

Better Breakouts: Creating Collaboration in Virtual Classes

When bringing people together for a virtual class, it should be for social connection, conversation, and collaboration. It should provide opportunity for participants to ask questions, and to test and apply what they have learned.

To create a collaborative environment, begin by setting the stage for engagement:

1. Set Expectations	
Ensure everyone knows what's expected by having an accurate event description, sending appropriate communication to attendees, and preparing them to get involved.	Example: <i>Change event description to include words like "interactive" and "hands-on." Send an email with all prerequisite tasks and ask attendees to respond with confirmation.</i>
2. Start Strong	
Capture attention as soon as attendees enter the live event by including on-screen interaction.	Example: <i>Opening slide includes a "while you wait" activity that captures attention.</i>
3. Select Opening Activities with Maximum Involvement	
Involve everyone in the opening activities that begin right at the event start time.	Example: <i>Within the first 2-3 minutes of the event start time, use a poll question to gather input AND ask attendees to select 'yes' or 'no' to a question.</i>
4. Create a Social Environment	
Find ways for attendees to connect, communicate, and collaborate with each other.	Example: <i>After initial introductions via chat, place everyone into small (3 people) breakout rooms for a quick meet & greet, and opening activity related to the content.</i>
5. Seek and Sustain Engagement	
After the initial whole-group interactions, invite frequent engagement throughout the event.	Example: <i>Use a variety of platform tools (chat, polls, annotation, breakouts, etc.) to enable attendee involvement in meaningful activities to further the learning outcomes.</i>

Once you have established an engaging environment, use the following tips to create collaboration in your virtual classes.

Three Types of Collaboration in Virtual Classes and Facilitator Tips for Each Type			
Type	Description	Examples	Best Practice Tips and Scripts
Large Group	Involving the entire audience in an activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise Hand if... • Choose an emoticon that represents... • Type your response in chat... • Answer the following poll question... 	<p>Phrase your questions in a way that requires everyone to respond. For example, "In chat, tell me XYZ. There are 25 of you, so I'm looking for 25 different responses." Or "if you have a question click on 'raise hand', if you don't, click on 'no' which tells me you're ready to move on."</p> <p>After a large group whiteboard brainstorm, debrief by asking participants to use stamps to mark everything they agree with.</p>
Small Group	Breaking the audience into smaller sub-groups. (typically, 3-5 people per group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whiteboard annotation / drawing activities • Team competitions • Breakout groups and other breakout practice activities (such as scenarios, case studies, role plays, etc.) 	<p>Divide a whiteboard into sections and assign designated participants to each section. After they've typed, invite each "group" to report out highlights from their section of the board.</p> <p>For breakouts, provide both visual and verbal instructions. Assign roles in advance (i.e. leader, scribe, spokesperson, etc.) and provide just enough tech instructions for a seamless experience. If desired, pull breakout activities back into main room for discussion.</p>
Pair Groups	Matching individuals with a partner for a discussion-based activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask each participant to choose an accountability partner at the start of the event • Assign partners for a private chat discussion activity 	<p>Enable private chat in the platform so that partners can talk with each other.</p> <p>Type partner names into chat so everyone sees the pair groupings (i.e. Emma - Jack; Sara - Adam; Suri- Rosanna, etc.)</p> <p>Start private chat discussions by first having everyone find their partner in chat & raise hand. Then share the discussion question, allowing 1-2 minutes for chatting.</p>

Sample 75-Minute Virtual Class Outline Crafted for Collaboration

Time	Activity Type	Notes
-	Welcome Activity On-Screen Before the Start Time	Discussion question on screen as everyone joins, along with administrative logistics
5	Strong Start	Welcome to the event on topic ABC. Introductions via Chat and Webcam sharing
5	Breakout Team Check-in	In groups of 3-4 people each, say hello to your teammates and create a team name!
5	Agenda + Poll	Today's agenda is XYZ. Which of these topics are you most interested in? Respond via poll. Share the WII-FM for attendees, what to expect + how the program is extremely relevant to them right now.
10	Whiteboard Challenge	What's challenging for you related to topic ABC? Let's brainstorm a big list on the whiteboard. {After board is full of ideas}... Use your marker to put a dot next to the ones that resonate with you as well.
5	Presenter Lecturette	Brief lecturette on Topic A, include at least one "raise hand" question
10	Breakout Brainstorm	In breakout groups (same groups as before), review assigned challenges in light of Topic A. (Option to provide additional relevant scenarios prepared in advance for groups to consider)
5	Presenter Lecturette	Brief lecturette on Topic B, include at least one "chat" question
15	Breakout Case Studies	In breakout groups (same groups as before), review assigned case studies in light of Topic B. Create relevant solutions and present out to large group.
5	Presenter Lecturette	Brief lecturette on Topic C, include at least 1 poll question
10	Partner Action Planning	In paired partners, use private chat (or breakouts, if preferred) to create action plans for applying the content and solutions learned from Topics ABC.
	Close	Thank everyone for their active participation. Share job aids and other takeaways.