Breakout Rooms Handout for OLLI-USF Instructors

What are breakout rooms? Breakout rooms are sessions that are split off from the main Zoom meeting. They allow the participants to meet in smaller groups and are separate audio and video windows from the main session. Breakout rooms can be used for collaboration and peer-to-peer discussions.

Tips – Make sure participants have the latest Zoom software installed on their device before class. Send the help link to them before class, Updating your Zoom software. This will ensure they have all the latest features. Most, but not all devices support breakout rooms. Zoom help provides more detail.

Why use breakout rooms. Participants relate that it is easier to chat and discuss in small groups. Conversation is more natural and richer.

Breakout rooms is **one tool** in the Zoom toolbox. Be sure to have a purpose and clearly articulate the reason and expectations for participating. (See Stanford U. techniques and tips below.)

Caution: If someone is hesitant or unsure about being put into a breakout room, do not assign them. Or let them know they can leave at any time and join the main group if they feel uncomfortable.

Getting ready to use. Before using breakout rooms, be sure to do these steps:
1. Verify that you have enabled breakout rooms in your profile settings. To enable the breakout room feature:
    -   Sign in to your Zoom.us account
    -   In the navigation menu, click **Settings**.
    -   Scroll down to **In Meeting (Advanced)** section options. Navigate to the **Breakout Room** option and verify that the setting is enabled.
        If the setting is disabled, click the toggle to enable it. If a verification dialog displays, choose **Turn On** to verify the change.

2. Verify that you have the most current Zoom software on your desktop. If you do not know how to do that, please visit, Updating your Zoom software https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362233-Downloading-the-latest-Zoom-update

3. If you have not participated in a breakout room, I recommend that you read this short article before class to become familiar with the experience your students will see: https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115005769646-Participating-in-breakout-rooms

4. If you have not hosted a breakout room, I recommend that you view this short video ahead of time:
https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476313

Setting the Stage

Decide why you want to use breakout rooms. Have a purpose in mind that enhances the objectives of your class. Examples include: small group literary discussions, foreign language conversation practice, creative writing small group exercise, ice breakers.

- **Set expectations** with the participants. Why are you using breakout rooms? Have a purpose and communicate the reason. (See Stanford tips below.)
- Put in **writing** what your want them to do (white board, chat, or screen share) ++save work
    - What is the "assignment"? How much time will they have? Who will be note taker? Who will "report out" to the main group? What do you want them to report back about? E.g., summarize, most surprising thing, highlights, discuss 2 things you discovered…)
- If it is the first time for anyone, do a quick practice run so everyone is comfortable.
- Remind them to **accept the room assignment** on the pop-up window. If they do not accept, they stay in the main room. Unless you turn on the option for them to automatically go to their room.

Helpful reminders to participants:

- You may send "broadcast messages to the room."
- You may pop into their room to see how they are doing to answer any questions.
- The room can call for **help** and you will pop into the room. **Help** might be in the form of a question icon, or under the 3 dots (more) menu.
    - Note: Co-hosts, or people with account administrator privileges may not see the Help function. Just have someone else in the room ask for help. Or leave the room temporarily to "visit" the host in the main room!
- The rooms have all the normal Zoom functions, including chat and the ability to record their room's session.
- Even though a time limit, the participants can leave the room if they are finished or wish to leave the room for any reason.
- Remind them its ok if they are uncomfortable with being sent off to a separate Zoom room. They can choose to leave the room or opt out of being placed into a room.

Planning and Starting

Plan the details beforehand. Ask yourself:
- How many breakout rooms do I need?
- How many participants should each room have?
- Most importantly, should I manually assign participants to rooms or allow Zoom to do this randomly for me?

