Tips for Success:
Synchronous Online Class Sessions using zoom

Hosts/Presenters

Before the Session

*Be Familiar with Zoom and Computer Where You’re Presenting*

The Zoom meeting is similar to a webinar, allowing faculty to interact synchronously with students in online courses.

*It is essential that the online faculty team be familiar with managing a meeting in Zoom* before hosting their first session. There are several resources available, including JHU’s faculty support site and Zoom’s support page, to help you get to this point.

*JHU also offers Zoom Training several times throughout the year.* This training is recommended for anyone new to Zoom or who wants to know more about managing a meeting. A link to register for training appears under the JHU Faculty & Staff Zoom Help Site.

*Communicate the Objective of the Session to Students*

Know the purpose of your synchronous session and **share its objective with the students and any guest presenters**. The purpose of the session can set the tone your meeting. It may be helpful to develop an outline, or agenda, of the session to guide you. This outline could transform into slides you might share during the session.

*Generate Interest/Engage the Students Before the Session*

Questions and topics of interest can be posted to a Discussion Forum prior to the Meeting. While it’s OK to leave a Discussion Forum Category or Topic open and ready for students to post on their own, consider this alternative: as a first post, faculty can **write the objective(s) of the synchronous session and prompt students to ask questions, mention related topics they want to see addressed, or link to relevant current events**. These questions and topics can alternately be emailed to the faculty team. You may want to impose a deadline, leaving yourself enough time to review the shared interests.

*Another idea is to have students prepare for the session by assigning preparatory work*, such as reading a relevant journal article, reviewing a lecture, watching a video external to the course site, or being familiar with a current item or trend in the news.

*Be Ready to Personalize the Session for your Current Students*

If you are having an introductory meeting, **take the time to learn about your students before the live class**. If they’ve introduced themselves online (e.g., in a VoiceThread or Discussion Forum), have a general idea of the professions, organizations, and/or interests they represent. In most cases it is **not** appropriate to single out a student for their perspective representing an entire group, however it is usually fine to ask an opinion or experience of something in more general terms, e.g. “for anyone who’s been involved in serving Baltimore’s youth” or “for those who have completed residencies”, etc. This personal familiarity can be advantageous and appropriate later in a term as well.
If you are assigning preparatory work, make certain to purposefully tie it to the synchronous class session. The students need to know that their preparation was worth the time; i.e., that they prepared for a reason.

Communicate your Expectations of the Students
Encourage students to join the meeting synchronously but remind them, if you select the option, that a recording will be available (hopefully, linked through a course site) with a transcript within a day. Communicate whether students should let you know in advance if they can’t attend the live session.

If students are expected to use their microphones, encourage the students log into the Zoom meeting at least 15 minutes early so they can run the Audio Test inside Zoom and get their microphones checked. (With Zoom, participants are encouraged also to share their video. Students can check their video settings also.) If you have student presentations during the synchronous class, please require that each student presenter practice using their microphone – including muting their microphone – before the session. Ideally, the student presenters will be able to practice with someone from the faculty team or each other. They can also practice using Zoom controls by connecting to http://zoom.us/test.

If students are expected to engage in written dialogue during the meeting, encourage them to use the Zoon Chat window (during). After the synchronous class they can continue the discussion in a Discussion Forum or other asynchronous platform. If you want students to use their microphones to participate in oral dialogue, depending on the class size you may want to encourage them to raise their hand (in a larger class) or simply go ahead and allow microphone privileges for all participants (in a class with fewer than 20). Please remain culturally responsive and understand that not all students are comfortable or willing to speak during a session.

A Note on Slides
PowerPoint files that are properly formatted (i.e., universally accessible) usually have very few issues when they are displayed on different computers. This could be important if you’re not presenting from your own computer. Try to avoid PowerPoint with macros or other add-ins to keep away from unexpected mishaps. PDF files are also an option, though they may require a bit of adjustment (for example, selecting the appropriate magnification/zoom level) when displayed during the Zoom meeting).

