

How Do I Use Webconferencing At Our School?

Overall: Videoconferencing is often seen as the only way to meet / teach in our distributed medical education network. Webconferencing provides a powerful alternative that is flexible and available 24/7. Blackboard Collaborate (Collaborate) is freely available to Western faculty, staff and students.

- Since Collaborate uses the internet, an optimal experience will depend on a high speed internet connection (same as Skype!):
 - video uses a lot of bandwidth, so use video sparingly. Use video at the start of a session to greet the participants, then switch video off and / or display a static picture of yourself;
 - ask participants to load pictures of themselves as well. Each will display when participants use their microphone to participate in the webconference;
- Collaborate is accessible from inside an OWL course/project site, as well as from outside OWL. To setup a Collaborate room outside of OWL send an email to [STC](#);
- Webconferencing (Collaborate) can be very effective just using audio. Video does not add much to a communication session unless the participants are new to one another or there are just one or two speakers. Too much video can be a distraction and participants with slower internet connections will have an adverse total experience;
- As the presenter, ensure that you are assisted by another participant who can moderate / monitor other areas of the interface and session, especially when you are new to the software:
 - e.g. have your colleague monitor the text chat, use of the 'raise hand' tool, etc.
- Log into the room 30 minutes prior to the start of sessions to setup the room:
 - load slides, images, and setup participant permissions (annotation, video, chat, etc.)
- Establish protocols at the start of the session: should participants use the 'raise hand' tool before they speak? How frequently will text chat monitored? What to do in the event of a technology glitch? etc.
- Send participants a link to the webconference (the 'virtual room') 3+ days in advance; ask them to login and **test the computer they will use on the day of the session**;
 - sometimes a plug-in will need to be downloaded to that computer, or the microphone / video will need to be setup;
- Use annotation tools to highlight information on slides / images so that it is clear to participants what you are referring to: consider enabling annotation tools for participants to allow them to directly participate in the session activities;
- It is important to **engage participants** in webconferencing sessions; they are more likely to drift into 'TV mode' when sitting at their computer alone than when in a meeting / classroom with others around;
 - see sheets #4 and #7 for ways to involve your audience;
 - change your delivery style / activities every 15 minutes;
- Encourage questions using text chat and **answer them verbally**. Record (archive) your session for later and ensure that participants are aware that this will be part of the archive;
- Get comfortable with **some** features, and then slowly try out other features in subsequent sessions.