There's an optional feature called "Move all participants into breakout rooms automatically". It works well and I recommend it. Without using that option, when you (as the host) click to "Open All Rooms", users have to acknowledge by pressing a button on their screen to move to their room. Some users on mobile devices have had problems getting into their breakout room which is solved with the 'automatic' option.
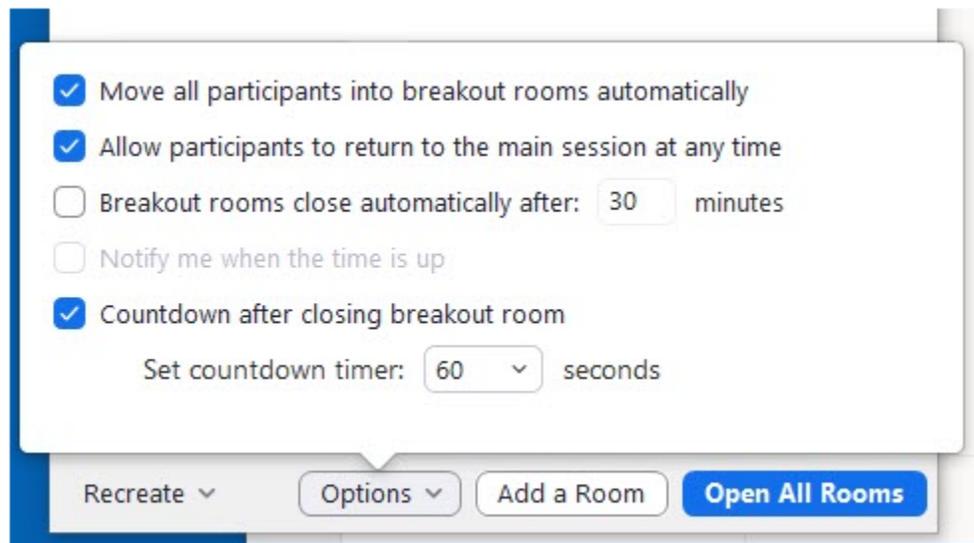
After clicking the green **"Breakout Rooms"** button**,** you will be shown the eligible number of participants and asked how many rooms you would like to create. From here, you may either allow Zoom to assign your students to rooms **"Automatically,"** or assign the students to each room yourself **"Manually."** You can also let **participants choose a room, but use this option carefully. It can be disruptive for people to come and go,** and even leave people in a room by themselves. **(**Note – host does not get assigned.)

In this example, you will see the first breakout room pop up. It is set to automatically (randomly) assign the 43 meeting participants into 3 rooms. The Zoom window shows have many participants will be in each room. **Adjust the settings** as needed.