Type up any Polls that you want to Use During the Zoom Meeting
While you can add Polls right before or during the session, it is a good idea to have them typed up in a Word or other document. It will be easier to copy and paste the questions and students’ possible choices as opposed to typing them up by hand in the meeting’s setup on the Zoom website, taking up precious time and possibly having typographical and grammatical errors.

Instruct Remote Faculty/Guest Presenters how to Access the Session
Remote faculty and guest presenters should have a Zoom account and have downloaded Zoom on the computer they’ll be using. In addition, they should check for Zoom updates, test their audio (USB headsets are highly recommended), and check their video settings. Make sure the remote faculty or guest has the direct Zoom meeting URL in advance of the class session. The meeting host can promote the remote guest to co-host.

During the Session
If Feasible, Have Someone from the Faculty Team on a Personal Laptop Who is not Presenting
If a TA or second faculty member is available, from their personal laptop they should log into the meeting and be promoted to co-host. They can monitor the student (participants’) chat and, if necessary, visit any Breakout Rooms, grant Microphone Rights, upload files to distribute through the Zoom chat feature, etc.
Engage Students During the Session

Be familiar with and call upon your students’ own expertise. This is possible only if you get to know their personal interests and anecdotes prior to the Zoom meeting. Prompt the students so their experiences outside of class add to the session’s discussion. This personalizes their learning, making the topic relatable and it increases the chance that your objectives are met.

During your conversation and presentation, draw upon any recent assignments including preparation activities (readings, lecture reviews, etc.). This can also include a formal or informal formative assessment of their knowledge in the course to this point. Direct the meeting’s conversation so your objective is met.

Consider the session in conjunction with the other student activities. Students should see a clear rationale for both attending the session and doing any work that is intended to support it.

Switch between your Gallery and Active Speaker video layout of Zoom, according to how your class session is proceeding to get a sense of how students – who control their own views – might be experiencing the meeting. Remember that sharing video is an important opportunity for building community!

If there is a second faculty team member monitoring the Chat pod, and the chat is largely silent or inactive, consider typing directly into the Chat some key points that are stated by the presenter separate from the text on any slide that is being displayed. It’s important to keep on topic, especially with a limited window of time. You want to keep or draw back the attention of any of the participants that may have strayed away from the session by reiterating important points. It is OK to type in a prompt such as, “Are there any questions before we proceed?” even if this has just been asked by the presenter.

If students have already been told they will be allowed to use their microphones and the have checked their audio ahead of the meeting’s start, in larger classes encourage students to Raise their Hands so they can be called upon to use their microphones. Make sure students mute their microphone when they are not contributing to the discussion. (Remember that as host, you have the option of muting or disabling the participant’s microphone.)

Make certain the presenter addresses aloud questions and points that are typed by students in the Chat. It may not be possible to address everything; in this case, consider prioritizing or searching for common themes. If the chat is quite active and there is a second faculty team member monitoring it, these questions & points or themes can be found later by downloading the Chat text file which will be automatically saved for the main Zoom meeting room.

Make certain to build in time to address questions or common themes students had stated (ahead of the meeting) that they want to see addressed in the synchronous class. These questions or themes should have been shared via email or in a Discussion Forum post and reviewed by faculty ahead of the session. Oftentimes, these are addressed in the natural course of the conversation. But it is helpful to leave a few minutes to review these at the end of the meeting. If there is not enough time, remember the conversation can continue asynchronously online.

Manage the Meeting using the Built-in Tools

Familiarize yourself with the basics of Hosting (managing) the Meeting inside Zoom well in advance of your scheduled meeting. Consider using Polls, Breakout Rooms, the Zoom Whiteboard, and more to meet the objectives of your Class session.
Remember that you are Being Recorded (if Selected)
If you choose to record your session, your microphone may be very sensitive. Please take this into consideration and avoid any inappropriate or unnecessary conversation while you are in the meeting. If a student is asking a question that deserves a private answer, consider waiting until after the synchronous class or sending a private chat response.

