

Brookes Briefing

Creating Engaging Digitally Enabled Teaching and Learning Experiences

Creating an engaging learning experience is an essential part of online learning, this Brookes briefing aims to outline some tips to help you create an engaging session along with the principles behind it. Although this briefing is primarily focused on teaching a synchronous session through Zoom the principles can be applied to asynchronous and even face-to-face sessions.

As with face-to-face teaching, creating an interactive and engaging session can directly be linked to a positive student experience (Hamdan & Amorri, 2022).

Being engaging online does not come from the sophistication of the technology used, it comes from how well the tools are used (Christopher & Hyder, 2015). This briefing gives you a clear steer on how to use digital teaching tools to create engaging teaching and learning experiences.

Principles and Practices for Creating Engaging Online Teaching and Learning Experiences

1. Know your kit: take the time to set up an Online Teaching Session

Setting up an online teaching session can be the most daunting part of online teaching, however getting the right settings for your session can drastically improve the running of the session once it's started. At Oxford Brookes we recommend using one of our licenced tools, such as Zoom, for online synchronous sessions. Zoom is a cloud based video conferencing tool with a variety of features that can be utilised to create engaging learning experiences.

Below are two recorded online sessions that outline the different options available to you when creating and setting up your teaching session.

The 'webinars' take you through:

- Oxford Brookes licence for Zoom
 - Installing zoom
 - Configuring the settings
 - Verifying you are signed in correctly
 - Scheduling a meeting
 - Sharing the meeting to the participants of the session
1. [Setting up teaching in Zoom](#)
 2. [Setting up a zoom session from a classroom](#)

Setting up an online session can be overlooked as an administrative formality but it is essential to understand the options available to you to create an inclusive, engaging and interactive session that is accessible to all.

2. Be welcoming

Welcoming students as they arrive in the online environment is an easy way to create a positive sense of learning community within your online sessions and show students that they individually matter. Creating an online community is often cited as one of the most important aspects of a successful online session (Conrad, 2005).

For groups of up to 12 use Zoom's waiting room feature (how to do this is shown in the '[Setting up teaching in Zoom](#)' session above). This allows you to individually accept students into the session and have a short but personalised welcome conversation. This introduces Zoom as a two way communication tool and medium for active engagement.

For larger groups, welcome students by name as they come into the room and ask them to say 'hi' in the chat, perhaps asking them to post how they are today, or how their studies are going. You could also ask them to use the reactions feature to react to your introduction questions based on how they are feeling.

3. Break the ice from the get-go

An icebreaker is a great way to get students engaging with each other and the session and worth the investment of 5 minutes at the beginning of every class. Just as in face-to-face sessions students may have social anxiety and worries related to engaging with an online session (Ngien & Hogan, 2022). Lecturers should also use this as an opportunity to get to know the students and allow the students to get to know you. A positive engagement between students and staff has been cited alongside 'Being good at using educational technologies' as two of the most important aspects of being a good university lecturer (Su & Wood, 2012).

Try to be inclusive and understanding of all students, if possible give students warning about the icebreaker especially if you are asking them to share something about themselves. This can be done through the meeting notes/invitation, an email or just giving them a bit of time at the start of the session.

For the first time students meet each other or for larger online sessions use Zoom's breakout rooms to create smaller groups and give them a collective task such as 'introduce yourself and find something you all have in common. You could bounce between the rooms and introduce yourself too.

In subsequent sessions use the icebreaker activity to check for understanding.g. Use a [Zoom poll](#) in sessions to check the main learning points from the previous session. Encourage engagement (and lead by example) but don't force it. There are lots of interesting and fun icebreaker activities you can try, See [this blogpost](#) for some ideas.

4. Create opportunity for connection throughout the class: Scaffold Engagement

Scaffolding engagement is an essential part of online teaching and has been proven to increase students' behavioural and emotional engagement (Cho & Cho, 2014). This can be done by building up engagement and starting with low stakes elements such as the welcome task or icebreakers discussed above. Turning your mic on and contributing to discussions can be daunting to some students but using smaller scale interactive features while gaining positive feedback from the session leaders can help alleviate this.

Zoom has a range of features and tools that can be used to help scaffold engagement. These features include: [polls](#), [breakout rooms](#), [sharing your screen](#) and a [virtual whiteboard](#). These features are a great way to increase engagement and measure comprehension (Folse, 2020). Tools such as polls can also be used anonymously to allow students a safe environment to share their comfort level with the current topic and helps to create better equity within class discussions (Cox, 2021).

There are also some 3rd party applications that can also be used (check the [Digital Toolkit](#) for what we recommend and which we have licences for) to help increase engagement in online sessions such as Padlet. Padlet is a web based platform that allows users to create and collaborate on online bulletin boards. For more information check out [Padlet at brookes](#) and [30 creative ways to use Padlet for teachers and students](#).

Below are a list of webinars to help explain some of these tools:

- [How \(and when\) to set up breakout rooms in my online teaching in Zoom](#)
- [How \(and when\) to share materials in Zoom breakout rooms](#)
- [How to share videos, screens and materials in my Zoom teaching session](#)
- [How \(and when\) to use a poll in zoom](#)
- [How \(and when\) to use a whiteboard in my online teaching in Zoom](#)

Ensure to set expectations on how students engage with these tools such as stating if it's anonymous, how long they have for the task, if using breakout rooms ask them to nominate someone to give feedback to the rest of the group.

5. Encourage Connection: Using Cameras and Chats

Make it clear how much of a difference it makes to you as a lecturer to see faces and get visual and other feedback when you are teaching. Keeping cameras on helps you read body language and social cues, helps students connect better with their peers and helps create the feeling of a community within an online class (Voigt, 2021). However there are many reasons why students or staff are unable to put their cameras on such as: bandwidth issues, a busy home life, unsuitable location, anxiety etc. Insisting that students have their camera on has been shown to increase anxiety, stress, fatigue and worry about being judged for their home life, financial state and other obligations such as being a career, parent, etc. (Moses, 2020).

Be clear why and when you would like cameras to be on, if possible and for longer meetings have 'Camera breaks' especially when cameras are not needed, as this has been shown to reduce 'zoom fatigue' (Nesher & Wehrt, 2022). Have a look at Brooke's '[camera on' policy for clarification](#).

Another useful tool for engagement is the chat feature, encouraging students to use it to ask/answer questions if they are unable to use their mics. A 2nd presenter or nominated student can monitor the questions in the chat and potentially help anyone with technical issues.

6. Useful Resources

- [Blended and Online Teaching at Brookes](#)
- [The Digitally Enabled Teaching Toolkit](#)
- [Zoom and Panopto at Brookes](#)
- [12 Ways to Embed Interactivity in Zoom](#)
- [How to Combat Zoom Fatigue](#)

References, resources and further reading

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