

Notes on Using Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

- **Use the main Course Room.** Don't bother with "Create Session" for separate, normal class sessions. That's neither necessary nor efficient as a daily task; students may get in the wrong session by mistake, uploaded documents are not shared between sessions, etc. Note that any recorded session is automatically tagged with its own date and time (and you can edit recording title after to taste, if desired).
- **Plug in your drawing tablet.** I normally have this disconnected to avoid cable clutter; don't forget to plug it in before the class session starts.
- **Record the session.** Easy to forget about; put up post-it note, tell students to remind you. For good, identifiable recording intro: as you start, have first content slide up and visible, make a verbal welcome/intro statement.
- **Typing on the whiteboard.** Note that any whiteboard objects do not appear to viewers until the object construction is complete; e.g., when typing, up until you hit Enter, the typing is invisible to viewers. Asking questions for next thing to type is useless in the meantime.
- **Students writing on board.** I have students writing on board set generally to OFF. But even so we can temporarily designate one as Presenter, which allows them write controls (in Attendees, see settings button to right of each participant).
- **Partial erasures on whiteboard.** Note that you can erase one item by using the Select tool, selecting the object of interest, and pressing the keyboard Delete key. Also note right-click "save as/copy" (whiteboard screenshot) tools.
- **Audio problems.** Audio problems seem fairly rare. If one or a few students have a problem, it's likely on their end; suggest re-connecting. If many have a problem, it may be on the moderator end; toggling the mic off/on in Collaborate always fixes it to date. Video always seems solid.
- **Read chat questions aloud.** Text chat is saved, and can be accessed in a recording by the same pink menu button on the bottom-right as usual. That said, reading any chat questions aloud means the question/answer is intelligible from just the audio alone. Also this is probably good practice for people who have trouble reading.
- **Identifying hands.** If many students have hands up, you can identify them in the Attendees tab; hands-up will have big purple icons (and sorted to top of list), hands-down will be small and black (and bottom of list).

- **Beware “Share Application”.** On Firefox, a drop-down list appears, and frequently an application fails to appear; if you click “don’t share” then you’re locked out of the feature for the rest of the session! This is handled better on Chrome. However, in either browser, apps with editable or dynamic content (word processor, programming IDE, video content) usually fail to appear (noted on Bb help page below). It’s much more dependable to share the entire screen, but then you’ll have to deal with visual feedback, everything on your desktop being visible to students, etc. Using a 2nd monitor can avoid these problems.

Recommended reading: “Ultra Experience - Best Practices for Application Sharing”:
<https://blackboard.secure.force.com/apex/publickbarticleview?id=kA739000000028q>

- **Note the mirrored camera.** As presenter, your camera view is mirrored (flipped horizontally) so you can synch up your left hand on your left side, etc.; but viewers will see it un-mirrored. So a written paper document will look backwards to you, but not to your viewers.

Session Settings

Things switched from defaults:

- **Set “Show profile pictures for moderator only” to ON.** When I had this set to the default (off, permit profile pictures) the very first student had a profile picture of a TV character, which is the kind of thing I’d like to avoid.
- **Set participants “Share audio” and “Share video” to OFF.** I don’t want any chance of 25 students chaotically talking over each other, nor the crushing bandwidth that would take.
- **Set participants “Draw on whiteboard and files” to OFF.** Normally I don’t want that, and with a bunch of idle students, someone will surely start fiddling with those drawing controls (one student attempted to help by deleting some stuff I’d written at one point). You can still make participants temporary “presenters” in Collaborate for permission to do that.
- **Set “Allow attendees to join the session using a telephone” to OFF.** If this is on, students are given an option to dial in with a phone number for an audio-only interface. But (a) I’ve discovered the audio for that is crazy awful, (b) in our discipline seeing the writing is critical anyway, and (c) I can imagine someone with a smartphone mistakenly thinking that dialing in would give them the full multimedia experience.