

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 to the links below for full info on using Meetings.

- [Sakai Help for Students](https://go.durhamtech.edu/sakai-students) [<https://go.durhamtech.edu/sakai-students>]
Scroll down to “How to attend an online meeting in Sakai”
- [HANDOUT: 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 quick check-ins, ask students to select an emoji (e.g. thumbs up or down, smiley or frowny face) display beside their name on the user list. To do this, they click their name > then **Set Status**
- 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 result in problems (disconnection) for participants who have low-bandwidth connections.
- Should I share my webcam with students?
 - It should be fine for instructors to share their webcams, if they wish to do so.
 - 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 students share their webcams?
 - Generally, it is ok for students to share their webcams. However, it is recommended that **no more than 10 webcams** be shared at a time.
 - If the meeting contains more than 10 participants, consider limiting webcam display to only the speaker(s).
 - *Update since March 2020:* If students share their webcams, all participants in the meeting will be able to see them (unless the instructor changes advanced settings).
 - If students share their webcams during recorded Meeting sessions, they will also appear in the recording. Be aware of FERPA and [student privacy considerations](#).

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 can be 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:
 - Do not use screen sharing to show a PowerPoint or other document. Instead, save the t or document as PDF and upload it to the whiteboard area.
 - Do not 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.
 - Do not 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.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

Update since March 2020: Instructors can feel free to use these features if they wish.

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

ALTERNATIVES TO LIVE LECTURES

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](#)

RECORDING A MEETING

Instructors can record online meetings so students can re-watch them later or catch up on a missed class. To record a meeting, you must...

- make sure the Recording box is checked when setting up the meeting in Sakai, and
- when the meeting begins, click the START RECORDING button at the top

After the meeting ends, it may take an hour or longer for the recording to be processed and to appear in Sakai. (As a rule of thumb, the length of the meeting is approximately the length of time needed for processing.) When processing is done, the recording automatically becomes visible to students and instructor(s) in the Meetings area of the Sakai site, under the "Recordings" tab.

Student Privacy Considerations

Recordings of Sakai Meetings may contain student information that is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), such as a student's chat room participation (which shows students' names and comments they typed), audio participation (e.g. if they participate vocally), and images of the student (if they share their webcam).

FERPA allows recordings that contain student information to be shared with other students in the same class. Recordings that contain student information should not be shared with other classes (current or future) or with anyone outside of the class or outside of the College.

If the recording does not contain student information or participation, the instructor may share the video with other classes (current or future).

See pages 4-5 below for Technical Troubleshooting Tips

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 screen sharing, 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



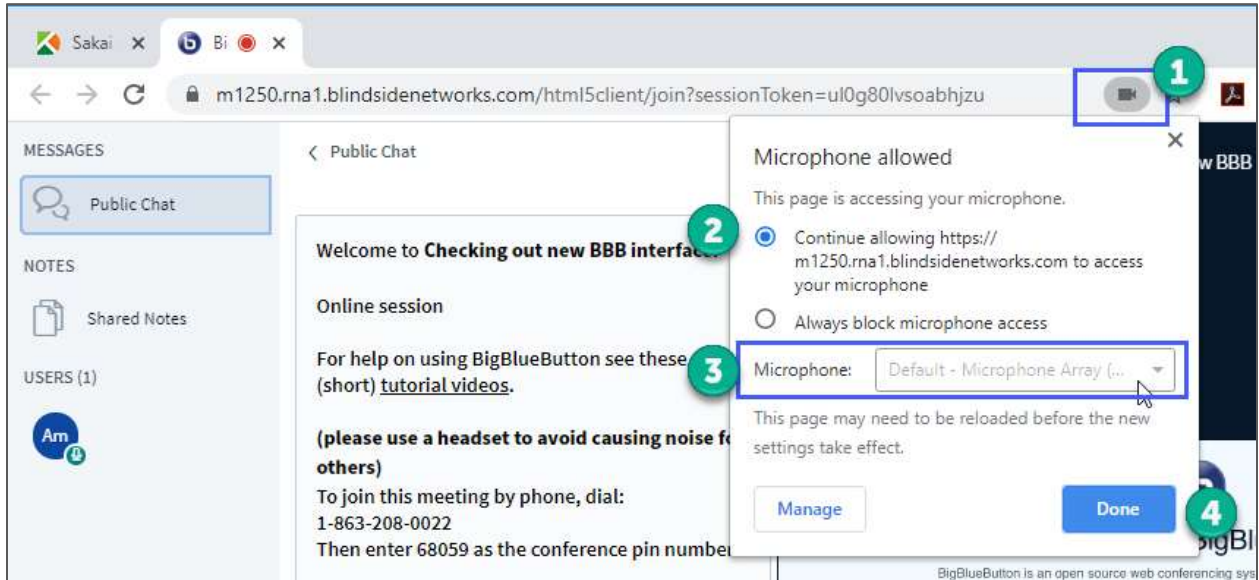
- A window with audio connection options will appear.
- Click **Join using your phone** and follow the on-screen instructions.

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 on your keyboard for a quick refresh).

