

Advice for Minimizing Problems in Online Meetings in Sakai

Note: To learn to use the Sakai Meetings tool, visit go.durhamtech.edu/sakai-meetings

For a smooth experience leading online meetings in Sakai, it is recommended that instructors make thoughtful, informed choices about how they use the Meetings tool.

Recognize that some students will have low-end devices or low-speed internet connections. **Using complex or “high bandwidth” features may limit some students’ ability to maintain a connection or participate.** And at times of heavy system usage, these features may cause problems for all users.

 **Rule of thumb:** If a simple tool will get the job done, don’t use a more complex one instead!

PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS

Be sure to give your students instructions so they’ll know what to do! Direct your students here for full info on how to join a meeting:

- [Sakai Meetings for Students](https://go.durhamtech.edu/sakai-meetings-students) [<https://go.durhamtech.edu/sakai-meetings-students>]

SIMPLE FEATURES INSTRUCTORS CAN USE (low-bandwidth)

Use simple tools for communication

- Audio (microphone or phone dial-in)
- Public chat (a good fallback for students who don’t have a working microphone)

Use simple methods for presentations

- Save PowerPoints (or other documents) as PDF and upload them to the “whiteboard” area for presentation to students
- Draw on your PowerPoint (or on the whiteboard)

Use simple methods for interaction

- For a quick check-ins, ask students to select an emoji (by clicking their name > then **Set Status**) to display beside their name on the user list (e.g. thumbs up or down, smiley or frowny face).
- Include poll (quiz) questions in your PowerPoint for students to respond to

COMPLEX FEATURES (high-bandwidth)

Webcams

- Webcams can be great for enhancing personal interaction, but lots of people using webcams all at once can tax the system.
- A system-level setting has been put in place so that **students cannot see each others’ webcams.**
 - Students can see the instructor’s webcam (if the instructor shares it).
 - The instructor can see students’ webcams (for students who share it).
 - But students cannot see each others’ webcams.
 - However, if students share their webcams, they will appear in the recordings.

Though not ideal, the student-to-student webcam restriction has been put in place to limit performance problems for all users during this time of unprecedented high usage.

- Should I share my webcam with students?
 - Generally it should be ok for instructors to share their webcams.
 - To conserve bandwidth, one option is to share your webcam at the beginning of a session, to show students you are there and to establish a personal connection – and then turn it off for the rest of the session if not needed.
 - If you share your webcam and start to notice technical problems (for you or for your students), the first thing to try is to stop sharing your webcam and ask students to do the same.

- Should I tell my students not to share their webcams?
 - Unless you need to see their face, we recommend you ask students not to share their webcam in a meeting. Again, if it is needed for instruction, use it; if not, don't.
 - Remember that if a student shares their webcam, **only the instructor will see it**. Other students will not. However, **the student's webcam will appear in the recording**.

Screen sharing

- Screen sharing can be very useful if you need to show students how to do something on a computer (e.g. how to manipulate a spreadsheet, how to use a programming tool) or to point out something specific on a website, etc.

- Screen sharing is bandwidth-intensive and may strain the system at times of high usage.

- It is recommended to use screen sharing when necessary – but don't use it when it isn't!
For example:
 - Don't use screen sharing to show a PowerPoint or other document. Instead, save the PowerPoint or document as PDF and upload it to the whiteboard area.
 - Don't use screen sharing to show a video. It's best to provide students with a link to the video and have them watch it on their own time, outside of the meeting.
 - Don't use screen sharing to draw on a blank screen or document. Instead, draw on the whiteboard in the Meetings tool, or upload a PDF and draw on that.
 - If you need to direct students to a website – but don't really need to show them anything specific there -- you can paste the web address in the public chat.

NON-ESSENTIAL FEATURES (high-bandwidth)

Due to bandwidth concerns, we recommend not using these features at this time:

- Breakout rooms
- Shared notes
- Shared whiteboard (all users writing on the whiteboard at same time)

ALTERNATIVES TO LIVE LECTURES

Here's what we're learning from colleges and universities that have gone "all online" already...

Instead of giving "live" lectures – or live screensharing demonstrations – many instructors have found it works better to create video lectures (or screencasts) that students can watch ahead of time, outside of the meeting. Then use online meeting time for questions/clarification/review.

