



TALE Teaching Tip:

F2F Group Work and Discussions in a Pandemic Classroom

Adaptability

Group work and small-class discussions are still not returning to normal so we should adjust our expectations. Yet, it is possible to engage students in discussions and activities if we exercise caution and adapt for the duration. Adapting to the suggestions will depend upon your space and student learning goals. In general, accept that you might need to keep interactions simple, answering questions, general discussions of class materials, and think-pair-share. Some suggestions may strike faculty as childish or not in their job description. Some general tips:

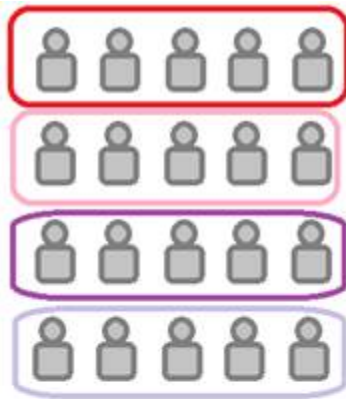
- Masks should be worn.
- Remind students and yourself to project your voice through the masks.
- Keep physical contact to a minimum.
- Whiteboard work should be limited to one student at a time.
- Limit close interactions (perhaps less than three feet) to ten minutes or less.
- Limit group sizes to two or three individuals.
- Minimize the need for movement within the classroom.
- Send small groups to nearby empty classrooms and hallways.
- Have sanitizing gel or spray available and encourage students to use upon entering the class.
- Encourage students to wipe down desks upon entering the class.
- Request students to wipe down stations or lab space when they finish the activity.
- Allow students to use devices in class to leverage technology.
- Ensure students have access to devices in advance.
- Disseminate handouts in digital form through Teams, OneDrive, or BOLT.
- Use online collaborative apps like Office 365 and Google Docs.

Seating Arrangements for Small Group Work and Contact Tracing

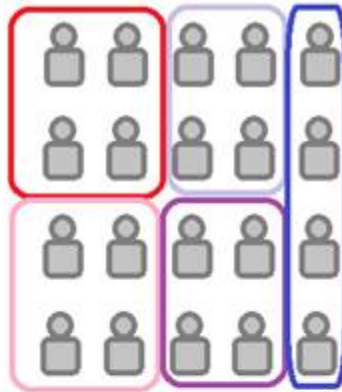
As a general rule, smaller discussion or work groups is better than larger groups. When groups are kept to two or three students, individuals are more likely to participate. For contact tracing purposes it is essential to keep the groups the same to reduce possible contact transmission. Seating charts should not become a burden, nor should they be interpreted as inappropriate for a college age group; when students enter the classroom they routinely gravitate to the same seat. We recommend grouping students who are close together on the seating chart. They can pivot in seats to have group chat or shift their seats away from other groups without moving too much. You can use different groups without students moving seats or around the room. Here are some examples in a 20-seat room:



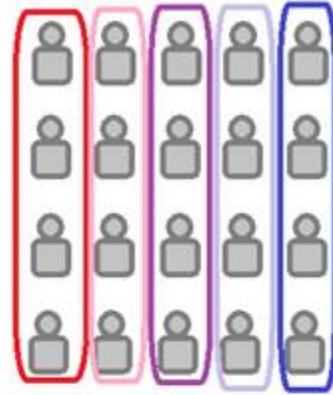
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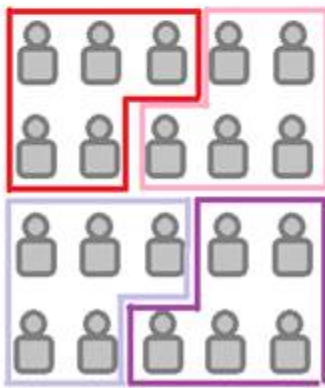
Across the rows



Clusters and rows



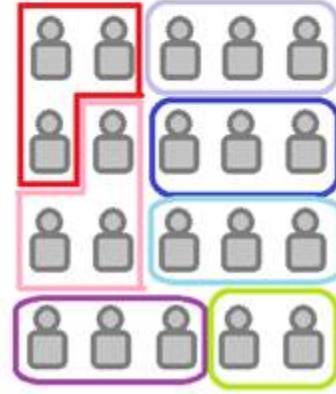
Down the rows



Even clusters



Duos together



Small clusters

Use of Technology to Facilitate Group Work and Doc Sharing

To reduce the exchange of paper, make use of technology. Instructional Media and Design Center (IMDC) recommends these be distributed and collected through MS Team or BOLT. In addition, make use of applications that allow for collaboration (e.g. Google Docs, Google Slides, or Office 365 tools). This does require students to bring devices to the classroom, and so you will need to know if they have this capability. If they are physically grouped together, it may be sufficient that only one person in the pair or triad have a device. See the last section below for short videos that help you discover more about these collaborative tools and apps.

It will seem strange to have students sitting together in a classroom while they exchange ideas through some sort of collaborative application (e.g. Google Docs, Google Slides, or Office 365 tools). Yet it has an advantage that goes beyond eliminating the exchange of paper: these apps facilitate sharing and revising within the group and with the class as a whole during and after meeting times.

