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## Pro Tip#8: Discussion and Group Work in Virtual Space

### Advice from your colleagues and some experts

During CTL Coffee Hours, some of our colleagues mentioned that students are quieter in virtual classrooms than in face-to-face classes. So, I'm back again with another guide to transitioning to virtual instruction!

#### **First some generalizations:**

1. Whenever possible, provide opportunities for students to “participate” asynchronously.  
Why? Some of your students are now in other time zones. Others may not have a quiet place to work, or are caring for family members. Others may find video conferencing uncomfortable. And we are all stressed and busy and baffled.
2. Teaching virtually requires structure, flexibility, accountability and transparency.
  - a. Structure: Try to make classes predictable, so your students know when to listen and when to discuss.
  - b. Flexibility: Try to make room for students' busy, stressed lives.
  - c. Accountability: If you want students to participate, require (and grade) participation. But create a variety of ways for them to participate.
  - d. Transparency: Going virtual requires changing your course and your syllabus. Just tell your students what you are changing and why.
3. Manage your own workload so you don't burn out. Your lectures don't need to be perfect, and you don't need to respond to every email right away.

#### **Step 1: Identify your goals**

Start by reviewing your goals for your course and how you use student participation in your face-to-face class. This will help you pick a good mix of real-time and asynchronous participation.

- A. Are you asking students questions to check their comprehension of in class material?
- B. Are you asking them to apply what they are learning to a case study, problem set, or past content?
- C. Are you checking if they're keeping up with reading or other homework?
- D. Are you trying to vary your instructional methods?

#### **Step 2: What kinds of participation must take place during Zoom class sessions**

If you are lecturing, you'll want students to ask questions when they don't understand something. But other types of participation lend themselves to other solutions.

- A. Try using Blackboard Discussion Board to collect questions about lecture, or to prompt students to relate homework to lecture. During lecture, have students submit questions to Chat; take breaks during lecture to read and respond to the Chat, or ask students to answer each others' questions on Chat.
- B. Use Zoom breakout sessions for small-group discussions applying lecture and homework. Asynchronous small group discussion can take in a drop-in Zoom room, or a Blackboard discussion board.
- C. Use the Zoom poll, and a yes/no functions for quizzes, or set up short Blackboard quizzes to nudge students to keep up with homework.
- D. Vary instructional methods with break-out rooms; short, ungraded writing assignments; or videos from other sources.

For help with Blackboard, see <https://its.sdsu.edu/docs/SDSU-Blackboard-Quickstart-Guide.pdf> .

For help with Zoom, see [Guide to Educating Through Zoom](#) and [Tips for Teachers Educating on Zoom](#)

**Implement: Set the stage and explain your expectations**

1. Going virtual is like starting the semester afresh. So, if you haven't already, take a class session to explain how your virtual classroom will work.
  - o How will each class be structured each day?
  - o How do you want students to participate -- by chat or by talking?
  - o Do you want them to have video and microphone on or off?
  - o What alternative, asynchronous participation are you offering? For whom?
  - o Where should students send questions, and when will you respond?
  - o When and how will you send regular communications (reviews, updates, assignments)?
2. Set up your Blackboard Discussion Boards, mess about with Zoom's polling and break out rooms, and give them a try.

Remember, this is new to almost all of us. It's okay to experiment. It's okay to change your syllabus. And it's okay if you and your students take a while to get into the new groove.