Click *Create*. **This does not start the rooms!**
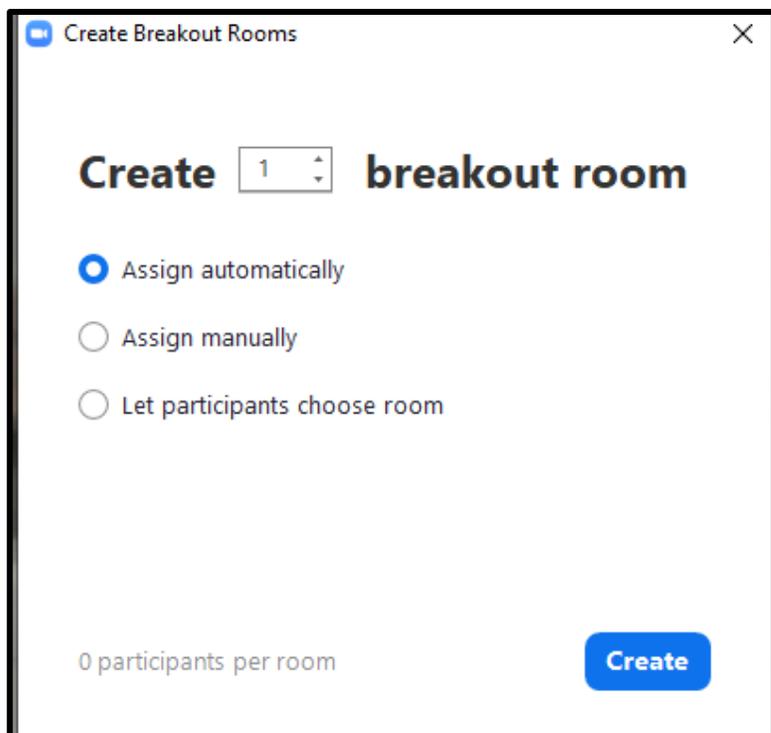
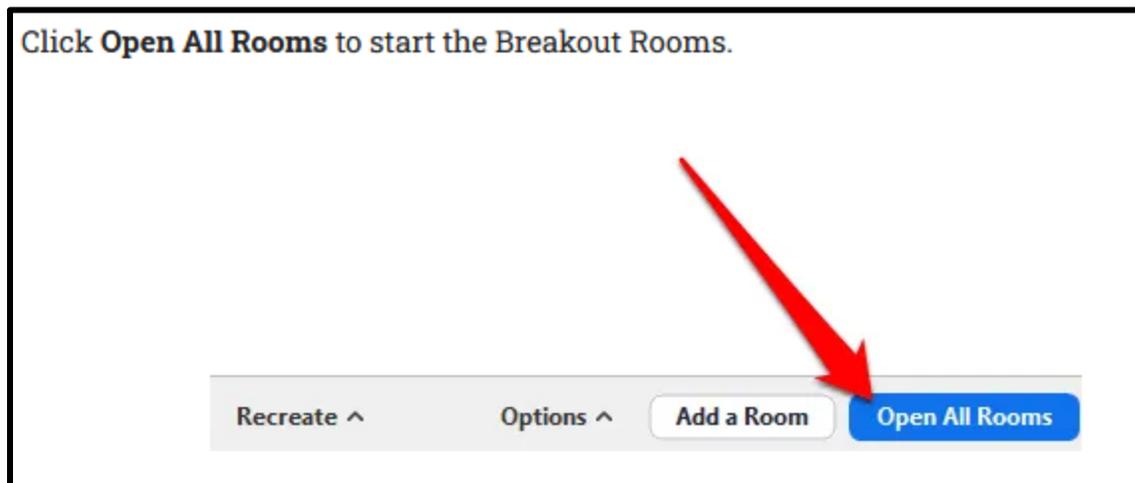Continue to next screen for **Options** – and to open the rooms.
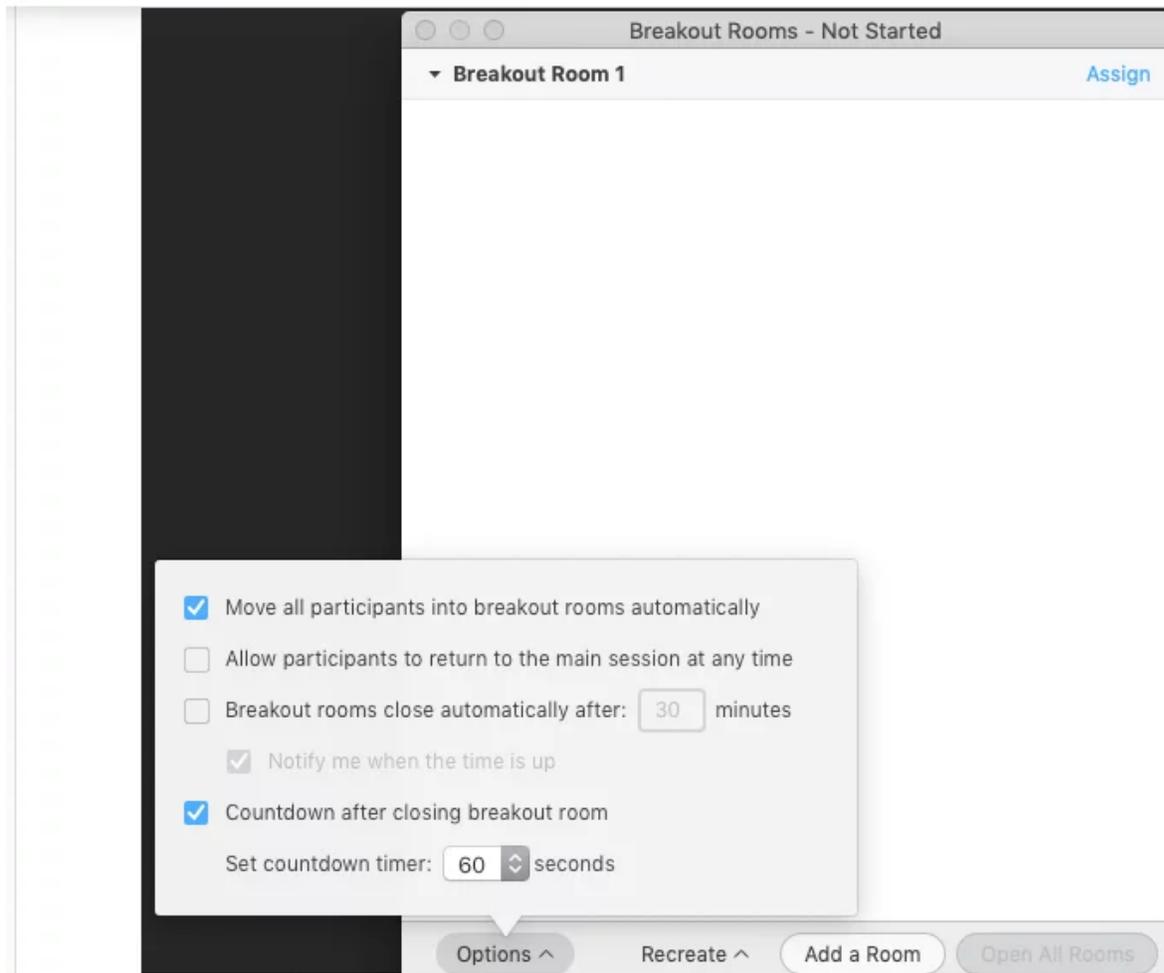
