

Six Steps to Better Breakout Rooms Online Classes

We know breakout rooms are essential for keeping students engaged in online classes - they break up the monotony and give students a chance to apply skills in an interactive way.

But if not designed properly...

Breakouts can turn into "breaks", where students just check out.

Here are some helpful tips when designing your breakout experiences:

1. Demonstrate

Make it easy for students to complete their breakout tasks by showing them exactly what it looks like to complete them. Show them a sample of the handout completed if you can make one. The more confidence you can give your students that they can complete a task, the more likely they will.

Share your screen and show students exactly how to use the tool by sharing a sample of the deliverable. Do this Before they break out.

2. Provide Written Instructions

When students are in their breakout rooms they won't have access to you or your slides, so it will be difficult for them to ask any questions that come up.

To avoid students getting stuck, assume they won't remember everything you demonstrate and provide them with detailed instructions that walk them through the exercise step-by-step.

For example, your assignment sheet should provide detailed step by step instructions like: "Designate a Facilitator"

3. To help eliminate student indecision around who will lead each breakout room, give your students a way to determine who will facilitate the exercise.

For example, in an assignment you can make the student whose birthday is coming up next designated as the facilitator. Bonus: Designating a facilitator implicitly gives that student ownership of, and responsibility for, the group's output. As a result, the facilitator will be motivated to ensure the group completes the exercise.

4. Require a Deliverable

By requiring students to turn in, or be ready to present to the entire class, the work they completed during their breakout session, you'll make clear participation is required.

In written instructions and verbal before break out, clearly explain that students should be prepared to turn in their worksheets:

5. Visit Breakout Rooms

While students are in their breakout rooms, be sure to drop by as many rooms as you can to answer questions. Don't talk, just break in. Or agree to answer one question, and move on. Your presence will also reinforce that the exercise is not optional.

***6. Recap with a "Chat Storm"

When your breakouts are over, recap using a "chat storm" to quickly spark a class-wide discussion.

A "chat storm" is when you:

Ask your students a question.

They type their answer into the chat window, but don't hit enter until you tell them to.

Tell students that on the count of three they should all hit enter at the same time.

You count down: "3, 2, 1, enter".

All of your students' answers instantly fill your chat.

Use this technique to ask students to recap what they are excited to have learned from other people they met in their breakout rooms.

This technique is great because it increases engagement by:

Inviting all students to participate. Chat storms give all students a safe way to share their thoughts. Chatting produces less anxiety than speaking during a video conference and students know that their message will be one of many that suddenly show up in the chat window, giving them a sense of "safety in numbers."

Students reinforce the takeaways for you. It's one thing for you to recap the goal of a breakout. It's another way students can see their peers reinforcing your learning objectives in the chat.

Highlight responses that drive the discussion. With dozens of chat responses to choose from, you can strategically ask individual students to expand on their answers, leveraging your students' voices to drive the discussion.

Summary: The Breakout Checklist

Use these six steps when you're designing your breakout exercises to make the most of them:

Demonstrate how to share and what the deliverable looks like

Provide written instructions

Designate a facilitator

Require a deliverable

Visit the breakout rooms

Recap with a "chat storm"

Adapted from blog By Justin Wilcox

TeachingEntrepreneurship.org

Here is another idea: Play music in your zoom room or collaborate while students work.

<https://www.teachingentrepreneurship.org/>