Sparking Joy & Engagement in Virtual Education

SETTING UP A VIRTUAL CLASSROOM IN ZOOM

Fall 2020

Thank you for joining our educator workshop!

This document will provide you with some of the best tools and practices to help anchor your virtual teaching. The goal is to set you up for success and to make you feel like you've mastered all the basics and intermediate skills when it comes to teaching in front of a computer. So… let's dig in!

Setting Up Virtual Spaces for Teaching

The best classrooms are those without distraction. That leaves you - and the others in the virtual space with you - to be the rightful focus. Therefore, it's essential to create a digital environment that allows for minimal distractions and maximum fun as much as possible.

This 12-page document will help you navigate how to best set up your virtual classroom for maximum efficiency and maximum fun!

Table of Contents:

The 15-Minute Rule

In general, it takes about 10-15 minutes to have attendees set up their location, gear, and environment. Because of that, during the first 2-3 classes, I ask attendees to show up 15min early so we can go over the basics:

➔ Making sure light is in front of them, not directly behind them
➔ Having their face appear in the center of their screens
➔ Making sure that they're in a quiet space with no pets or other distractions
➔ Making sure they rename themselves properly
➔ Ensure everyone knows where the "mute" and "stop video" buttons are located
➔ Having folks set their video settings just as you've done

Build this time into your lesson plan or setup process. If you can't get folks to arrive early, then set aside the time at the top of your first class. Assume that your students, participants, or attendees don't have the same equipment and technical knowledge that you do. Part of your job will be to help teach them how to arrive for the virtual environment that you've set up for them!

Computers vs. Tablets vs. Smartphones: A Clear Winner

Whenever possible, insist that students join your Zoom meetings using a laptop or desktop computer. Zoom works best on those devices, followed by tablets, followed a distant third by smartphones. Laptops and desktops generally have the best built-in sound and - even better - Zoom's "Gallery View" allows you to see all participants on those devices. On a tablet and smartphone, Zoom's software limits the Gallery View to a maximum of 4-9 participants.

#Sad

Naming & Ordering: Help Yourself & Others

When you're teaching in person, there are multiple ways that students can be subdivided, so they know where they stand in relation to other students. In the virtual space, there are fewer options. Therefore, I impose a numbering system to remove the guesswork. It looks like this:

As students join, I ask them to change their names and to add a number to the FRONT of their names. Then, if we run any games or exercises in numerical order, everyone can see what that order is, even in the virtual classroom. Placing the number first makes it easier to identify who is who.

Another option? Zoom allows you to order everyone's video screens on your display and then - taa-DAHHH!! - force all attendees to use YOUR screen order. If you use this approach - and it's pretty solid! - make sure that you ask all attendees to ONLY view their Zoom screen in GRID mode.

As the host, you can change other peoples' names, but it's best to teach your students how to do this for themselves. The quickest way is described here.
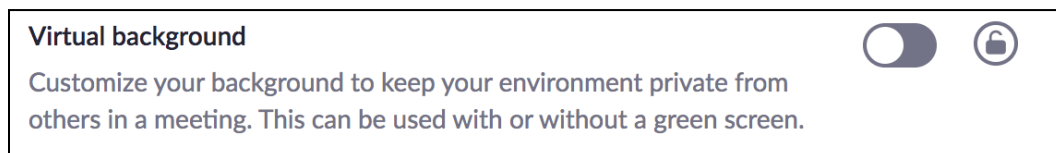
Virtual Backgrounds: For Special Occasions Only

Students in general and kids in particular love to show off their skills and creativity when they log into a digital or virtual environment. But flashy or moving virtual backgrounds pulls focus and makes it hard for others to focus. I do allow this function on days when my curriculum specifically takes advantage of it: say, on Halloween.

At all other times, this functionality is off. To turn this function off for your students or participants, click here, and scroll all the way down to the section labeled "**In Meeting (Advanced)**". That's where you'll find the setting switch for Virtual Backgrounds is listed. When it's off, it should look like this:

Virtual background

Customize your background to keep your environment private from others in a meeting. This can be used with or without a green screen.

