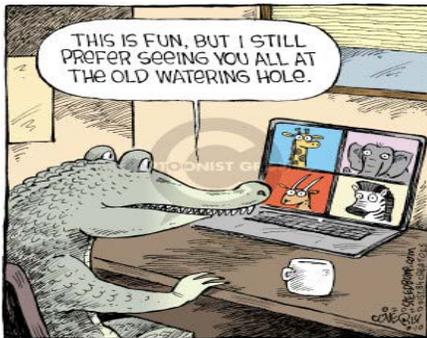




Ideas for Zoom Breakout Rooms

How might we energize or make our breakout rooms work better? We will revisit some ideas, ones you may be using already, others that may trigger creativity. Consider these ideas within the context of your discipline-specific course, its learning goals, nature of content, and your students. Please keep in mind that clear roles, focused tasks and deliverables, and time limits help support productive, meaningful, fun collaboration and engagement.



Varying the group assignments can counteract the tediousness of hearing several groups of students talk about the same thing when class reconvenes, and groups present their findings. For example, break a topic/reading into several questions and invite students to select their breakout room based on their interest in a question; assign different problem sets to different groups; or ask student to discuss different cases all pertaining to the same topic.

Consider alternatives to text as a way for groups to report their learnings to the class. Interactive tools, such as [Google Jamboard](#) help students highlight information via sticky notes or images, accompanied by verbal explanations. For example, “*Select an image that reflects your main take aways from today’s mini lecture and be prepared to explain your selection.*”

Share with students why you see breakout rooms as a powerful learning tool and what role they play in helping students learn. Students are more likely to buy-in when they understand why we include peer learning in our course: *We realize what we don’t understand by teaching another.* (Lang, 2010) Invite formative feedback on how the breakout rooms are working for the students. For instance, you may use the polling feature to get a quick sense of pace, timing, nature of tasks, group size, instructions, use of chat, desire to change groups. Highlight the main observations from the students’ feedback and adjust, as appropriate. This process gives students agency and conveys both their responsibility and partnership in creating a productive learning environment.

Associated song: Steven Curtis Chapman, [Together](#) (uplifting in current COVID context), YouTube

Adapted from McMurtrie, B. [How to make breakout rooms work better](#), Chronicle, 12/10/20 – accessed 02/02/21

Reference: Lang, J. (2008). On course. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.