Tip sheet – Engaging students in a synchronous session

Synchronous tools enable real-time (same time, same place) communication and collaboration. Two synchronous tools available in FLO are the Chat activity and Collaborate web conferencing platform.

- Chat enables participants to have text-based (only) discussions in a chat interface. It is only synchronous if all participants are online and in the tool at the same time.
- Collaborate enables participants to chat (text-based), screen share, share audio/video, poll, use a virtual whiteboard, and break into groups in real time. It creates a virtual face-to-face experience.

You can schedule sessions with a particular date/time with both tools to facilitate synchronicity.

Collaborate is the richer online experience for students, allowing you to incorporate interaction and engagement into sessions in a variety of ways (whilst also modelling good online behaviour). It is a recommended tool in the FLO ecosystem.

Tools for engagement in Collaborate

Enable students to play an interactive role in sessions, when appropriate, using one or more of these engagement tools.

Feedback

Under 'My Status and Settings' (bottom of screen) is a range of feedback options. If you detach the attendee panel, you will be able to see student reactions at a glance (either prompted or spontaneous).

- Agree/Disagree (**useful for** seeking a quick response to a question)
- Faster/Slower (**useful for** asking students how they are finding the session's pace)
- Happy/Sad (**useful for** beginning/ending a session, and checking in during the session if material is controversial etc)
- Surprised/Confused (**useful for** checking in during the session)

Find out more: Manage attendees (moderators) and Other features (participants) (Collaborate Help)

Raise hand

Encourage students to ask/answer questions using the 'Raise hand' option (bottom of screen). You can see who has their hand raised via the Attendees panel (if open) and Notification Settings.

This feature is **useful for** managing student responses (questions/answers) and ensuring inclusivity.

Find out more: Manage attendees (moderators) and Other features (participants) (Collaborate Help)

Chat

Students can use the Chat (text-based) function to ask/answer questions. It is a good option for students who are reluctant to use audio/video. If you have the Chat panel open during the session, you will be able to monitor comments (the Collaborate pop-up notification is ticked by default). Chat emojis are a quick non-verbal way of seeing how students are going. You could encourage students to reply to chat questions to develop peer support.

This feature is **useful for** checking student status and learning:
- 'How are you today?' / 'Do you feel prepared for this session?'
- 'Have you understood …?'
- 'What is the (short) answer to this question ….?

Find out more: Chat (moderators) and Chat (participants) (Collaborate Help)

File or screen sharing

This function is in the Collaborate panel > Share Content > Primary Content. You can raise a student's status from participant to presenter so they can share a file or screen.

This feature is **useful for** asking students to:

- respond to a question they have prepared in advance (you could randomly select a student or let a student know in advance)
- give a presentation as an individual or on behalf of their group
- share an artefact they have created (eg a formative/summative assessment task).

Find out more: Share content (moderators) and Present in sessions (participants) (Collaborate Help)

Polling

You can set up a poll in the Collaborate panel > Share Content > Secondary Content. There are two question types – Multiple Choice and Yes/No Choices. You can monitor the poll and also share responses with students (anonymously).

This feature is **useful for** asking students to:

- answer a simple/fun question without the pressure of choosing a 'right' answer (eg as a warm-up/ice breaker)
- show they understand a concept/idea/information (or not)
- show where they sit on an issue (if responses are shared then they see an overview)

Find out more: Polls (moderators) and Polls (participants) (Collaborate Help)

Breakout groups

You can allocate students to groups randomly, manually, or allow them to self-allocate. Socratic questions could be used to prompt group discussions and focus their learning. You can share files with breakout groups (they won't be able to see the main screen once in the breakout room). The moderator/s can enter breakout rooms to see how groups are going. Groups can report back in the main room.

This feature is **useful for** discussing a question or doing a task (eg brainstorming, problem solving a scenario).

Find out more: Breakout groups (moderators) and Breakout groups (participants) (Collaborate Help)

Draw on whiteboard and files

This option is ticked by default in Session Settings. If you intend sharing a file in the session, you may want to untick this option (unless you want students to annotate your file while you are presenting it). You can enable it later when appropriate. The capital T (Text) is the easiest option for writing on the whiteboard, but you may want to give students more creative options. Play around with the whiteboard tools yourself to see what they do.