Worth noting: *you cannot change the virtual background settings DURING a Zoom meeting. It has to be done prior to or after any meeting that you're hosting.*

Chatting in Zoom: An Optional Tool That's Up to YOU

Zoom has a built-in chat feature. This function allows for some great exercises and lesson plans. It also allows me to communicate with my students privately if I ever need to say something to them that I'd rather the others not hear.

I teach some groups of kids where I allow everyone to use Zoom's built-in chat functionality. I have others where I don't. It depends on the group and if they're able to remain focused while that function is enabled for them. What's important is learning how to change your chat settings quickly. Zoom has a great page on how to learn that right here and it's worth a read.

In short, if you open your chat, you'll see a button with thee small dots (on a Mac) or a button that says "More" (on a PC). Clicking on that button brings up a contextual menu for you to pick from three different, easy choices: "No one" which disables chat, "Host only" which limits chat between the Host (that's you!) and students, and "Everyone publicly" which allows anyone to chat with anyone else.
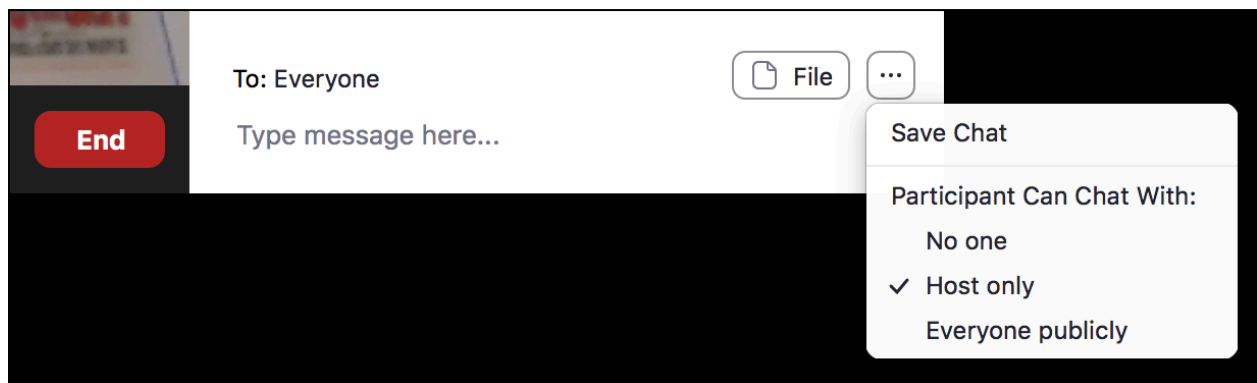
I've had great classes with open chat. I've also had to lock down chat in other classes where students were using it to talk with one another while I was teaching, pulling focus.

Sharing What's On Your Screen: So Many Options

The teachers and facilitators I know that use Zoom like the screen sharing capabilities because it allows them to put their lesson plan or game front and center. That's great, but they're forgetting that you can share far more than just your screen! Zoom allows you to share all of the following:

★ An application: like Safari, Chrome, or Microsoft Powerpoint
★ Audio files
★ Video files
★ An interactive Whiteboard for collaboration
★ Any connected iPhone/iPad

Why is this important? Because it allows for dance parties, that's why!! No, I'm serious: why not find some funky music on YouTube and then share that music with your participants? You can literally broadcast any music you like over the internet to everyone in your Zoom room. I like having quick dance parties with my students to shake some energy into them (and me)!

Basic Screen Sharing

Click the green Screen Share button from within any Zoom meeting. It looks like this and it's easy to find because it's the only green button in your window:
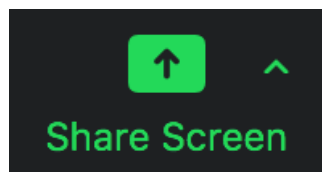
That brings up another window (shown below) that opens a world of opportunities. What most people don't notice is that this window has three tabs at the top: Basic, Advanced, & Files. Moving the slider to each of those tabs opens up even MORE opportunities for educators and facilitators.

