

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.** Collaborate now has a pop-up to record as soon as you enter the room. However, I delay that until I have that start of my lecture slides up. This makes for a good, identifiable recording intro. But don't forget to hit "record" then.
- **Whiteboard 2.0.** In Summer 2021, Blackboard released a completely overhauled version of the Whiteboard/drawing application. The prior version was minimalist but functional; many of us find the new version nearly unusable (for a dozenfold reasons). Prior notes in this document about using the Whiteboard are no longer applicable (and have been deleted). This writer installed a separate whiteboard application locally ("Whiteboard Notepad"), and transmits that via screen-sharing.
- **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 to maintain focus on the audio channel, and for viewers with vision problems.
- **Hands up not needed.** In my sessions I haven't found the hands-up feature to be useful. I just tell students to type chat at any point and I'll address it when I can. Sometimes it's clicked in error. (The Attendees tab shows who has hands-up, if needed.)
- **Removing attendees.** A troublesome course attendee can be removed by the moderator. In Attendees, point to member > click Controls (for right button) > Remove from session. The attendee can rejoin after moderator leaves & rejoins the session. See: https://help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Moderator/Moderate_Sessions/Manage_Attendees

- **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 avoids these problems. Recommended reading: “Ultra Experience - Best Practices for Application Sharing”:
<https://blackboard.secure.force.com/apex/publickbarticleview?id=kA739000000028q>
- **Playing Audio + Video Content**. As of this writing, playing an online video with audio (e.g., a YouTube video) only works through the Chrome browser. When you share the screen or application, be sure to click “Share system audio” in the lower-left of the selector popup.
- **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.