# Webinar Top Tips

## Be mindful of bandwidth

Participating in webinars – livestreaming audio and video content – makes demands on users’ internet access. This is a major consideration when you cannot guarantee the quality of participants’ internet access. Blackboard Collaborate has a good back up for this, as you can record sessions. Reassure students at the start of any webinar that the session is being recorded so that they know they can catch up on content missed during any times when they are reconnecting.

Another point to remember is that additional audio and video will put further pressure on internet connections. Weigh this up against having students sharing videos during a class, including using their cameras to stream images of themselves during the webinar, and consider it when planning how much you will share a video of yourself if you are also presenting slides or using the whiteboard function. You can turn off participants’ ability to share videos from the general webinar settings on Blackboard Collaborate.

## Start with housekeeping

In your first webinar, you should expect to spend at least five minutes going through the features of the platform, including reminding students that the webinar is being recorded and checking they are using Google Chrome or Firefox. Even though you would not expect to give such detailed instructions for each subsequent class with the same student cohort, every webinar should start with a quick audio and chat check to ensure students can hear you and are able to communicate with you through the chat. Remember, a silent cohort could be a cohort who cannot hear you and have no way of telling you this!

## Keep audio channels clean

Only one microphone in a webinar should be on at a time. This will decrease pressure on bandwidth as discussed above, but will also prevent feedback or ‘echo’ on the audio. As the presenter, you can see if microphones are switched on – remind students to turn them off unless they are talking. If you have ‘handed the microphone’ to a student, switch off your own microphone while they are speaking.

## Keep the chat panel clean

A benefit of webinars is the different ways for students to interact. They can talk, annotate, share screens and make use of the chat panel. It is important to remember amid the technology that this is still a classroom setting. If you wouldn’t normally expect students to talk when you are talking, don’t encourage them to use the chat panel when you are speaking. Instead, build times into your session plans for them to ask questions or make comments.

## Consider alternative methods of interaction

Webinars can be overwhelming, with visual information being presented, audio from the presenter and any number of participants as well as a potentially fast-moving chat channel. Take advantage of Blackboard Collaborate tools to maximise interaction while minimising cognitive load. For example

* Polls and multiple-choice questions can get students engaged without needing to use the chat or any audio. Selected students can then explain their ideas to the group.
* Use a whiteboard for collating ideas. Comments in the chat can scroll out of sight quickly – if sentences are typed on the screen you, or the students, can then move them around to group or rank them as they are addressed.
* Students can put their hands up rather than type in the chat if they want to attract your attention while you are talking. The hands-up feature can also be used as a simple yes/no poll as the participant panel will let you know how many and which students have raised their hands.
* As a manager, you are able to control the roles taken by other participants, for example, you can make a student a teacher or manager for a portion of the webinar and so enable them to share their screen, upload their own slides and control the microphones for their peers. It takes some training, but students can present using webinars just as they might be expected to present or lead a discussion in a face-to-face classroom.