Each tab presents you with large, graphical buttons which - when pressed - allow you to share something from your computer in a variety of creative and inspiring ways. Let's take a deeper look at each of those tabs.

The "Basic" tab:
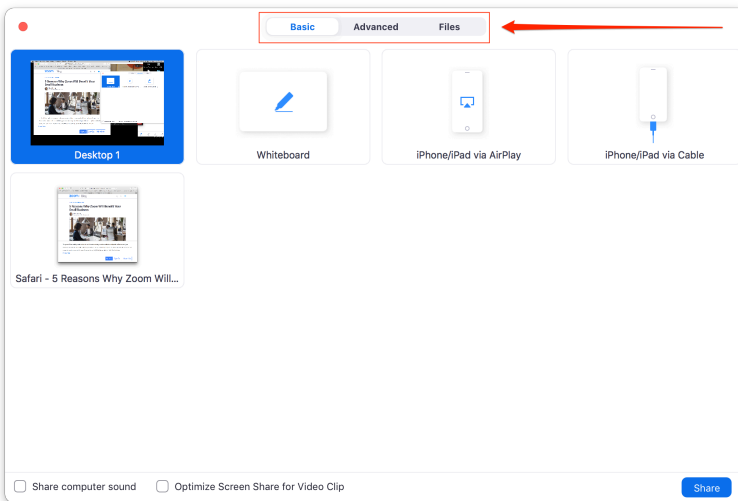
From the Basic tab, you can share your entire desktop, an interactive Whiteboard, an iPhone/iPad or a specific application like Safari. Use this tab for most kinds of sharing/presenting. But not all kinds, because…

The "Advanced" tab:

From the Advanced tab, you can share either a small portion of your screen, music or sound, or a second camera. I use this tab all the time to share music and have a dance party! Sound, by the way, can be ANY sound you like: songs played from YouTube, iTunes or any other mp3 player, etc.
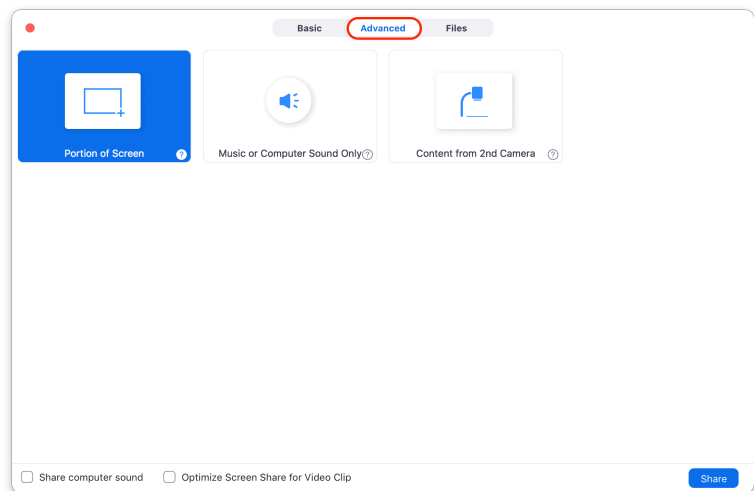
The "Files" tab:

