

What are Breakout Rooms?

Blackboard Collaborate Ultra Breakout Rooms enable small group discussions and collaboration separate from the main room. Each group has private audio, video, whiteboard, application sharing, and chat features.

Benefits of Using Breakout Room Activities:

Designing breakout room activities can benefit both instructors and students. By designing breakout room activities, instructors can:

- **Promote active engagement:** Dividing participants into smaller groups increases the students' chance to be heard and participate.
- **Enhance the quality of conversation:** Focused discussions often lead to better ideas and solutions.
- **Encourage a diversity of voices:** Smaller groups ensure a broader perspective of students participate and their perspectives are represented.

What Nobody Tells You: Preparing a Successful Breakout Room:

When designing breakout room activities, consider more than just the "activity" itself...

- **Familiarize with a Quick Demo:**

Instruct students to self-navigate into breakout rooms, which grants instructors more time for room preparation. We suggest utilizing pre-established LMS group tools from Blackboard, ensuring students are aware of their assigned groups. This also allows groups to form once rather than re-form each time.

[Visit the CTLS Resources SharePoint: Breakout Groups](#)

- **Establish Roles:**

Make sure your group has roles. To keep conversations productive, assign meeting roles for the attendees; below are examples of roles you could adopt.

- *Sub-group facilitator:* Guides the discussion.
- *Note-taker:* Records key points.
- *Reporter:* Shares insights with the larger group.
- *Timekeeper:* Keeps track of allotted time.

- *Equity monitor*: Ensures everyone gets a say.
- *Questioner/devil's advocate*: Challenges ideas for robust discussions.

- **Provide Clear Instructions:**

Share detailed instructions and upload them into the breakout room or share link to the activity instructions in the chat box for easy access.

Note: [Example of Common Breakout Room Activity Instruction Document](#)

- **Have Deliverables:**

Use a set deliverable to give the breakout room activity focus.

Using a common Shared Doc and/or Shared Slides (e.g., OneDrive, Cloud, or Google Drive) file for breakout rooms serves three purposes:

1) It allows you to see their work in progress, allowing you to visit groups needing guidance or nudging.

2) It makes sharing out to the larger class easier since all deliverables are in one place.

3) It can act as a longer-term storage of the day's work, allowing students to go back and learn from other groups' work.

4) It provides a pre-set and structured system for groups to record their work.

- **Include Time:**

Time for specific tasks with a clear endpoint.

- **Actively Observe:**

Occasionally drop into breakout rooms to ensure smooth progress. If you choose to only observe, consider turning off your microphone and video to minimize distractions. Inform students, in advance, of how you will enter groups and your role when you are there (e.g., active participant, devil's advocate/questioner, provide more guidance, correct misinformation, silent observer).

- **Report Out Debrief:**

Having groups report out is an important part of using breakout rooms—it provides accountability for the groups, adds a sense of importance to the work they just did, and allows you to review and build upon their work in order to move the whole class forward.

Note: Create a shared common Shared Doc or Shared Slide (e.g. OneDrive or Google Drive file) where groups document their work. This allows you to pick which groups you want to call on if you cannot get to everyone. If you have more groups than can report out, but you aren't using Docs or Slides, you can come up with a

fun way to randomly select groups to report or you could use the polling feature in Collaborate or other tools to have groups report back.

Things to Think About:

- **Size of Class:** If the class is too large to monitor all the breakout rooms, for example a class size of 80. Consider another collaboration and community-building practice.
- **Commitment/Practice:** Breakout rooms are effective and valuable when implemented consistently. If you are unable to make breakout rooms a standard practice throughout the lessons/term, consider another collaboration and community-building practice.
- **Randomly Assigned Groups Can Be Difficult:** Community building requires consistency in interactions. It can be challenging to “break the ice” with new group members whenever a breakout room activity is planned. Before using breakout rooms, consider using the group tool in the Blackboard.

How-Tos:

[Using Breakout Rooms in Collaborate Ultra Groups for Breakout Rooms](#)

References:

- Indiana University Bloomington. Center for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.). Using Zoom Breakout Rooms Effectively. Retrieved from <https://citl.indiana.edu/teaching-resources/guides/zoombreakouts.html#:~:text=Cons%3A%20Takes%20more%20time%20before,sure%20to%20practice%20this%20beforehand>
- Michaelson, L.K., Fink, L.D., & Knight, A. (1997). [Designing effective group activities: Lessons for classroom teaching and faculty development.](#) In Dezure (ed.) *To Improve the Academy*, Vol 16, pp. 373-398. Stillwater, OK: POD Network.