

Teaching with LfA Student Moderators: Guide for Instructors



Student moderators, hired by IS&T, play a crucial role in Boston University's Learn *from* Anywhere approach. Employed skillfully, they can enhance the learning experience in an LfA classroom. LfA is a new way of teaching and learning at BU, intended to flexibly support our students during these unprecedented times; as such, everyone is still learning how to do it most effectively. That said, some forethought on teaching with LfA moderators can help you craft an approach to LfA teaching that best supports you, your students and your learning goals for your students.

Student moderators have two key roles in an LfA classroom: to handle technical difficulties with Zoom instruction, and to facilitate interaction and active learning by monitoring for questions from remote students. This document offers suggestions for making the most out of the second role.

Please remember that student moderators are not teaching assistants or teaching fellows. They will often come from different fields of study from the class they are teaching; they are trained to handle the Zoom component of an LfA class. Please respect the nature of their role and do not assign them tasks that go beyond this role.

Choosing an approach to student participation

To learn from you, your remote students need to be able to ask questions. Your moderator is there to make that process easier. You need to prepare by deciding how you will handle that process in your classroom. Handling it involves at least two key choices.

First, **when will remote students ask their questions?** There are two basic approaches: either the moderator can *monitor* Zoom and use a visual signal to indicate to you when questions are incoming, or you can *pause regularly* to give students an opportunity to ask spoken questions. You can also do both to give the students maximum opportunities to ask questions. Monitoring Zoom allows questions to come up at the students' own pace. Pausing gives students formal time to think on their questions, and reduces student distraction from chat appearing in the window.

If the moderator is *monitoring*, you need to decide how they will let you know that a student has asked a question that has not yet been answered. Agree on an appropriate visual cue or signal to indicate the presence of questions. The most obvious is for the moderator to raise their hand (physically) when a question has been asked. You could also provide the moderator with a physical object to place in front of them and use as a cue, such as a water bottle, keys or another agreed upon object. Whatever cue you choose, it is essential that the moderator sit somewhere that you can see them easily at all times.

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If you *pause*, make sure to make each pause long enough that students have time to mentally formulate their questions. Ten seconds is a good amount of time to formulate questions that the students will ask orally; if they need to type questions in chat during the pause, you could extend it to 20-30 seconds to give them time to type. You should also make sure to pause frequently enough to give students a chance to ask questions. It is helpful to plan pauses within a lecture. (If you use slides, you could insert regular slides labelled “Any questions?”)

It is also possible to take a *combined* approach: students can ask questions in the chat and the moderator can monitor for these, but rather than having the moderator give you a visual cue, you can pause regularly to ask the moderator if there are questions. If you take this approach, it is essential that your pauses for questions are frequent.

Second, **how will remote students communicate their questions to you and/or to the moderator?** There are two basic options here: either they can ask their questions in the Zoom *chat*, or they can use Zoom’s Raise Hand option to signify that they have a question which they will then themselves ask *orally* through their Zoom microphone. Oral questions allow you to be more sensitive to tone and facial expressions, in a way that can make remote learning more personal. Chat is often more comfortable for shy students, and can give students more time to formulate their questions. (It is even possible for in-person students in a large classroom to have Zoom open – with the sound off – and ask their questions via chat; this may be helpful if masks and social distancing make it difficult to hear direct questions. If you want to allow this possibility, clarify that to the students as well.)

If you use the *chat*, you should decide whether to have the moderator read the question to you, or whether you want to read it yourself. Either way, if the moderator is monitoring, they should use the agreed signal to indicate when a question is pending. If you pause for questions, you should make sure that either you or the moderator is checking Zoom for questions asked.

For *oral* questions through raised hands, make sure to specify that students follow appropriate etiquette guidelines to minimize disruption. Such questions are also important for student group participation in breakout rooms.

Guidelines for student participation

You should provide students with guidelines on how to participate most effectively in your class. You may find it helpful to co-create these guidelines with students during your first week, to help them feel actively connected to the process and set expectations mutually.

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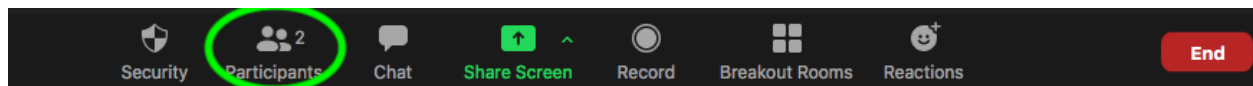


Suggested etiquette guidelines for students when speaking include keeping their microphone muted when not speaking, and not to talk to others from their remote learning environment while on the microphone. Students should also wear headphones (earbuds or otherwise) in class to avoid interference from background sound. Finally, you may wish to suggest that students turn on their video cameras so that their facial expressions can clarify their questions. (We recommend that cameras not be made a *requirement*, as some students might be joining class from a home office with others in the background that they prefer not to share, or have disabled their cameras to optimize limited bandwidth.)

In the context of chat, consider what kinds of posts you think will be most helpful in chat and when you want students to post there. It is useful to think about the flow of information, both from instructors and from students. Especially, do you want students to use the chat only to ask questions, or to discuss class material with each other? On one hand, a stream of student-to-student chat could be distracting for some students; on the other, it allows students an additional organic opportunity to interact with each other. You could consider reserving the Zoom chat for direct questions to you and asking that students put questions to each other in a dedicated discussion forum. One option for such a forum, newly available for all BU classes as of fall 2020, is [Pronto](#), a tool for real-time online chat (comparable to Slack and Discord). TechWeb (IS&T's website) has [detailed instructions](#) on how to get set up with Pronto.