From the Files tab, you can share files from your computer (it's actually from your cloud storage provider, but let's not split hairs) with everyone else. Is there a specific document, spreadsheet, keynote presentation or image that you'd like to share with everyone? No problem! Zoom connects to Dropbox, OnDrive, Google Drive and Box to help make those transfers easy.
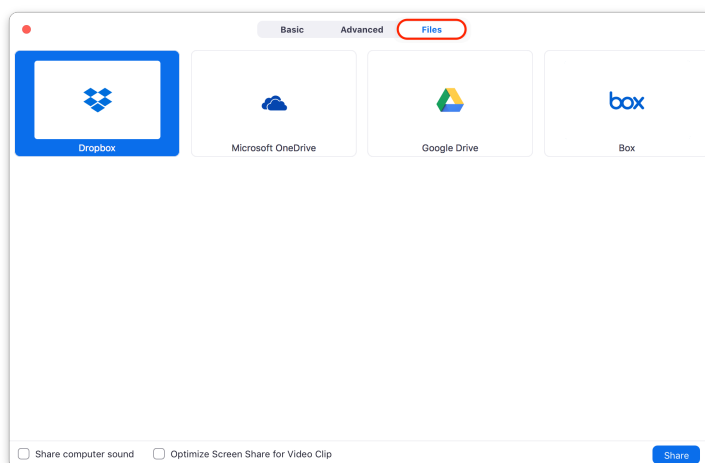
I've never had a need for this particular functionality but perhaps you will. Perhaps you'd like all of your students to fill out a particular form. If so, then this Zoom feature might be the

perfect way to distribute that form to everyone live so that all of your students can open them together.

Worth Noting

By default, sharing is limited so that only the host can share. That's a good thing! However, if your lesson plan calls for students to present, you may wish to grant them that ability, even if temporarily. If so, click the small arrow NEXT to the "Share Screen" button (as shown below) and then on Advanced Sharing Options. Set the preferences to suit your needs. Just remember: put the settings back to only the Host being able to share later.

Think of it like your car: take it out of park when you're ready to drive; put it back in park when you're finished driving.

:)

Breakout Rooms: Let's Talk... Separately!

There are times when it's best to break your larger groups into smaller teams or units to work together, discuss something, or create. This is where Zoom's unique (and highly coveted) Breakout Rooms feature really shines.

Some of you may never need to use breakout rooms. I rarely do, myself. Others may rely on it regularly. You should know the basics of how it operates, regardless. So let's take a deeper look. If you get lost, Zoom has a FABULOUS page on this topic [here](#).

In essence, there are really only two breakout room modes: automatic and assigned.

Automatic Mode: The Easiest Way to Fly

In Automatic mode, you simply tell Zoom how many rooms you need and how many people you'd like in each room. Zoom computes the number of rooms and all you need to do is click the blue "Create Breakout Rooms" button. Zoom will pre-populate your rooms with a pre-defined number of participants.
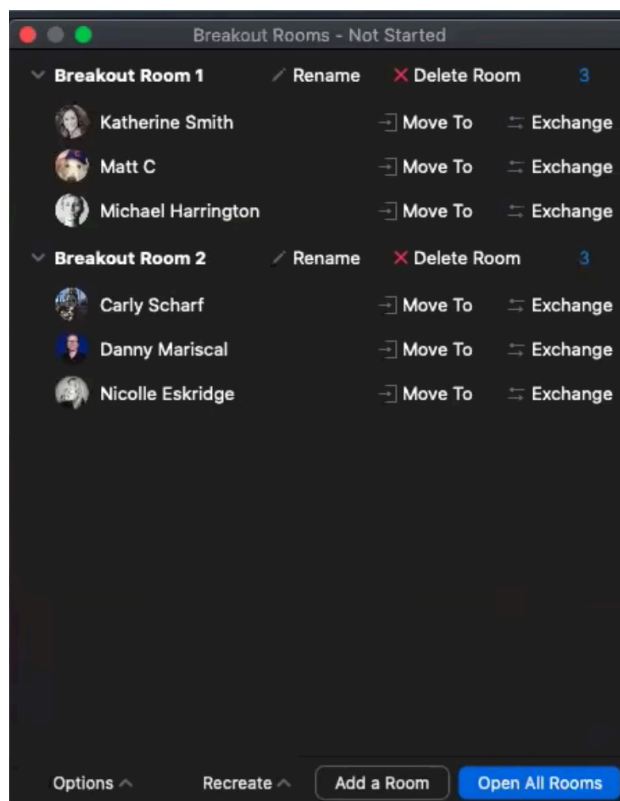
After checking that each of your breakout rooms look correct, simply click the "Open All Rooms" button in blue at the bottom right of the window. When you do, everyone will be sent to the breakout rooms you've created. The process takes about 10-15 seconds and you'll see everyone's video screens start to disappear from the main room as they are shuttled away into their respective breakout rooms.

