

Group #

Member names:

Breakout Rooms for Student Choice

Modified directly from 'Teaching Effectively with Zoom' by Dan Levy

Directions:

1. Read about two similar strategies below.
2. Complete the two reflection questions.
3. Apply elements of these strategies to a member of the group's actual lesson plan.
4. (If time allows, please feel free to adapt more than one group member's activity.)
5. **Select a designated reporter to share your newly adapted activity with the group.**

Strategy 1: Choose your own topic

Jennifer Lerner, a professor at both the Kennedy School and the Department of Psychology at Harvard University, creatively uses breakout rooms at the start of her classes by having students choose one of three themed rooms based on the previous day's presentation and homework. For instance, the themes might include networking, discussing sunk cost bias, or exploring heuristic vs. systematic thought. Lerner notes that students find it easier to ask questions and check their understanding in these small group settings.

For more information on **how** to use breakout rooms in Zoom, click [here](#).

Steps:

- At the start of class, provide students with a brief overview of the three themed breakout room options based on the previous day's presentation and homework.
- Allow students to choose one of the breakout rooms that aligns with the theme they are most interested in discussing.

- Consider providing prompts or directing them to relevant parts of their homework.
- After the breakout sessions, bring the class back together for a full group discussion, encouraging students to share insights and clarify any questions that arose during the small group discussions.

Levy, D. (2021). *Teaching with Zoom* (2nd ed., pp. 95). Harvard University Press.

Strategy 2: Choose your own level of support

“Teddy Svoronos, a lecturer at the Harvard Kennedy School, uses breakout groups in an ingenious way. In his statistics classes, he often has students work on a problem individually for a few minutes. He recently introduced a twist by allowing students the choice to stay in the main room (if they want to work alone), go to a breakout room where a teaching assistant can help students who need help, or go to a breakout room without a teaching assistant (in case they want company rather than assistance with the material). This element of choice takes the third method of assigning students to breakout rooms to a new level: students not only get to choose which breakout room to go to, but also whether to go to one at all!”

Image of the slide directing students:



Steps:

- Present a problem for students to work on individually for a few minutes.
- Offer students the choice to stay in the main room to work alone, join a breakout room with a teaching assistant (or yourself) for help, or join a breakout room without formal assistance, but company.
- Make the breakout rooms available and allow students to choose which room they want to join.

Levy, D. (2021). *Teaching with Zoom* (2nd ed., pp. 95). Harvard University Press.

What makes these strategies engaging? Why might they work?

- Students make their own decision, what matters most to them
- Choice is good! What topic is most relevant to their life...
- Interest drives involvement

What may be challenging about these strategies?

- If the theme is too specific, then there might be students who won't be as engaged if they do not like the topic
- Risk of tangents / over specific
- Are students aware of what support level works for them?

Briefly describe how you would adapt one of the strategies above to your own classroom:

--Be sure to make good choices for the discussion group options—will they all be interesting?
 --Topic areas are general enough/not overly specific
 --Monitor progress—sufficient time for the exercise? Too much time? Second options if the solution is too quick/easy?
 --Rotate groups/assignments?