There are apps like Kahoots or Quizizz that allow students to compete while reviewing course content. In advance, be sure students download these apps to smart phones so they can quickly gain access to the quiz.

Most applications and collaborative tools are shared through URLs. To give students quick and convenient access to the URLs, create a bit URL and QR code. A Bit URL is composed of only a few characters, so can



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easily be typed into a web browser on laptops or other devices. The QR code is easily scanned with smart phone or tablets from any location in a classroom.

As is true in any active learning teaching technique, be sure to plan ahead, provide structure, and clear instructions. For example, imagine that I want my students to discuss the pros and cons of learning history from a range of popular movies. In advance, students have learned through lecture or readings, the ethos and techniques that historians and filmmakers adopt to present the past. In advance, pairs of students were assigned to watch one of several historical films. The discussion would occur face-to-face in groups of two; at this stage they are provided an Office 365 (collaborative) Power Point (a URL shared through BOLT, MS Teams, or as a QR code or bit URL) upon which they record their ideas. The Power Point slide would include a T-Chart: column 1 students record pros and in column 2 students records cons. A sufficient number of slides would be created so that each pair of students would have their own upon which to record ideas. After students discussion in pairs, we then discuss limits and possibilities of learning history from a multiple of films as a whole class.

If you want the groups to meet in the online hub, IMDC recommends MS Teams. Teams has an easy to use synchronous meeting capability that is in many ways on par with Zoom. Both meeting tools have whiteboards, screen sharing, breakout rooms, live transcriptions, and video filters. Students can use the Chat feature in Teams to discuss group activities. If you want them to use voice and meet in audio/video chats in Teams, they will need headsets. The classroom could get very loud. However, this reduces the need for them to move around the room or disrupt the established seating chart.

Faculty in the Zeigler College of Business have made creative use of virtual worlds to bring students together. Ronda Mariani, Monica Favia, Thomas Tanner, and Scott Mehall are good resources to learn more. Some virtual reality platforms, such as Virbela, cost money, while others are free.

Develop Alternatives for Quarantined Students to Participate

At the [University of Kansas](#), they found that allowing students to remote in to a F2F class in which active learning was prioritized, joining by video conference undermined their ability to participate. This approach posed challenges for instructors who understandably found it difficult to pay equal attention to students in the classroom and those remoting in for a discussion. Nonetheless, if students are quarantined and your classroom has video capabilities, you could set up Zoom or MS Teams meetings for them to join in, so they increase their awareness of what is happening in class.

Whatever platform you use, give quarantined students online activities to fulfill the class participation goals. At the least, you could record the session and post to BOLT, so they may watch later. However, keep in mind that their ability to hear F2F student voices may be diminished significantly by the availability and placement of microphones (unless everyone has a device and headset). Another approach is to hold a synchronous online discussion for quarantined students. If your class activity involves hands-on work, quarantined students may need to develop their skills through simulations, virtual labs, or interpret results of published research.

Resources to Learn More about Collaborative Tools and Apps

LinkedIn Learning Videos

[Teams Channels \(4:24\)](#): Can create channels for each group activity

[Teams Chat \(4:24\)](#): For text-based chats amongst small group members

[Teams Audio/Video Meeting \(2:15\)](#): For audio calls amongst small group members; if used in a classroom, each student would need a headset.



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TALE Videos on Tech Tools and Apps (most average 10 minutes)

[Blogger](#), Christina Francis describes an app in which students gain experience writing and sharing blogs.

[Creating and Sharing Google Forms for a Zoom Session](#), Lisa Stallbaumer's tips are easily adaptable to F2F

[Creating and Sharing Office 365-Doc for a Zoom Session](#), Lisa Stallbaumer's tips are easily adaptable to F2F

[Flipgrid](#), Craig Young shares how students exchanged ideas through text and video

[Go React](#), Jessica Bentley-Sassaman describes how students can use this app to offer video feedback

[GroupMe](#), Christina Francis shared how this app allows for group texts to create community (similar to Slack)

[Kahoot](#), Rebecca Willoughby demonstrates how she used Kahoot to quiz

[Kahoot Quiz Game](#), Christina Force shares her use of the quiz feature

[MSTeams](#), Dan McCurry briefly discusses his use of this platform for students to chat and share content

[Padlet](#), Stephanie Gardner shows how she uses this app for students to exchange course concepts

[Piazza](#), Dan McCurry shows how you can use this app for students to ask and answer questions

[Polleverywhere](#), Arjun Sondhi demonstrates how he uses this polling app to get feedback from students

[VoiceThread](#), Julie Ambrose uses VoiceThread to present interactive lecture content

[Vialogue](#), Skye Chernichky-Karcher demonstrates how Vialogue allows students to record commentary on video

To learn more about these apps, contact the faculty member who presented. In addition, take advantage of our wonderful colleagues in Instructional Media and Design Center (imdc@bloomu.edu) to learn more about how to use technology tools.