Worth Noting: if your breakout rooms are NOT to your liking, feel free to move individual participants to a different room using the "Exchange" or "Move To" buttons. That way you can separate or pair people who require it!

As the host, you now have three options (and buttons!) as to what happens next:

1. Join one (or more) of the breakout rooms and join the various smaller conversations.
2. Broadcast a message to all of the rooms.
3. Close the rooms and end all breakouts.

The picture to the right shows each of those options and, to help identify them, I've color coded them.

Joining a breakout room (in the orange box) allows you to leave your main virtual room and enter one of your smaller breakout rooms. As Host, you can jump from room to room, which is useful if you need to observe, participate, or offer assistance to your participants.

Broadcasting a message to everyone (in the breen box) allows you to type a text message which will appear on everyone's screen. It's just like a text message, but for your Zoom environment. It's text only: no graphics, sounds, or video.

Closing all rooms (in the red box) shuts down all breakout rooms and AUTOMATICALLY returns participants to the main Zoom room after 60 seconds. Neat!

Best Practices for Breakout Rooms:

As with any tool, both how you set it up and how you use it matters. With that in mind, here are some general guidelines to remember:

- Tell participants in advance that you're sending them to breakout rooms.
- Give them an amount of time that they'll be there and what they're to do.
- Remind them that they'll get on-screen messages from you with updates.
- Inform them that you'll be dropping in to assist/watch.
- Broadcast a message when 50% and 25% of the time is left. Broadcast a final message when there are 2min left.
- When one minute is left, click the "Close All Rooms" button.
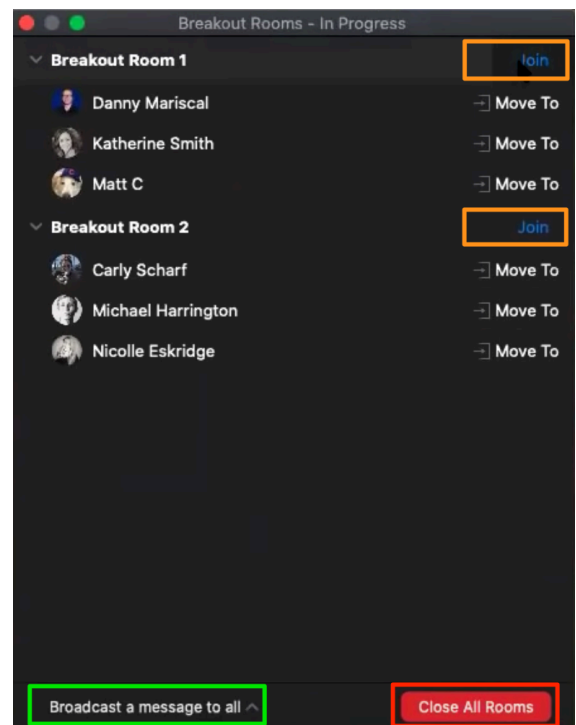
Remember the Power of Play and Experimentation

The last piece of advice I'll give you is this: trust yourself. And trust in play.

As you get better at using your technology, I encourage you to find ways to play with it. Do the unexpected. Save 15-30min each week to experiment with one of your classes and try something new. Intentionally break the rules. For example:

- Run a section of class where all cameras are off and participants HAVE to rely on sound, only.
- Turn cameras on and mute everyone and ask them to solve a problem with no audio whatsoever.
- Have everyone rename themselves the same name or symbol, say "?". Then ask for all cameras to be turned off. Ask a series of questions in the chatroom. As participants type in their answers, they'll be anonymous. Use that to your advantage.

There is no magic book for you to read, no magic master of classroom work. It's on you and you've got this. Never underestimate the power of experimenting and play to unearth new and best practices. It's how I developed some of my finest games and exercises. Which reminds me…