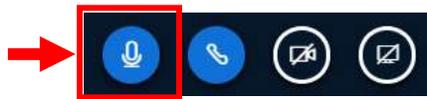
- [Narrating PowerPoints](#) is a good way to create a video lecture
- You can use [Warpwire](#) to create a video of yourself talking (with a webcam, phone or tablet)
- Or you can create a screencast demonstrating something on your screen using [Warpwire](#) or [Screencast-o-matic](#)

TECHNICAL TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

If you encounter technical glitches, be aware that Instructional Technologies staff are unlikely to be available to assist you or your students at that moment. We will do our best to follow up on all reported issues, but that may be after the meeting has passed. *Below are self-help tips for common situations.*

Microphone drops out (you hear "you are now muted")

During a meeting, there may be times when your microphone access drops out. If this happens, you'll suddenly hear "You are now muted." Simply click the microphone button to reconnect.



Screen sharing doesn't work

If you try to share your screen and it doesn't work, make sure you are using Chrome or Firefox. (In all cases of this problem we've encountered, the instructor was using an incompatible browser, such as Safari on a Mac.)

You get disconnected or dropped from a session

You or your students may suddenly lose access to the meeting if your internet bandwidth drops too low. Things to try if this happens...

- **Refresh your browser.** This will give you a new connection and, if the bandwidth drop was temporary, you should be able to reconnect within a few seconds to rejoin the meeting.
- If refreshing doesn't work, check your internet connection and try a different browser (or device, if possible).
- Turn off your webcam, if using. Turn off screensharing, if using.

Cannot connect via microphone (students are unable to hear you)

In a pinch, remember that you can always dial in by phone. To do this while in a meeting:

- Click the phone icon below the presentation area



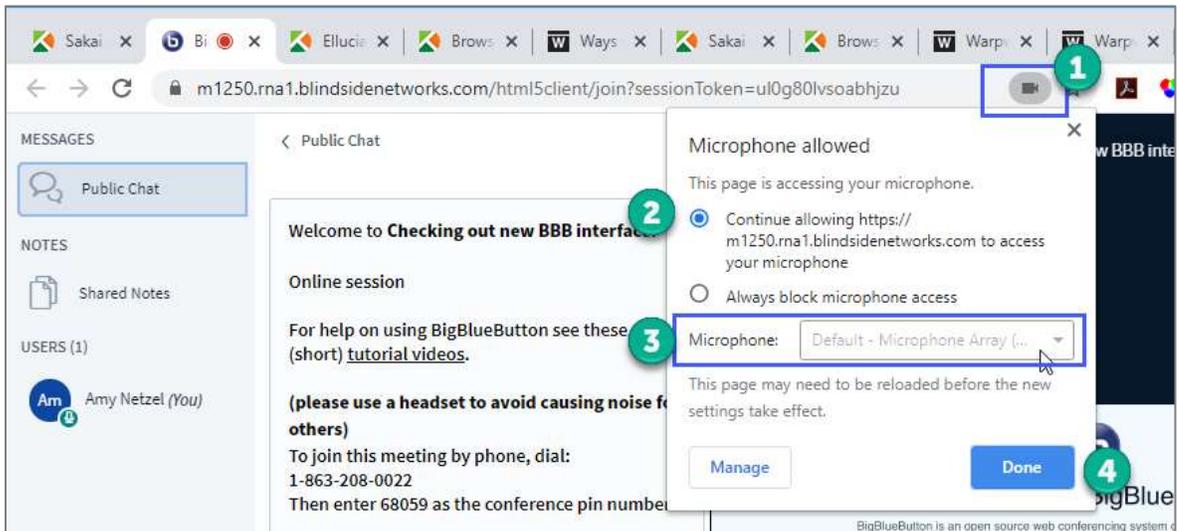
- A window with audio connection options will appear.
- Click **Join using your phone** and follow the on-screen instructions.

Troubleshoot browser-related microphone or webcam issues

If you can't get your microphone or webcam to work in a meeting, often the reason is that you did not "allow" your browser to access them and therefore they are "blocked".

- **To troubleshoot in Chrome:**

Click the tiny camera icon that appears on the right end of the address bar to make sure the correct microphone (and/or webcam) is selected and is not blocked.



- **To troubleshoot in Firefox:**

Firefox prompts you to select a microphone when you enter the meeting. To verify the correct microphone has been selected...

Click the **lock** on the left side of the address bar. A menu appears. Click the **X** next to **Use the Microphone**. Then refresh the browser (you can press F5 for a quick refresh).