This feature is **useful for** asking students how they are going – 'Have you understood …?' or 'Do you think X or Y?' (eg 'dot voting' where they mark their position against a simple scale).

Find out more: Share content (moderators) and Present in sessions (participants) (Collaborate Help)

Prepare for and run a Collaborate session/s

To maximise student engagement and achieve learning/teaching goals, it helps to have a planned approach. View Collaborate – main entry (FLO Staff Support site) for how to plan, build, test and administer a Collaborate session.

You could either run a session with the whole class/specific group or conduct a secure session for vivas or private meetings with one student.

Run an orientation/troubleshooting session with students

Ideally, run an informal session at the beginning of semester to check technical issues. Prior to the session, refer students to Collaborate help materials (FLO Student Support and Collaborate).

- Alert students to the Course Room and tell them it is always available if they want to test their settings or meet with other students outside of class.
- Ask students to turn on their microphones (audio) and webcams (video) to mimic the physical classroom, at least for the first few minutes. They will need to have a microphone to talk to the group. If they don't have a headset with a microphone (advised), they can use their mobile phone for audio (earbuds are a good alternative). View Software, equipment, teaching spaces and telephone dialling (FLO Staff Support site) for more information.
- Model participative behaviours, such as turning off audio/video whilst others are talking (ground rules).
- Get students to use Collaborate tools for engagement, including breakout rooms if you intend to use these for future sessions ('no-stakes activities').

Before a session

1. Plan your session/s. What do you want to achieve? What structure supports your aims? You could seek student opinion on the overall structure (students as partners) in the orientation/first session. View Collaborate – planning guide (FLO Staff Support site).
2. Share expectations and how the session contributes to the bigger picture (eg part x of a unit of work). For example:
    - This is a virtual 'face-to-face' classroom so they need to participate
    - They will gain … from participating in a session/s (eg practice for assessment, meeting learning outcomes)
    - Their expectations – what they hope to gain by participating
3. Set up a session/s (it could be a weekly series). View Collaborate – building guide (FLO Staff Support site).
4. Prepare yourself and your students for sessions:
    - Follow the technological tips Best practices for best experience (moderators) and participants (Collaborate Help)
    - Prepare files in advance (eg presentation, poll questions) – view Session prep (Collaborate Help)
    - Do students need to prepare for the session (eg watch a video, read an article, complete a quiz, formulate a question/s, present an artefact)? If yes, use FLO communication tools (eg announcement) to let them know in advance. See Tip sheet: structuring your FLO site and setting out a module for online learning for topic/module design considerations

Run a session

View Collaborate - administration guide (FLO Staff Support site).

1. Arrive early ('15 min before start time' is the default) to upload files and check Session Settings (enable/disable features you want to use/not use). Encourage students to also arrive early to check their audio/video so they can participate.

2. [Detach the Attendees panel](#) to keep it open at all times. You will be able to tell who is away, has their microphone on, or is having network connection trouble.
3. Open the session with a warm-up activity:
    *   Have video on so everyone can see each other (turn off once the session gets going to save on bandwidth)
    *   Do a quick social check-in so everyone has the chance to speak (or use chat)
    *   Run an ice-breaker activity (eg get to know each other; answer a question you posed before the session; raise any issues/questions; run a poll)
4. Establish the structure (which could be consistent across all sessions) but be flexible. If confusion or questions arise, you will need to address these so students feel heard and are encouraged to participate now and in future sessions.
5. Moderate the session using tools for engagement (share content, raise hand, chat, polling etc).
6. Close the session. Thank your students for participating. Highlight what needs to be done next and the communication channel/s that will be used prior to the next session. Encourage students to provide feedback on the session, through the [forum](#) or [feedback](#) activities.
7. Note anything that might work better next time or went well this time. You could [share these notes with your teaching team](#).

Resources

Acadly, [10 ways to use polls in the classroom](#)
Acadly, [Using essential questions: starting the lecture with the bigger picture](#)
Faculty Focus, [Synchronous online classes: 10 tips for engaging students](#)