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# Maximising interaction in the online classroom

## Webinar handout

by Lauren Perkins

### Practical ideas for making your online classes interactive

#### 1. Set up interactive activities effectively

- Give and check instructions with ICQs (instruction checking questions) very clearly, and then leave the instructions in the chat box (or on the screen) so that students can still see them while they do an activity.
- Set a timer in the main room or in the breakout rooms (BORs) so that students know how much time they have left to do an activity.
- If you group and regroup students for BOR activities, rename your students adding a group to their name (e.g. 'Pol A', 'Roy B', 'Maria C'). This means you can put students with the same group name in the same BOR (e.g. As) or mix the groups (e.g. ABC).

#### 2. Make BOR activities inclusive, interactive and well-monitored

- Give each member of a group their own role so everyone participates evenly and no one feels left out e.g. notetaker, timekeeper, involver. (Galloway 2023).
- Be clear about who should speak first in the BO room e.g. 'Student A starts' and tell lower-level students exactly how to begin. Give students a 'useful language' bank in the chat before they go to BO rooms.
- Use tripods, instead of pairs. In groups of three, two students can do the speaking task and one student monitors. Then they can swap. (Byrne & Heffernan 2020)
- Monitor breakout rooms quickly first to check everyone's on task and then more carefully a second time to make notes for feedback.

#### 3. Motivate learners to participate

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- Get students speaking in breakout rooms at the beginning of class for the Warmer or Lead-in; start as you mean to go on.
  - Give praise / immediate feedback at the beginning to give quieter students confidence to speak and set expectations for the rest of the class (i.e. it's ok to make mistakes).
  - Include a competitive element by asking students to race and write answers in chat.
  - Give thinking/planning time – give students time to prepare a response before eliciting in front of the whole class.

#### **4. Make more time for online interaction**

- Use a flipped classroom approach. Students can do reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary activities asynchronously *before* the class.
- Use the chat box for short responses to closed questions and then follow up with an open question using the mic.

#### **5. Increase Student Talking Time (STT)**

- Reduce your Teacher Talking Time (TTT) – ask students to read instructions on the slide. Demonstrate activities and ask simple instruction checking questions (ICQs).
- Nominate students and directly invite them to respond. Encourage student-student nomination e.g. 'Pedro, you ask someone else'. Also invite students to answer other students' questions.
- Stop screen-sharing during speaking activities – allow the students to see each other.

#### **6. Have a plan for when technical issues occur**

- Put learners with technical issues in larger groups in breakout rooms i.e. groups of three or four instead of pairs.
- Group all learners with the same technical problem (e.g. cameras off / can't unmute) together in the same breakout room so they can interact in the same way.
- Ask learners to participate in the chat if they can't unmute or speak. Be prepared to adapt and change a speaking activity into a writing activity using the chat box or a collaborative document (e.g. GoogleDocs).

## **References and further reading**

Byrne D. and Heffernan M. (2020). Success with online activities. *English Teaching Professional*. Issue 129. pp.6-7.

Galloway, S. (2023). Making webinar Interaction work. *Modern English Teacher*. Vol.32, Issue 1. pp.74-8

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A recording of Lauren's webinar can be watched here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/different-approaches-technology-classroom-mini-event>

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

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