

Running online sessions

Blackboard Collaborate is a virtual classroom platform where you can run synchronous (live) classes / seminars (or 'webinars') with participants logging in remotely. Collaborate is integrated with other university systems such as Learn, Moodle and MyEd. It can be used for group meetings as well as 1-to-1s.

Collaborate can be used for several different purposes:

- On online programmes it offers a platform to run regular synchronous (live) meetings / seminars with students not based in Edinburgh
- It can also be used for 1-to-1 meetings and drop-in sessions
- You can make use of Collaborate to run one-off events such as lectures or training / information sessions where it's not practical / feasible to gather presenter(s) and attendees in the same physical location (note that neither the presenter nor the attendees have to be in Edinburgh; e.g. you can moderate a session from Edinburgh, while the presenter logs in from USA and attendees join from multiple locations around the world)
- Similar to face-to-face teaching, your events in Collaborate can elicit varied levels of student engagement interaction, from lecture-style or webinars, one-way knowledge transfer sessions (=speaker talks to PowerPoint slides), through to using polls, group work, breakout groups, to Q&As and student-led discussions.

How to use Blackboard Collaborate

Videos about using Blackboard Collaborate for teaching:

- [Collaborate - first steps](#)
- [Collaborate - advanced features](#)

Setting up sessions on Learn:

- [Learn integration guide](#)

In addition to being able to create specific sessions on Learn, **each course** comes with a dedicated 'open session' / room which is always on, or available, by default. This makes it easier to use Collaborate and provides you and your students a convenient launch point for classes or impromptu meetings. However, depending on the sensitivity of the meeting there may be privacy issues conducting a 1-to-1 as anyone registered on the course can join the room without invitation. Further information on how to access these Collaborate rooms can be found here:

- [Course room](#)

Creating a session in myEd:

- [Create access](#)

Planning your session

The structure of the session will depend in part on the number of participants. Collaborate can accommodate up to 500 users in single sessions, but the character of the event and interaction with participants will be very different for a tutorial with 15 students vs a large 200+ event. Currently, Collaborate supports six simultaneously active videos. Blackboard are working on improving this and it will increase to 16/24 videos in the next three to six months from the date of writing this document. The number of live mics is unlimited.

If it is a small tutorial group, you may wish to structure the session differently when compared with larger groups. If there are more than five people in the room, it is advisable to ask all participants to mute their mic, raise their hand to indicate when they want to speak, and only have their mic on when they are talking.

When working with groups greater than fifty, consider disabling all participants' mics and offer the chat tool only. These are only recommendation and the structure will depend on the group, how disciplined they are, how many moderators are available in the session, and how experienced the tutor is.

It is very difficult to manage a highly collaborative environment with larger groups. Under these circumstances, you should consider limiting your audience participation to polling and chat only.

When planning a session, you should consider the following:

- Ensure the session has a focused topic.
- Plan an opening icebreaker such as personal introductions.
- Structure activities that are simple, short and, focused.
- Ensure activities assess and reinforce student understanding and learning.
- Plan active learning sessions for students and avoid focussing on plain transmission of information.
- Anticipate prompts for discussions and encourage feedback.
- To avoid silence when asking questions, use the polling tool when seeking answers.
- Design sessions with break-out rooms and split larger cohorts into smaller learning groups.
- Plan break-out rooms to set group tasks and then invite the groups back into the main session room to report their findings.
- If you wish to show the students a video on Collaborate, do not share on the screen, but instead share a link to the video on the chat function and give students some time to watch it.
- Accept that with the best intentions, things will not always work but try to seek feedback for improving future sessions.

Delivering a live session

Set the 'etiquette' for the session: let students know the expected style of behaviour and interaction – are you happy for them to contribute mainly through the text chat? When they speak, should they have their video on? Do you want to keep the conversation formal / informal?

Join the session early: this will give you enough time to upload content, test your camera and audio, and set up breakout rooms if appropriate.

Record your sessions: you should include a reminder to yourself or the moderator to start recording at the beginning of a session and seek permission to do so from the students. This cannot be set in advance. A recorded session will allow students to review the content or view it if they were unable to attend. You may consider setting aside some time at the end of the session which is not recorded, with the goal of allowing students to ask questions more freely than they would if it had been recorded.