Students/Remote Participants

Before the Synchronous Class

Check for any Pre-Session Instructions or Other Communications
Often there is a Discussion Forum category devoted to the Zoom meeting where students can post questions or share relevant topics or current events related to the class session. If there isn’t a Discussion Forum category, but you want to suggest a topic or ask a question to be addressed during the session, email the faculty team.

There may be an assigned reading or suggestion for lecture review in advance of the session. Make sure to set aside the time to complete this preparation before the scheduled session.

Check Zoom Installation, Audio, and Video Sources on the Device that will be Used
If you’ve never used Zoom before, make sure to create a Zoom account prior to the session. Download the software (computer) or app (mobile device) and check for updates.

Make sure your connection speed is fast enough by joining the Zoom test meeting. Take the time to do this quick connection test on the computer or mobile device that will be used during the synchronous class!

In addition, make sure your audio headset is working properly. If you are asked to participate with a microphone, a USB-connected headset which is connected to your computer before you join the Zoom meeting works best. (External speakers often lead to a frustrating echo.) To make sure your audio is set up correctly inside Zoom, after you’ve logged into the session, please test your Audio.

Check your video inside Zoom. This check can include making sure your camera is capturing your face in a good light and at a good angle. (Avoid sitting in a dim room in front of a window letting in a lot of light! And don’t hesitate to prop up your laptop so you aren’t looking “down” at the camera.)

During the Class Session

Arrive on Time
Sign into Zoom first and then connect to the Zoom meeting at least 10 minutes prior the scheduled start time. This helps everyone move through the session cohesively and steadily.

If you are presenting, arrive to the meeting at least 10 minutes prior to the start time to test your microphone and video.

Avoid Side Conversations
Side conversations – Chat or otherwise – can be very distracting so they should be conducted via private messages. However, it is fine for participants to converse a little before the session gets formally underway, or when the session ends.
Observe Key Rules of Netiquette
Everyone should be courteous, respect other people’s time, present his or her best side, share expert knowledge, and think first to share well-framed questions and comments.

Avoid Opening a Separate Screen, Video, or VOIP (voice) Sharing Application
While you are logged into Zoom during the Session, there is a heavy demand on your computer’s resources and your Internet bandwidth. In addition, the audio configuration of most computers is such that speakers and microphones (i.e., headsets) like to only be associated with one application at a time. Opening a separate audio or streaming application (such as Google Hangouts) will likely have a detrimental impact on the class session and should be avoided. If you will be sharing your screen, close “background apps” that have pop-up or banner notifications. This includes apps such as Slack, WhatsApp, MS Teams, Facebook, etc.

If you are Granted Microphone Rights, Turn on Microphone to Speak and Mute when Done
Prior to the synchronous meeting, you should have run the Audio and Video checks. If you are granted microphone privileges, you still may have to turn ON your microphone. When you aren’t speaking, mute your microphone (clicking on the microphone icon on the toolbar again) to reduce feedback and extraneous noise.

You’re Encouraged to Use your Video
If you are comfortable sharing your video and are in a place free of distractions, check your video to make sure the other attendees can clearly see your face. Avoid sitting in a dim room in front of a window letting in a lot of light; don’t hesitate to prop up your laptop so you aren’t looking “down” at the camera. And while you’re encouraged to use your video, please stop your video if you are doing other tasks, such as looking at your phone or eating. Even if you’re only viewing the “Active Speaker”, others may be viewing the Gallery View of all participants depending on their selected video layout.

Switch between your Gallery and Active Speaker video layout of Zoom, according to how the class is proceeding to get a sense of how others – everyone controls their own view – might be experiencing the session. Remember that sharing video is an important opportunity for building community!