchange contact information
- Use students’ names when answering their questions or when praising correct answers in the chat.
- Have students call on one another in larger group discussions to get them using one another’s names

- Help students connect the concepts in your class to their everyday lives by encouraging journaling or a brief 25-50 word “report back” from an attempt to apply what they learned in your class to (a) another course or (b) their life outside of school

For more information on humanizing your virtual classroom, consider checking out "Humanizing Your Virtual Classroom" through our [TA eLearning Series](#)

Be a Present Online Instructor

- Make the most of time shared together in synchronous sessions by providing multiple active learning opportunities. Your synchronous session should not look like a pre-recorded lecture. You can learn more about planning for active learning at [this CTL Active Learning Page](#). For examples of active learning strategies that work in the online environment see [this page on Active Learning for the Online Classroom](#)
- If you were to ask a question in class, you wouldn't sit back for the rest of tutorial and just let the students discuss among themselves. Apply the same active moderation techniques you would use in a face-to-face or synchronous class to moderating discussion boards.
 - Publicly acknowledge quality contributions.
 - Ask follow up questions to encourage students to dig deeper.
 - Ask students how their argument connects to another week's topic, or how it compares to an opposing argument offered by another student.
 - Check in more than once, to ensure you're not just engaging with the first couple of responses offered.
 - For examples of multiple ways to use your asynchronous discussion board, see [this resource on Ideas for Discussion Forums](#)
- Help students prepare for tutorial by posting a weekly announcement or overview of what will be covered, or what you would like students to arrive prepared to discuss
- Consider creating a collaborative document where students can ask questions anonymously. This will help minimize the number of emails you get about deadlines and assignment guidelines because you can address these questions once in your collaborative Q&A, rather than in 7 different emails to 7 different students
- When giving out assignment prompts, consider posting an accompanying video that goes into further detail and directs students to relevant resources

- Encourage students to post questions in the chat during synchronous session. Then, set aside specific times during tutorial where you can check that chat. If you aren't able to address all the questions, you can always save the chat to review after class, and then post answers on OWL.

...but not *too* present. Model healthy boundaries for your students

- Make it clear to your students that working from home doesn't mean you should always have to be at work. Set a good example by drawing work/life boundaries and not being available to your students 24/7
- Hold regular online office hours and encourage students to make 15-minute appointments with you within those hours
- Think through alternatives for students with poor internet connectivity, such as audio only office hours, or phone calls through Teams.
- Offer guidelines about how long any asynchronous work you are assigning should take
- Tell students how frequently they should be checking their university emails, and how promptly you will endeavor to respond to their emails (for example, "I will respond to student emails within 1 working day" lets students know that you will not be checking your work email on weekends or holidays)

Take advantage of the online environment

- Vary the ways in which students communicate with you by allowing for written, audio, and video contributions on your discussion board. This is one thing that's actually easier to facilitate online. When was the last time a student passed you a note in class the same way they could with the private messaging chat function?
- Encourage students to mute themselves when not speaking to reduce background noise. No longer will a ringing cell phone have to disrupt the whole class!
- Use available videos as discussion starters. By selecting "share computer audio" when sharing your screen, you can use YouTube videos as discussion starters. Search for resources from other scholars in your discipline, people across the globe who you may never have been able to get as a guest speaker may now be uploading content that you can use. You could also record a zoom call where you interview one of your colleagues, to provide a different point of view on that week's material.

- Get them to use their smartphones to be present in class. If students are on their phones anyway, consider using tools like Kahoot or Poll Everywhere. Turn that would-be distraction into a learning tool!
- Consider creating a Q&A forum for students where they answer one another's questions about course content. This will help your students take control of their own learning and, by checking on occasion, you can get a sense of what concepts students are struggling with and may need you to review
- Screen share or record a lecture capture when teaching a particularly process-based point, such as how to use a particular library database, or how to use a specific software
- Take advantage of the global online community of educators by checking teaching association websites for resources. The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education's website keepteaching.ca is a great place to start. Your disciplinary associations may also be creating repositories of online lessons and resources. You are not alone in this!

For More Information, Consider the Following Resources

Quick, Useful Overviews

- Do This, Not That Online Teaching [Infographic](#)
- How to Be a Better Online Teacher, from the Chronicle of Higher Education: https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-be-a-better-online-teacher/?cid=gen_login_refresh&cid=gen_sign_in
- Teaching Without Walls Episode 1 "10 Online Teaching Tips Beyond Zoom": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7vooDcxUaA>
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For Student-Centered Learning in a Pandemic

- "Adjusted syllabus" helping students adjust and reframe their expectations about online learning in the midst of a world crisis: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-6d_W8rdzE9mW2DvPi-dPvRxo4sekKlz3VqEpnu4Dwg/preview
- The Single Most Essential Requirement in Designing a Fall Online Course from the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory <https://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson/2020/05/11/single-most-essential-requirement-designing-fall-online-course>
- Making online course materials accessible (Camosun): <https://elearningtutorialscamosun.opened.ca/accessibility/>

TA Specific Resources

- Being a TA in Online Courses (Waterloo): <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/being-ta-online-courses>
- Graduate Teaching Assistants (GATs) teaching and learning continuity information (Calgary): <https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/teaching-continuity-gats>

Western Centre for Teaching and Learning

- Academic Continuity at U of T: Tip Sheet for TAs: <https://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/strategies/continuity-planning/tip-sheet-tas/>
- Using the Zoom “waiting room” feature for holding office hours with one student at a time: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115000332726-Waiting-Room?zcid=1231>