# Zoom Activity Ideas

Looking to build some interactivity into your zoom sessions? We have some ideas, ranging from the simple, but effective, to the more adventurous. These ideas let your students play a more active role and we know this can enhance their learning and increase peer-to-peer engagement.

Let's start with some guiding principles.

- Your course objectives drive everything. What you do in a zoom class should help students achieve these.
- Students don't expect perfect. If something doesn't work, move on.
- Give students time to think, to catch-up with what you're teaching.
- Don't talk at them – instead ask, probe, challenge.
- Have a plan – see Lesson plans for interactive virtual classrooms

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> *I would so like to improve engagement in my VC's. I have found that it is truly exhausting trying to teach to a whole lot of little black squares!*
>
> *Anonymous*

Those "little black squares" are students with their webcams off. It can be hard to build engagement without that visual connection so some of these ideas work well when students have their web cams on.

OK now for some ideas…

**Don't under-estimate the Chat**

Add a question to the chat before students arrive linked to the current week/topic. Think "Before we start, share your most interesting insight/biggest challenge from ….", or something like "If there is one thing you want me to cover again what would it be?".

Then thank everyone for sharing and debrief based on their responses.

**Let them think**

Share a power point slide with an emotive image but no words. Ask them to think about it from some perspective. Give them time to think about it. Then start a sharing whiteboard and invite students to simply add words that reflect their thoughts. Again, debrief afterwards.

**Put them centre-stage**

Students prepare a presentation and deliver this during the session. Make sure they keep it short, around 5 minutes, and encourage the class to ask questions afterwards.

**Break them up**

Break-out rooms – they're a hit! They can resemble the small group discussions typical in classroom tutorials with students often being more active in these smaller groups. Remember to set them a task first, including what you expect after the break-out groups finish.

**Bring a guest**

A guest speaker is possibly easier in a virtual classroom because the world is unlimited. Always wanted your students to hear from that renowned expert in London? Well at least with some good-will around time zone differences. But don't make it like a lecture; instead interview your guest and have students add their own questions to the chat.

**Pop a padlet in**

Students will need to have a split screen for this but it's not too hard. Make a padlet with a task for students to respond to – perhaps post an article, an image or have a debate. This takes place in padlet in real time. The trick here is you are also 'live-streaming' the padlet by sharing it through the zoom. It turns an asynchronous activity (the padlet) into a live bulletin board.

You could do the same with any shared file like google docs or a mind map.

**Scavenger Hunt**

Set students a task to search the web for some information and bring it back to the class. Make it fun and challenging. For example, "*Find evidence of what you think is the greatest engineering feat of all time*" and come back and tell us why. Be prepared to share what you found. Set a time limit, perhaps 10 minutes. Use the whiteboard for students to post their answers then encourage a lively discussion.

**Let them teach**

Each student (or pair of students) chooses one learning outcome and gives a 5 minute talk on what they have learned and why they thought it important to share. Set the task a week before and have them submit a couple of written paragraphs to you before the zoom session. Explain this will ensure everyone's original thoughts are captured before they hear from everyone else.

**End with action**

Create a poll with a list of possible actions you expect students should do between now and the next session, or assessment etc. The options are contextual to your course but could include doing the practice quiz, begin the essay plan, summarise the reading etc.

Ask students to respond with what they think they are most likely to do and then share the results, concluding with some words of advice.

More ideas….

https://learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/video-conferencing-with-zoom-online-course-tips-ideas

We found this table (Finkelstein, 2006) irresistible for its analogy and for its ideas.

| Table 5.1. Being a "Good Host" in Synchronous Sessions. | |
|---|---|
| *Dinner Party Axiom* | *Live Online Learning Guidance* |
| Prepare for your guests' arrival | Have the resources that you plan to use ready in advance so that you can begin on time. When learners arrive, you want to be able to focus on them and on the content and collaboration at hand. |
| Welcome guests warmly | As people login, welcome each person by name if possible. In addition to being a warm way to begin, it sets a tone and reminds learners that you know they are present and that their participation will be expected. |
| Frequently assess the mood in the room; don't wait until the end to ask guests if they need anything | Periodically gauge comprehension and mood by asking quick poll questions, soliciting emoticon use, or cold-calling on learners for feedback. Waiting until the last few minutes leaves lithe opportunity for adjustment. |
| Have more food (for thought) than you need | Prepare more activities than you think are needed for the time allotted. It is better to have a few planned activities left over for next time than to be short of things to do together as a group, thereby causing learners to question why they needed to carve the same hour out of their day. |
| Make everyone feel included | Try to recognize and solicit contributions from as many participants as possible, and refer to comments made by the name of the person who shared them. This is even more important online than offline, where multiple voices can be heard at once and some can be lost in the mix. |
| Facilitate connections and conversation, but don't dominate every discussion | Use your role as facilitator to foster an environment where learners are exchanging ideas with others, and seeing their peers as resources for ongoing learning. If a lecture is needed, consider recording it and posting it to a course site for anytime viewing rather than doing it live. |
| Offer guests something to take home with them | In combination with a transcript or recording of a live online session, post handouts, slides, or the results of group activities as on-demand resources within a course site. These convenient take-aways help reinforce new knowledge constructed or shared during the experience. |
| Know when to say good night; leave everyone wanting more | End on a high point. Don't cram too much into a live session or preside over unnecessarily long goodbyes. If a session peters out, participant attention will diminish quickly and goodwill can suffer. Conclude at a high-energy level to propel learners to do their follow-up work and keep them excited about the next live session. |

Finkelstein, JE 2006, Learning in Real Time: Synchronous Teaching and Learning Online, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, Hoboken. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [26 May 2020]. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unisa/reader.action?ppg=83&docID=469387&tm=1540878658114#ppg=5

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