

Tech Snacks: Remote Student Engagement Ideas

“Zoom Fatigue” is real, and we’re all feeling it! Getting remote students engaged on the other side of a Zoom or Webex screen can be a challenge, especially this far into the semester. Is there anything we can do to increase remote students’ interest and attention? OTLE has a few strategies for you! We are also happy to help you learn and explore any of these technologies or techniques.

Polls, Surveys, and Quizzing Games

It’s always a good practice to keep students thinking “alongside” you while you’re presenting information. A number of free technologies can help you solicit information from students as you go so that they feel involved and you know where they’re at.

Polling in Webex or Zoom - A built-in polling feature for (relatively) seamless check-ins with students. These are both a bit tricky to use, but OTLE can help you test them out.

PollEverywhere - A classroom response tool that allows you to poll students in multiple choice and open answer formats and display group results. Share your screen to view and discuss the results as a class.

Google or Microsoft Forms - A simple electronic survey form. Share the survey link in your chat and have students answer the survey questions in a variety of formats. Share your screen to view and discuss the results as a class.

Kahoot! - A gamified quizzing platform that allows you to use multiple choice questions to check in with students. The leaderboard and countdown music make it fun and competitive.

Quizlet - A flashcard platform with various self-quizzing features. Share your screen on Zoom and have students race to answer as fast as they can verbally or in the chat bar. Bonus: you can share links to your flashcard sets with students so that they can quiz themselves at home.

Quizlet Live - A quizzing game tool that lets students compete in teams. During remote instruction or split-remote instruction, instructors can put remote students into one or multiple breakout rooms to participate on their designated “Quizlet Live” team.

Small Group Collaboration or Discussions

Breakout Room Activities in Webex or Zoom - Use Breakout Rooms in Webex or Zoom for think-pair-share activities, longer group discussions, debate teams, or group project planning. As an instructor, you can pop in on the breakout rooms to check on students’ progress. (Note: you have to change Zoom settings in your account prior to the meeting to use breakout rooms.)

Collaborative Brainstorming - Set up a collaborative document like a Google Doc and share the link in your Webex or Zoom chat area. Have students contribute ideas in writing inside the document. This is a good option if you have students with bandwidth issues that make video discussion difficult.

Watch Parties - Teleparty (formerly Netflix Party) is a Chrome extension that allows groups to watch Netflix, Hulu, HBO, or Disney content at the same time while chatting about it. Prime Party is a Chrome extension that allows this for AmazonPrime. YouTube Party is a chrome extension that allows this for YouTube videos.

Whole Group Collaboration or Discussions

Collaborative Slideshow - Create a blank Google Slides deck with individual student or group names assigned to specific slides (this can be indicated in the Notes section at the bottom). Share the file link in your Webex or Zoom chat box and have students or groups work on their respective pieces and then have each group present their piece at the end.

Picture Annotation as a Group - Embed photos in your PowerPoint or Google Slides presentation, share your screen, and allow students to annotate on it together to analyze the photo, identify important patterns, components, etc. (Note: you have to change Zoom settings in your account prior to the meeting to allow participants to annotate.)

Low or No-Tech Activities

Sometimes it can be refreshing to give the group a mental break from being in a virtual meeting without actually ending the meeting. You can do this by having everyone turn off their audio and video for a few minutes and complete an analog activity that can be shared back with the group. Embrace the silence! It can be calming. Just be clear about how much time you're going to give.

Free Write or Free Draw - Give students a few minutes periodically throughout the class to write down their thoughts or draw a diagram or picture. Students can share their reflections in small or whole group discussions or hold up their drawings on the webcam.

Discussion Question List - Begin class by displaying a set of questions that students take a few minutes to write down. Give them time to jot down answers to those questions and reflect periodically throughout the lecture. Towards the end of class you can draw out student answers to build up to a whole group discussion.

MSU-Northern Faculty Members' Own Tips

Below are some other tips and observations that MSU-Northern faculty shared and have found useful for keeping remote students focused and engaged during this disruptive, distracting time.

- Be extra cognizant (when you can!) of the importance of visual structure, organization, and routine in Brightspace with your own content and assignments. This is an emotionally chaotic time, and having structure and predictability helps students focus.
- Remember that your course may actually be helping students find structure, stress relief, and focus for part of their day because you're giving them something else to focus on. The course is not necessarily a source of stress even though it entails work.
- Another low tech option: have students physically raise their hand (visible in the video) to vote on a topic or express agreement during class.
- If the class is over an hour long, stop and take a break and encourage them to go outside and walk around for five minutes. Make sure to be clear about the time the meeting will resume.
- If it suits your personality: use a puppet or other theatrical props in the Zoom video to keep students laughing and interested. Everyone needs comic relief right now!
- If you plan on drawing out student participation, let them know ahead of time to expect it, and make it more of a group exercise in which they can answer together and are encouraged to help each other form answers.