

Active Learning While Maintaining Social Distancing

From Montana State University Teaching Resources

Group work and active learning may be a major component of your in-person or blended courses. While maintaining the recommended social distance of 6 feet can complicate the ability of students to actively interact in groups to collaborate and share ideas, there are some options below that can allow students to work together and maintain physical distance.

Many of these options require that students bring and utilize a laptop, tablet, or smart phone. Not all students may have a device for participating, so they may need to acquire one before the class starts or during the first week of the class. Make sure students are aware of this in the Syllabus, during the first in-person class meeting, and possibly in an initial email welcoming students to the class.

Socially Distanced In-Person Active Learning/Group Work Options	Description	Tools Available or Needed
<p style="text-align: center;">Virtual In-Person Class Collaboration</p>	<p>While in a physical classroom, the instructor can leverage some online collaboration spaces and tools where students can collaborate and discuss from a distance in pairs or small groups, then share the results of their virtual conversations or work with the rest of the class.</p> <p>The collaboration platforms in the next column will show updates, changes, and additions in real time.</p> <p>****Note that Padlet, Awwapp, Hypothes.is and Limnu are not</p>	<p>Google Docs – A collaborative writing platform.</p> <p>Note that students will need a gmail account to use Google Docs.</p> <p>Padlet – A digital bulletin board for compiling comments, text, images, lists, videos etc.</p> <p>Microsoft Office 365 Document Collaboration and Co-Authoring All students have access to Microsoft 365 and can obtain a free copy.</p>

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	<p>supported by MSU, which requires you to self-support if there are issues and may require purchasing for unlimited use and advanced capabilities beyond the free versions****</p>	<p>Awwapp – Collaborative whiteboard space for drawing.</p> <p>Limnu – Collaborative whiteboard space for drawing.</p> <p>Hypothes.is – A collaboration tool for discussing texts, can annotate and comment together on a reading.</p>
<p>Virtual Hybrid/Blended Online Collaboration</p>	<p>Instead of having students work in groups in class, all or most of the group work and collaboration can be done before and after an in-person class using asynchronous online discussion forums, MS Teams, WebEx, and/or Google Docs. Students can then share the results of the group work and discussions each week during the in-person portion of the course.</p>	<p>For more information on WebEx and a video demo of it.</p> <p>For more information on MS Teams and video demo of it.</p> <p>For more information on using Brightspace asynchronous online discussion forums, please watch this training, Maximizing Online Discussions for Asynchronous Online Learning</p> <p>Google Docs – A collaborative writing platform.</p> <p>Note that students will need a gmail account to use Google Docs.</p>

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<p>In-Class Student-to-Student Video Conferencing and Chat Tool</p>	<p>Students can also form groups and use their own laptops or mobile devices with WebEx or Microsoft Teams to collaborate and communicate with each other from across the classroom or with students outside of class who are unable to attend, then appoint someone to share the results with the class. Note that this may not work as well with a high number of students as it can overload the WiFi capacity in the room and there can be unpleasant audio feedback when multiple students are talking or forget to mute their microphones. Also, the use of masks may hinder their voices. Therefore, instead of students engaging in potentially distracting verbal video conference discussions during the group work, they can utilize the chat tools from WebEx or MS Teams to carry out their in-class conversations.</p> <p>This may require setting up pre-assigned student groups at the beginning of the course and helping them set up WebEx meetings or MS Team collaboration spaces for each group.</p>	<p>For more information on WebEx and a video demo of it.</p> <p>For more information on MS Teams and video demo of it.</p>
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	<p>If an at-risk student or one in isolation from quarantine is unable to attend class, they can join a virtual in-class collaboration and/or in-class video conferencing session from home.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">In-Person Non-Technology Options</p>	<p>Some rooms may be equipped with multiple white boards that can be used as a way for students to make individual contributions to a group product, where each student comes up to write an idea for their group one at a time. Flip charts positioned in the room and sticky notes can also be used in this way. Students can write down ideas and thoughts on sticky notes and post them to a space for their group on a white board and then one member can photograph them with their phone and send to the group to have and discuss. Small portable whiteboards could also allow students to complete individual work that they can hold up for their group members to see across the 6 feet of physical distance.</p>	<p>Room equipped with multiple whiteboards or request moveable whiteboards</p> <p>Require students purchase individual portable whiteboards</p> <p>Flip charts or easels for writing on or posting notes to</p> <p>Large or small sticky notes</p>

Tips and Strategies to Help Support These Options:

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- Ease your students into the use of these options with low-stakes practice opportunities at the beginning of the course.
- Be ready with a backup plan or activity that does not involve the technology in case there are issues.
- Check in with your students periodically with in-class polling, surveying, or informal conversations to see how it is going and whether you can make changes to support the use of these options.

Space Arrangements

If the classroom has moveable furniture, arranging students in a half circle formation can allow for collaboration while maintaining physical distancing. When possible, you can also take students to an alternative outside space to spread out and collaborate or an in-door area with more space.