Selecting the **"Options"** button will allow you to choose your various breakout room options / meeting settings. **Important – review the options so you are not surprised with the default choices!**
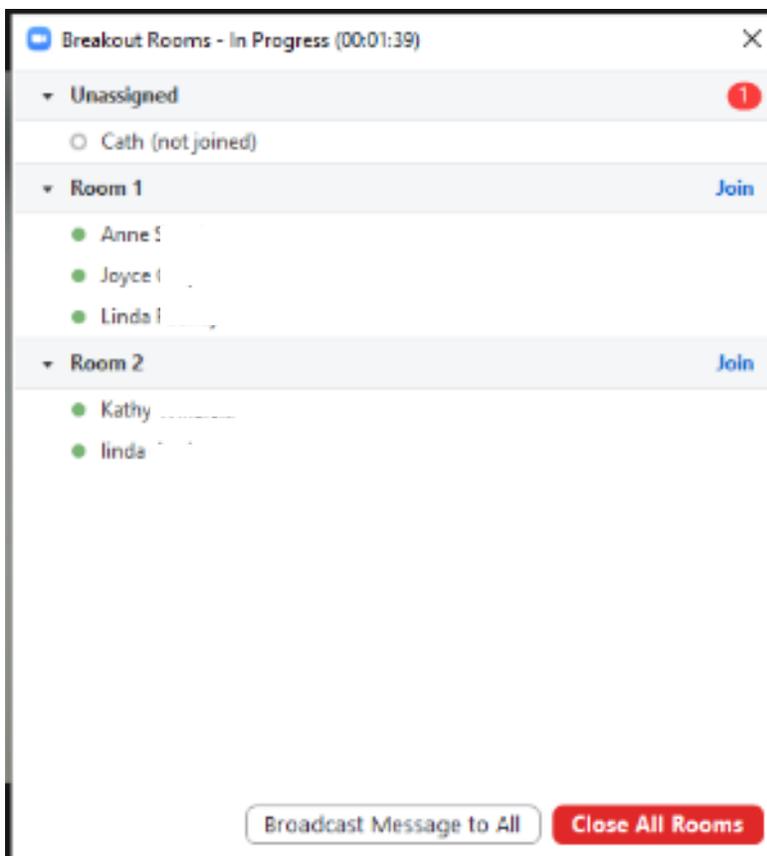
Here you can:

