**Tips for Classroom Usage of Zoom**

**(Natural science, math, and technical courses should note asterisks.)**

1. Practice using Zoom several times before using it in class for the first time. For example, ask several friends or family to respond to your Zoom link invitation and focus on the technical aspects. Practice using the major functions: muting and unmuting, sharing the screen, and the chat bar. (If you are adventuresome, the break out function [if it is set up] works well in Zoom.)
2. In some cases when a course is primarily asynchronous, the use of Zoom may be episodic and targeted, e.g., the first class, a class to debrief the midterm, and the final class. When the class is primarily asynchronous but you have a reserved virtual time, short office hours are often appreciated. For example: Module 1 (mandatory 90 minute Zoom); Module 3 (optional 60 minute Zoom office hour); Module 6 (mandatory 90 minute Zoom), Module 8 (60 minute office hour); module 10 (mandatory 90 Zoom).
3. Make sure that you have a Zoom link from your class (+ tab in upper left corner 🡪tools 🡪Zoom link at the bottom will populate a set Zoom link). Or you may want to request a technician to assist with this.
4. Allow students (and encourage them) to check into the Zoom session 10 minutes early.
5. Encourage students in your announcements or syllabus to use a full-screen device if at all possible, to ensure that the device has a camera and microphone, and to find a place with good bandwidth. Ask students to maintain a video presence (that is, to not turn off the video function which increases alienation and pseudo-presence).
6. Don’t plan to start the content of the *first* class for at least 10 or 15 minutes. Devote that time to technical issues that students may have and a quick review of Zoom participation expectations (see next item).
7. Before you start the first session with regular matters such as introductions, etc., rehearse these technical elements of Zoom usage for students. This is merely an example; adjust the points to your personal preference.
   1. Full-screen device preference for this course. Do not use cell phones unless absolutely necessary because the screen is tiny, the sound is poor, and technical issues are far more likely to occur.
   2. Keep video on, but in larger classes mute when you are not speaking. In small classes (10 or less) muting is only necessary if your personal environment is noisy.[[1]](#endnote-1)
   3. If there is reverberation, someone has two devices on in close proximity.
   4. There is a chat bar. Everyone should say hello in the chat bar.
   5. Sound is very important in Zoom. While the quality of the microphone in a device makes a difference, your distance from the mic makes a much larger difference. You may want to lean into the mic a bit when speaking if you do not have a quality mic.
   6. Visual elements. Please adjust your cameras as close to eye level as possible. Prop up laptops on books. Make sure that you are not in a very dark room (turn on the light), or one in which the light behind you is extremely bright (close the blinds somewhat).
   7. Be aware that you have a choice of speaker view or gallery view; in large classes you need to scroll to see all students.
8. If Zoom sessions are going to be an hour or longer, instructor sound is extremely important because poor quality sound is tiring to listen to. Unless your built-in mic is of high quality, consider an inexpensive external mic, preferably one that can be placed closer to your mouth. Head-gear mics may not look great but they really make listening far more pleasurable. When convenient, Zoom from spaces that do not have a lot of hard surfaces (creates tinny sound). If you are recording from a room with lots of hard surfaces, consider spreading a few blankets around out of camera view.
9. If possible, set up your share screen elements in advance. It is easy to get confused or have navigation issues if you are figuring things out on the fly.
10. Once you introduce yourself and make good contact with the students, studies indicate that seeing you is not particularly important *during the traditional lectures* using PowerPoint. For *discussions*, the opposite is true; seeing the instructor tends to be very important even if the instructor is only facilitating.
11. Think through your attendance policy carefully. If you have an official time set aside, you can mandate attendance. If you do not have an official time set aside, you cannot mandate attendance and must record the session. Understand that voluntary Zoom classes which are made available are convenient for students, but may lead to much reduced attendance and a less vibrant online class effect if interaction is an important part of the class.
12. “Seat time” in online classes does not have to be filled entirely with Zoom. In fact, generally in social science classes a good deal of seat time is allocated, variously, to watching prerecorded instructor lectures, small group discussions in Blackboard, taking rehearsal quizzes, completing (in-class) assignments, etc. The sum of these activities should be 200 minutes per week in a quarter system (150 minutes per week in a semester system). E.g., Zoom 100 minutes, a pre-recorded video (30 minutes), a quiz (allocate 30 minutes), and a small group discussion (40 minutes).[[2]](#endnote-2)
13. Note that it is also possible to pre-record Zoom lectures without students. When you do this, you can normally create a higher quality traditional lecture than normal lecture capture because you do not have distractions. Pre-recording in a program like Camtasia or a studio tend to create the highest quality lectures.

1. In large and very large classes, you may want to mute all students and respond to questions via chat, or selective unmuting. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In science, math, and technical classes, lectures are normally substantially less condensed than social science and humanities classes in a virtual environment. When there is a lot of technical content to master, students tend to want a more instructor-led style. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)