

facilitate **CHATROOM** in an effective way?

“*Students seem more confident in disagreeing with one another in the chatroom than in tutorials. They feel freer there.*

— Dr. Kate McClune

An original quote

Centre for Teaching and Learning, Oxford University”

What is a Chatroom?

Chatroom refers to synchronous online exchanges, which are mostly text-based. It is sometimes named as online chat and live chat. Chatroom is useful to engage students as it allows real-time exchange of ideas between the teacher and students and the students themselves. A chatroom requests all participants to be present online at the same time, which is different from discussion forums that also allow asynchronous exchanges.

What are the benefits of Chatroom?

- Easy to use without much preparation
- Maintain your social presence during online teaching and learning
- Enable peer learning and support as students can respond to one another's input
- Suitable for brainstorming and open discussions

What are the potential limitations of Chatroom?

- Can be inconvenient if your students are in different time zones
- Loosely organised and unsuitable for high-stakes assessments or tasks
- Difficult to trace earlier chats or organise them systematically
- Difficult to correct inappropriate behaviours (e.g. someone using offensive languages)

How does Chatroom enhance learning?

Well facilitated chatrooms encourage students to participate in discussions and debates in a lively manner. Students feel the presence of one another and therefore are motivated to provide immediate and relevant feedback to their peers. Teachers can make use of real-time chats to identify issues, misunderstandings, or concerns. Interestingly, students are sometimes more active in chatrooms compared to face-to-face classrooms because they feel less intimidated to express disagreements (Pilkington & Walker, 2003).

How do we create Chatroom?

There are various software which has chatroom as a function. Many learning management systems such as Moodle, Blackboard come with chatroom function. In addition, common communication software and apps such as Zoom and Skype provide chatroom while broadcasting. The widely used WhatsApp mobile application is a mobile chat room.

- See HKU e-learning resources:
http://moodle-support.hku.hk/teacher/Chat_room
- More support offered in Moodle resources can be found here:
https://docs.moodle.org/38/en/Chat_settings#Adding_a_Chat_to_your_course
- When you host Zoom sessions, you can start a chatroom simultaneously:
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203650445-In-Meeting-Chat>
- When you host Skype sessions, you can start a chatroom simultaneously:
<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/chat-in-skype-for-business-133b5587-105f-444c-b4a1-721c22416d02>
- WhatsApp Group Chat is a mobile chat room:
<https://faq.whatsapp.com/en/android/26000123/?category=5245251>

How can we facilitate Chatroom effectively?

Before starting a chatroom

- Inform students of the **time, purposes and expectations**: Convey the time clearly and bear in mind the **time zones** as some students may not be in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, it is also important to let students know the purposes of the chats (e.g. discussing a topic, resolving a difficult concept, and collecting opinions) and the expectations (e.g. What students need to do? Are there any ground rules?)
- Prepare a **meaningful question** or define an issue: Having a meaningful and interesting question related to your course content helps stimulate students' responses. It could be a topic for brainstorming or a challenging concept that students struggle to understand (see an example from Oxford University: <https://www.cetl.ox.ac.uk/files/casestudyblendingface>)

Facilitate a lively chatroom

- Post **prompting questions** intentionally: Your prompting questions set the context. It is better to align your prompting questions with your purposes.
- Keep the chat **focused**: Chats are usually informal and can go wild. You might need to rephrase your prompting questions when the chat starts to go off-topic.
- Consider **assigning students roles**: When more than ten students participate, you might not be able to pay attention to all issues. This is when you could consider assigning students some roles, e.g. summarising the chats, synthesising information.

After a chatroom session

- **Save** the chat: Most software applications allow you to save the chat history, which can be posted for those who could not attend the chat.
 - Save option in Moodle: https://docs.moodle.org/38/en/Chat_settings
 - Save option in Zoom: [https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115005516426- Storing-Chat-Message-History](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115005516426-Storing-Chat-Message-History)
 - Save option in Skype: <https://support.skype.com/en/faq/FA34894/how-do-i-export-my-skype-files-and-chat-history>
- Follow-up: Remember to take follow-up actions if there are some issues raised in the chat. You might also wish to define the topic for the next chat.

Good Practice Case Study

- Using pre- and post- tutorial activities to prepare students for online chat (University of Oxford) <https://www.cetl.ox.ac.uk/extending-tutorials-online-students-find-their-voice-in-chatrooms>
- Maximising interactions in online chats (and other synchronous sessions) (University of Northwestern): <https://dl.sps.northwestern.edu/blog/2016/05/maximizing-synchronous-sessions-part-ii-agenda/>

Resources and Further Reading

- Facilitating online chat and conferencing (University of Sydney) https://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/learning_teaching/ict/theory/internet/chat.shtml
- The why and how of online chat (University of California, Berkeley): <https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/technology-intro/gsi-examples/chat/>
- One-page synchronous activity checklist (Johns Hopkins University): <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVs-dGRvbWFpbmxiGx0dGVhY2hpbmd0b29sa2l0fGd4OjFjMDgzMWF-hYWQzYzYzZjE>
- A comprehensive guide for facilitating online discussion (Purdue University): https://www.purdue.edu/innovativelearning/supporting-instruction/portal/files/8_Discussion_Board_Facilitation.pdf

Reference

- Pilkington, R.M. & Walker, A. (2003). Facilitating debate in networked learning: Reflecting on online synchronous discussion in higher education. *Instructional Science*, 31, 41–63.