- Set breakout rooms to close after a certain amount of time if desired.
- Decide how much control participants can have over their time in these sessions.
- Set a countdown timer to inform participants of the time remaining in a session. The participants will be informed when the session time expires or when the host closes it.
- Selecting **"Recreate"** will shuffle breakout room participants for future breakout rooms into any order you choose.

When you are satisfied, click **Open All Rooms.**

Click **Open All Rooms** to start the Breakout Rooms.

Recreate ∧   Options ∧   Add a Room   **Open All Rooms**

Success! Green dot lets you know participants are in their rooms!

Breakout Rooms - In Progress (00:01:39)   ✕

▾ Unassigned   ①

○ Cath (not joined)

▾ Room 1   Join

● Anne S
● Joyce (
● Linda I

▾ Room 2   Join

● Kathy
● linda

Broadcast Message to All   **Close All Rooms**

From here you can visit a room clicking the **Join** feature, **Broadcast a message to All** rooms or **Close All rooms.** If you set a timer, the rooms will close automatically.

What to Do While Your Participants Are Away

Locate and be comfortable with the instructor tools. Some of your options are:

- Swapping participants around to balance the rooms.
- Sending broadcast messages to the rooms (reminders, encouragements!)
- Popping in to visit rooms
- Respond to requests for help from rooms

When the get back, ask how they found the experience. Complete the assignment you gave them.
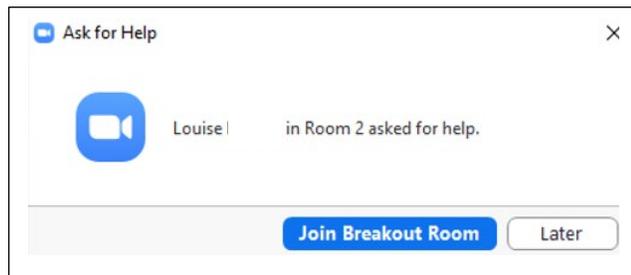
Repeat. If you are doing more than one breakout room, you have several options. You can recreate the exact same situation as your original or make changes.

Important – To change the breakout rooms, click **Options** (or gear wheel) before opening the rooms. Otherwise it will "repeat" the previous same rooms and settings.

This covers the Basic features. To learn more, visit the resources links. Practice. Practice. Practice!

Working with your Zoom coach. If you have an assistant, be sure to consult with them ahead of time about your plan. It may be helpful to have your assistant help with creating and managing the breakout rooms, especially if you have a large group with many rooms.

+++++

This handout covers the **basic operations**. Zoom help goes into more detail about advanced features. You may wish to explore these once you are accustomed to the basic functions.

Managing Zoom breakout rooms (includes video)
https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476313
Enabling Zoom breakout rooms (includes video)
https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476093-Enabling-breakout-rooms

All You Need to Know About Using Zoom Breakout Rooms

https://blog.zoom.us/using-zoom-breakout-rooms/

Stanford Teach Commons

Pedagogic techniques for successful breakout rooms

- **Assign a clear task for students to accomplish**, such as brainstorming, coming to a position on a set of questions, etc.
- **Match the amount of time and number of students to the task.** Depending on the activity, create groups of 3 to 8 people. The time for a breakout depends on the activity. Try different lengths and get feedback from students to find the optimal length of time.
- **Have students take notes collaboratively.** A shared Google doc is a great way to have students collaboratively take notes that they can easily share.
- **Do not change group composition too often. S**ome students have reported not enjoying breakout rooms because they are not able to get to know their classmates when instructors randomly assign new groups each time. Consider the frequency of class sessions, course size, goals and objectives when setting or mixing up groups.
- **Consider if you will monitor group discussions.** As host, you can move freely between breakout rooms, but can only be in one room at a time. Circulate through the rooms checking in with the students. Or you may prefer to turn off your microphone and video and simply observe.

Supporting students in breakout rooms

- **Share instructions for the breakout activity where students can see them.** Copy instructions into the Zoom chat or in a shared document, as students, will not see the shared screen in the main room while in a breakout room.
- **Assign roles to students.** Assigning roles will help students start the conversation and support equitable participation. Possible roles include first-to-speak, note-taker, reporter, timekeeper, equity monitor, or questioner/devil's advocate.
- **Randomly assign roles or select students with an equitable prompt.** This may have the added benefit of acting as an icebreaker. Examples include assigning or selecting the person: whose first name is closest to the end of the alphabet, is wearing the shortest sleeves, whose birthday is coming up the soonest, whose hometown is closest to campus, etc.
- **Let students know how to ask for help after they join their breakout rooms.** Tell students about the "Ask for Help" button at the bottom of their breakout room windows. This will notify the Zoom host that someone is requesting help and the host can join or send a TA to the breakout room. If you do not have enough people to send to different breakout rooms tell students to send a representative back to the main room for help. Just be sure to select "Allow participants to return to the main session at any time" when creating the rooms

- **Teach students how to share their screens and use the whiteboard feature.** Assign a student within the breakout room to share their screen. They might share their view of a document or use the whiteboard feature in Zoom. Once sharing a screen, they might use the annotation tool or save an image of the whiteboard.
- **Give students the option to opt-out of breakout rooms.** Zoom fatigue can make online group work very unproductive and sometimes stressful for some students. Perhaps instruct students to send a private chat message to you if they need accommodation or deselect "Move all participants into breakout rooms automatically" when creating the rooms and allow them to choose how they want to participate.