Facilitate student orientation: at the beginning of each session, provide a slide that explains how to configure audio and the etiquette expected when asking questions.

Prepare content before the session: create presentation slides, notes, links, application sharing and any questions prior to the session. It is advisable to have a plan beforehand and not to make it up as you go.

Check for understanding: use instant polling to check that students are following the lesson and also to stimulate further discussion.

Using PowerPoint: PowerPoint presentations that can be uploaded directly to Collaborate for delivery to students. It should be noted that any animations or embedded video or audio files will not work after it is converted for use on Collaborate. Therefore, PowerPoint presentations should be created with simplicity in mind. Avoid having too much text or colour contrast, and perhaps include a note on copyright. You may wish to use the electronic whiteboard to write on, use file sharing or share the desktop screen with students as an alternative, or in addition to using PowerPoint slides.

Use breakout rooms: Collaborate breakout rooms provide multiple, private rooms for group work and enable tutors to have micro, problem-solving spaces. Set clear expectations and instructions for the students. **BREAKOUT ROOMS CANNOT BE RECORDED.**

After the session

Consider giving students tasks to do post-tutorial. Some examples:

- ask them to write an open-ended question about the issue which they found most puzzling during the tutorial. Post it on the discussion forum. Reply to at least one other student.
- 3-2-1 – ask students to describe three takeaways, two questions, and one thing they enjoyed during the tutorial. If they want, they can share these on the forum and comment on others' posts.

Tutorial

In this model, less emphasis is placed on the presenter and may include acquisition of new knowledge by the students prior to the live session. The students will have been provided with materials to work through or a task to carry out beforehand, which frees up the tutorial time for participation in activities and group work. The Collaborate session then becomes a space to facilitate or clarify understanding of core learning material through discussion with peers and activities facilitated by teaching faculty.

Prescribed tasks or materials prior to the session can include:

- recorded presentations
- listening to podcasts
- recommended readings
- activities such as set discussions on Learn
- case studies
- or even posing a number of questions to consider
- having the students each prepare a poster and then present on Collaborate using breakout rooms

The benefit of this 'flipped classroom' approach is that during the live session, students can apply and extend the knowledge gained by working through the set learning resources, rather than using the tutorial to deliver content for the first time. Facilitated activities and group work are key to delivering a 'best practice' Collaborate session.

Webinar

Collaborate is one of the centrally-supported platforms for running larger online events. See guidance from the university on how to choose the best tool for your event:

- [Online and digital events service](#)

When working with a larger audience, Collaborate can perform as a webinar tool, with the focus being mainly on the presenter delivering a presentation. If the number of participants is high, you may need assistance and the use of a moderator is recommended. A moderator can play a key role in ensuring all the participants have a successful learning experience and can facilitate engagement, discussion and interaction. For example, moderators can provide technical support in the background so that the flow of the presentation proceeds uninterrupted or can answer questions from the students on the chat feature without disturbing the presenter.

Interactive tools such as polling and chat can be used effectively during webinar and tutorial modes to engage the audience and gain immediate feedback. Although the emphasis is on transmission of information during a webinar-style presentation, and is considered a low collaborative environment, encouraging students to think and respond is a good means of checking for understanding. This would be no different to a lecturer asking questions during a presentation at certain points in a face-to-face classroom. Although the pedagogical approach in structuring this type of session might differ to that of a tutorial style, some emphasis should still be placed on participation by the student. If not

answering questions during the presentation, then leaving some time at the end of the session for questions and answers can also generate meaningful involvement for the students.

If you are transitioning to online teaching, do not try to replicate the face-to-face format. Divide your lectures into smaller, bite-sized chunks of no longer than 20 minutes each. You should take some time to consider which synchronous and asynchronous activities you would like to include in your course, and perhaps arrive at the conclusion that some activities may have to be modified if you want to get the most out of live teaching and Collaborate. Using a collaborative, tutorial-style model may be a better approach than using didactic methods of teaching.