Approaches to breakout rooms

Zoom breakout rooms are the most straightforward way for remote students to engage in small-group discussion. If you use them, be aware of a key technical issue in Zoom: *only hosts and not co-hosts can create breakout rooms*. Only one person can be a host at one time; by default, the instructor is the host for each class. That means that either you must make the moderator the host so that they can create breakout rooms, or you must create the breakout rooms yourself.



You can make the moderator the host once the Zoom meeting has begun. To do this, click the Participants button on the bottom of the screen; a list of participants will appear on the right. Hover over the moderator's name and you will see a blue button pop up labelled



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“More”. This will provide you an option for “Make Host”. (If you wish to return to being the host yourself, the moderator should follow the same procedure with you.)

You should also decide how students will be assigned to breakout rooms (randomly or in a list). If moderators will assign students to breakout rooms and the students will not be assigned randomly, instructors should make sure that the moderators have a list of the students to be assigned.

Moderator opening meetings

Your moderator(s) will contact you by email before classes start, once they are assigned. You should meet with your moderator(s) at least once before class begins to establish your relationship and go over guidelines. If you have more than one moderator for different class times, you should meet with all of them (whether together or separately). The meeting should clearly establish your approach to the questions above. You may wish to establish them collaboratively with the moderator during the meeting, or you may have already decided before the meeting takes place; either way, the moderator should have a clear understanding of the approach you have decided on. You should also clarify the moderator’s role: moderators are there for technical help and the facilitation of active learning; as they are not TAs, they do not need to understand the subject matter.

Where possible, it is very helpful to visit the classroom together with the moderator(s) before classes start, either at the first meeting or at a separate session. This visit would serve two purposes: it would allow you and the moderator(s) to see what equipment is available and how to use it, and it would allow you and the moderator(s) to identify a place where a moderator will sit so that they can be easily visible as you teach. Be aware that such a pre-class visit is not always possible, however, depending on when the student arrives on campus and on room scheduling. If it is not possible, you should still meet with your moderator(s) virtually to set expectations.

Make sure the moderators have co-host or host access to all class Zoom meetings so they can assist appropriately.

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Beginning the semester: clarifying expectations

Whatever approach you take to the questions above, make sure to communicate it clearly, to all the students themselves (both remote and in-person) as well as to the moderator. Identify your approach to student questions both in your syllabus and in class on the first day: clearly indicate what mode of asking questions will be used, and encourage students to ask questions in that mode. You should also go over how the technology will work, and go over guidelines for participation for both face-to-face and remote students. These should include guidelines for video conferencing and/or chat etiquette, whether you have set them in advance yourself or want to develop them mutually with student input.

Class sessions

Always remember that you have students learning remotely, and they are no more used to this form of learning than you are. It is helpful to be deliberate by acknowledging the remote students at the beginning of each class and extending them a special welcome. Remind remote students that their involvement is invited and encouraged (and expected, if this is the case), through the questions they can ask via the method selected at the beginning of the semester (pausing or moderator). Whichever method you select for questions, make sure to take them frequently. You may consider actively alternating solicitation of questions between in-person and remote students.

Because of masks and social distancing, you may find it difficult to hear questions and contributions from the back of a large classroom. In such a case, you may consider asking them to ask questions in Zoom chat alongside remote students. (Having in-person students ask questions via audio/video is generally not advisable because of the risk of audio feedback in the room.)

If you are teaching a class that deals with sensitive topics and the possibility exists that students will be uncomfortable sharing their perspectives because of the session recording, you have the option to turn off recording of the session. While a recording can be very helpful for students, do not sacrifice the learning experience for the sake of the recording.

At the end of class, consider acknowledging the remote students and confirming when they can exit the Zoom session. If you are available after class, check before ending the remote session to see if any Zoom students want to stay after class to ask any questions. (Turning off recording for these questions is highly recommended.)

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Checklist for teaching with moderators

Before the first day of class:

- Decide when remote students will ask their questions and how they will communicate those questions to you and/or the moderator.
- Decide how students will be assigned to breakout rooms, if you are using them.
- Create a set of etiquette guidelines for students, or plan on creating them in consultation with students in class.
- Identify your decisions on the questions above in your syllabus.
- Meet with your moderator, in person or virtually, to clarify expectations and your approach.
- If possible*, visit your classroom to view its tech setup (ideally with your moderator).
- Make sure your moderator has host or co-host access to Zoom meetings.

At the first class session:

- Explain your approach to taking student questions and encourage your students to ask questions in the chosen mode.
- Explain and/or cooperatively determine your guidelines for etiquette in video and chat.
- Explain how the remote technology will work.

At the beginning of each class session:

- Acknowledge the presence of remote students and remind them that their involvement is encouraged and/or expected via the preferred mode.

During each class session:

- Remember to take questions frequently, by whichever method you have chosen.

After each class session:

- Consider acknowledging the remote students and confirming when the session is finished.
- Check whether any Zoom students want to remain after class to ask further questions (if you are available).

Sources

Some suggestions drawn in part from:

https://harvard.service-now.com/ithelp/ithelp?id=kb_article&sys_id=c1735972dbd7885430ed1dca48961975

<https://www.technology.pitt.edu/blog/zoom-tips>

<https://academictechnologies.it.miami.edu/assets/pdf/preparing-to-teach-a-hybrid-course.pdf>