



# E-Learning

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Guidelines for Delivering via the  
Virtual Classroom

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## About this Guide

This resource provides guidelines for teaching staff that intend to deliver webinars or online lectures via a virtual classroom environment. The guidance provided will enable you to plan, prepare and deliver webinars and online lectures effectively. While the guidelines focus on providing practical general advice and are not tool specific they may refer to examples from [Blackboard Collaborate](#) (the virtual classroom tool that is currently available in UCD).

At the core of webinars is that the learning takes place synchronously, in that learners are online at the same time. The virtual classroom environment has the potential to enable student interaction and collaboration in real time. Webinars can be used as a core part of the delivery of a blended/online programmes, to facilitate guest speakers or to support online office hours/meetings with students. The following guidelines provide advice that may be considered by online teaching staff during the planning and delivery stages of webinars and online lectures.

## Guideline 1: Define the Aims & Objectives of the Session

During the planning stage consider how you will structure the session to meet your teaching goals by considering the following:

- How will students interact/collaborate with you and one another?
- Consider icebreaker activities and other interaction tasks for students.
- Will students be given any pre-session reading or activities to consider?
- Content should be structured into timed stages. What content resources will you use to deliver the session?

## Guideline 2: Set-up/Organise the Session

- Set-up a virtual classroom session for your students in the appropriate module in Blackboard and inform them of the access details. There are comprehensive step-by-step instructions available in the [UCD Lecturer Guide to Blackboard Collaborate the Virtual Classroom](#) on how to do this.

## Guideline 3: Setup Equipment and the Virtual Classroom Software

- Set up the equipment that you plan to use to deliver the session. Check that the software works on your computer and that your microphone and camera equipment is compatible with the software. Practice or complete a trial run from the computer you intend to use for the delivery of the session.

## Guideline 4: Prepare your Students

- Communicate to students the necessary information that they need to participate in the virtual classroom, including access instructions i.e. the online location where the session will be held. A useful resource to familiarise yourself with and to share with your students is [UCD Student Guide to Using Blackboard Collaborate the Virtual Classroom](#).

- It may also be useful to arrange an introductory or 'test' session to enable students to familiarise themselves with how the software works prior to formal online sessions commencing.

## **Guideline 5: Contingency Plan for Technical Problems**

In the event that there are technical issues that may prevent you from delivering a planned session it is important to be able to communicate this to students. It may be useful to be able to email or communicate via your blackboard module to all students if some technical issues occur informing students of an alternative session etc. Equally if students experience technical problems and lose connection during a session they should be informed of the procedure to follow.

## **Guideline 6: Enter the Session Early**

It is advisable to enter the virtual classroom 20-30mins in advance of the scheduled start time to do the following:

- Upload required files/pre-prepared presentations and check navigation.
- Set up any links/files you want to share or demo (including web links).
- Test your audio and video (once you have tested them switch them off until the start time)

## **Guideline 7: Delivery Stage: Outline Objectives, Establish Protocols & Participation Requirements**

- Once all students have entered the virtual classroom you should check if they can see/hear you. A useful technique is to ask students to indicate this by using the yes/no poll.
- Start the session on time even if students are still logging in, be clear you are starting the session and explain the objectives of the session and how it will run. It is advisable to establish any rules for participation or protocols. You may issue these or agree them with students in advance of the session. Typically these would include how communication will occur during the session i.e. indicate to students which interaction features of the tool you want them to use e.g. yes/no poll, audio or text chat etc. Let students know how they should indicate if they have a question or comment i.e. should they raise the virtual hand to gain attention and then speak.
- If you are manually recording the session, remember to click the record button at the start.

## **Guideline 8: Maintain Student Participation and Interaction**

- For maximum student interaction design your session using the virtual classroom collaborative features e.g. through polls/quizzes, audio, text chat and breakout rooms (for group work).

- You can maintain participation by asking questions/polls that all students can respond to and by using short, focused, open-ended questions to encourage debate. Encourage quiet participants by asking direct questions and tactfully controlling any students who are dominating or leading the discussion off topic.

## **Guideline 9: Keep the Session on Track**

- It is important to keep the session on track in terms of both time and topic. If the session is in danger of going off schedule, summarise key points that have been made and redirect the session onto the next stage. If a topic is popular suggest that the discussion can be continued at the end of the session (time permitting) or that it can be followed-up in a discussion forum via the blackboard module. Likewise, if students ask questions that require complex or long answers offer to address these questions in an alternative way outside of the session.

## **Guideline 10: Conclude the Session & Follow-up**

- When concluding the session provide a short summary of key points discussed and any conclusions drawn during the session. If there are a lot of unanswered questions suggest that students post their outstanding questions to a discussion forum. If you wish, you can invite your students to continue the discussion beyond the end of the session. However, as the lecturer, it is good practice for you to thank your students for their participation say goodbye and log out of the session at the scheduled end time.
- After you conclude the session you may need to follow up on the session activities by sharing any additional relevant resources or readings. If the session is recorded provide students with instruction on how to access these recordings.

## **References & Further Reading:**

Young, J. 2009. Designing Interactive Webinars [Available Online]

<http://www.facilitate.com/support/facilitator-toolkit/docs/designing-interactive-webinars.pdf>

JISC, 2012, Designing for Participant Engagement with Blackboard Collaborate [Available Online ]

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/collaborateguidance.aspx>