Tips for Conducting Effective Web Conferencing Sessions

There are many things you can do to deliver high-quality, highly-effective web conferencing sessions. The following pages provide suggestions that you can use as you begin to deliver sessions in this environment. Remember that anything that you regularly do in a traditional meeting or classroom can be done in the web conferencing collaboration environment.

As you become experienced using web conferencing and handling participants, you will develop your own style of leading a session. For more information on Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing features, please refer to the Moderator’s Guide located in the On-Demand Learning Center.

Preparing the Content
Before you sit down to deliver a web conferencing session, you need to think about the content you want to deliver as well as how you plan to deliver it.

• Design content and create presentations to include interactivity and variety to engage all types of learners (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.). Make sure you provide opportunities for participants to interact and collaborate with each other as well as with the material.

• Make sure the content you create is easy to see. Keep background templates simple so that they don’t distract from the content you want to share. It’s usually a good idea to avoid gradient colors in the background.

• Use a font type and size that is easy to read. Typically, fonts should be no smaller than a 12 point standard font such as Arial, Verdana or Times New Roman.

• Use visuals whenever possible especially for complex processes or procedures.

• Avoid slide after slide of bulleted lists. Transform bulleted lists into graphical representations, lists of questions, polls, quizzes or even games.

• Identify which multimedia files you wish to include in your session.

• Create quizzes or surveys to use during your session.

• Create customized Clip Art collections in order to load images easily during the session.

Preparing for Your Session
If you have never taught an online synchronous session before, you should take some time to familiarize yourself with the features and functionality of the product and allow yourself to get comfortable with a new method for presentation delivery.

• Practice before leading your first session! You should be comfortable with the content you are delivering as well as with the web conference session tools. Invite friends and co-workers to your practice sessions to make the sessions more realistic. Practice using the tools you intend to use during the session.
• Practice with two computers – one with you as the moderator and another logged in as a participant. As you work with your presentation, look at the participant computer to see what they are seeing.

• Don’t try to use all the tools in your first session. Get comfortable with the basic web conferencing tools and add more advanced tools over time.

• Record your practice sessions and review your work.

• Set your user profile to be shared with others in the session.

• Plan to deliver your session with a co-moderator. This person can assist you in the presentation, respond to text messages, and conduct sound checks with participants. Make sure you work with the co-moderator to identify who will perform which activities.

• Identify a delivery space that is comfortable and quiet with no distractions. There should be a telephone available (with the ringer muted).

Preparing Your Participants
• Encourage users to pre-configure their computer prior to their first session by visiting the “First Time Users” section on the Blackboard Collaborate Technical Support website. This will ensure that users have the required software and have tested their audio.

• Optionally have a check-in session for new participants. This check in session, held prior to the participant's first online session, ensures that the participant is ready from a technical standpoint. Set up a time, for example an hour or two, when new participants can call in and someone walks them through accessing the session, checking their audio, and the basics of the interface. In this way, new participants will attend your first session prepared to engage, rather than apprehensive over the new technology.

• Send out an email laying out exactly what you expect of your participants. For example, this might include the pre-configuration information, the time of check in sessions, the installation of any plug-ins required by your content, etc. It should also include the exact time the session is scheduled to begin, how to access the session, and any pre-work that needs to be done.

Before the Session Begins
• Join the session 10 – 15 minutes before the session is scheduled to begin.
• Ensure that you set your **Connection Speed** is set correctly.
• Use the **Audio Setup Wizard** to ensure your microphone and speakers are working properly.
• Open web pages and applications needed for application sharing. Load multimedia files. Close all non-essential applications.
• In a text document or in the Notes tool, prepare a list of web sites you will use during the session.
• Load your content i.e. PowerPoint, whiteboard, Plan files, quizzes etc.
• Navigate to the first slide in your presentation and ensure that **Follow** is checked.
• If desired, set the “Raise Hand Upon Entering” option to be notified when new participants join the session.
• If working with a co-moderator, give them moderator privileges when they join the room.
• Set the number of people (up to six) who can speak simultaneously; the default is one.
• If desired, protect the whiteboard content in order to prevent attendees from saving and printing the whiteboard pages.
• Create breakout rooms and load content if required.

As the Session Begins
• You will see participants' names appear in the Participants panel when they join the session.
• Greet participants as they join the session. Have them speak to you as well so that you can check their audio.
• Remind participants to use the Audio Setup Wizard to test their microphone and speakers.
• Verify that participants set their Connection Speed when they first join the session. They can check their settings by selecting Preferences > Connection.
• Remove or assign privileges to participants as appropriate.
• Remind participants to click the “Step Away” button if they are temporarily away from their computer.
• If there are participants new to web conferencing, give them a brief overview of the interface including how to raise their hand and how to send a Chat.

During the Session
• Speak clearly and don’t rush.
•Animate your delivery. You must use your voice to project energy and enthusiasm into your delivery.
• Visualize your participants. Consider using video for introductions or encourage them to setup their User Profile and include a picture.
• Look at the whole screen, not just the whiteboard area. For example, watch the Chat panel for text messages and the Participants window for new participants joining the session.
• Watch the activity and session indicators in the Participants panel to know if participants are encountering any delays in receiving data such as audio or the whiteboard content. Adjust the pace of your session accordingly.
• Encourage participants to raise their hands when they have a question or comment.
• Ask questions and provide opportunity for interaction. Provide specific instructions on how participants should respond: use the polling responses or by raising their hand.
• Poll the participants at various intervals to obtain feedback. View the polling summary as needed. Consider sharing the results when appropriate. Clear responses after each poll.

• Use the whiteboard tools to assist you in your delivery. For example, use the Highlighter to call attention to specific regions on the screen. Try to provide some mark up for each screen.

• Include features such as Application Sharing, Web Tour, Breakout Rooms, Multimedia, or Quizzes to assist you in delivering your content and making the sessions more engaging and interactive.

• Remind participants that, when in a breakout room, they can raise their hand to notify you that they have a question or send you a private text message even if you are not in the room.

At the End of the Session
• Thank participants for their attendance.

• If desired save or print the whiteboard pages.

• Save chat if desired.

• Stand by for further questions until all participants have left the session.

• Make notes of any changes you might want to make in future deliveries.