Preparing for your first web conference

Using this guide

This guide is designed to help you prepare for and connect to your first web conference. Work through the guide from start to finish. You may also find it useful to refer to this guide when preparing for subsequent web conferences.

What is a web conference?

Web conferences are meetings or classes held at a set dates and times in a web rooms on the internet. The University of Tasmania (UTAS) uses a product called Blackboard Collaborate to make web conferences possible.

What might happen during a web conference?

Web conference sessions are managed by a Moderator. The Moderator's role is similar to that of a person chairing a meeting or a tutor teaching a class. They are responsible for directing the activities that take place during a web conferencing session. The Moderator might, for example, use a pointer to indicate important points on a whiteboard, take you on a tour of a website or ask you to take part in a poll. The activities that take place during a session will vary depending on the number of participants, the aims of the session and the Moderator's preferences.

During a web conference, you should be able to communicate with the Moderator and fellow participants using a microphone and speakers and/or a text chat feature.

What do I need to do to prepare for a web conferencing session?

The Moderator should let you know the date and time of your web conferencing session. They should also provide you with a link (web address) that will connect you to web room that will be used for the session. The Moderator may include the link in an email that they send to you. Alternatively, they may add the link to their unit's MyLO site. If you cannot locate a link to the session, contact the Moderator (for example, your lecturer, tutor or meeting chairperson).

- **At least 48 hours before your first session**, **ensure that you have appropriate audio equipment.**
  You must do this so that you can listen to and contribute to the session. Refer to **Audio Options** on page 2 for further information.

- **At least 24 hours before your first session**, **set up your computer and test your connection.**
  Refer to **Setting up your computer** on page 2 for instructions. Working through the set up process early will give you time to seek help with any connection difficulties. You may also like to take this opportunity

to become familiar with Elluminate and its features.

- **At least 20 minutes before your session, enter the web room and set up your audio.**
  Refer to **Entering a web room** (page 3) and **Using the Audio Setup Wizard** (page 5) for instructions. **It is essential that you enter the web room before your session is due to start. Arriving late without prior arrangement can be disruptive to other participants.**

Audio options

To speak and listen to others during a web conference you can use a headset, **or** headphones and your computer's inbuilt microphone.

Headsets combine a microphone and speakers in one piece that you wear over your head. As the microphone is positioned close to your mouth, it picks up more of your voice and less background noise. Headsets come with one of two kinds of connection points:

Audio jacks
These have one connection point for a microphone and one for speakers.

USB
USB headsets have a single USB connector.

You can purchase either type of headset from around $25 at office supply and technology stores.

Combining a computer's inbuilt microphone with headphones can be quite effective. However, be aware that the quality of inbuilt microphones can be quite poor and some computers don't have inbuilt microphones at all. If you must use your computer's inbuilt microphone, use headphones to hear sound. This will prevent other participants from hearing annoying feedback or echoes from your computer's internal speakers.

Setting up your computer

> ⓘ **If you will be using a variety of different computers to access web conferencing sessions, you will need to repeat this process with each computer.**

☑ Plug your headset or headphones into your computer.

☑ Ensure that your computer is connected to the internet.

☑ Open a web browser application (e.g. Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Safari etc.) and go to: http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/Support/Support-for-Blackboard-Collaborate.aspx and then click on the **First Time Users Getting Started** link.

☑ You should now see the **First Time Users** web page. Click on the **Blackboard Collaborate Web Conferencing** link.

☑ During **Step 1** you can check which version of Java you have installed. If your system is configured correctly, you should see two green ticks, one for your **Operating System** and one for your **Java Webstart Version.** If your version of Java is too old* or Java is not detected on your computer, you will need download the latest version of Java from http://www.java.com/en/ and install it.

☑ In **Step 2**, you can configure your computer, connection and audio by visiting the **Configuration room**. Your connection is successful if you can enter the room and set up your audio. Before you enter the Configuration Room, you may be asked to give permission to run the software (click **Run/Yes/OK/Allow** to let it run). You will also probably be asked to set a connection speed. If you are on a fast broadband or wireless connection, choose the **Wireless 300kbps** option. If your connection is slow or unreliable, try the **56kbps** option.
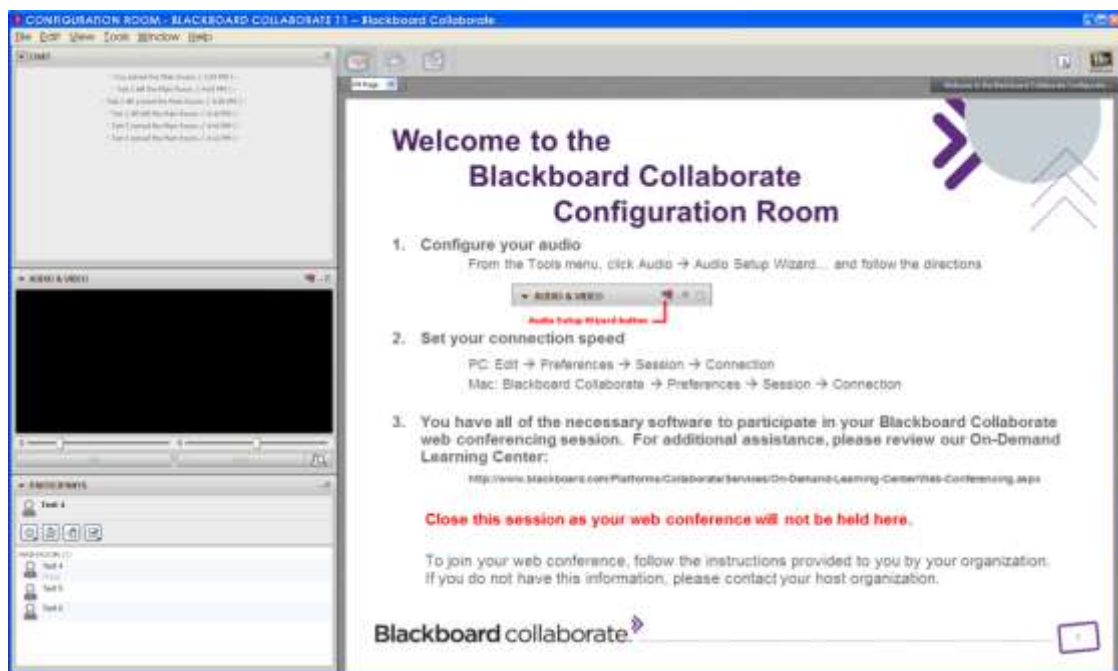
Follow the instruction on the Whiteboard of the **Configuration Room** to configure your audio.

> **Problems accessing the *Configuration room***
>
> If you experience difficulties connecting to the Configuration room, refer to our web page for information and solutions to common problems.

If your connection to the *Configuration room* is successful, it is likely that your connection to other web rooms will be successful too. If your connection or audio set up is not successful, you may find it helpful to refer to **Step 4** which has links to support resources.

☑ **Step 3** contains more information about using Blackboard Collaborate. You may find it useful to view some of these materials to familiarise yourself with the system prior to your first session.

Entering a web room

Allow at least 20 minutes to complete these steps before your session is scheduled to begin. This should give you adequate time to enter the web room and set up your audio. It also gives you time to contact the session Moderator or Blackboard Collaborate Support if you experience difficulties. **Do not expect the Moderator to respond to calls or emails once the session has commenced.**

To enter the web room for your session, follow these instructions:

☑ Ensure that your headset/headphones are connected to your computer and that your computer is connected to the internet.

☑ Locate the link to the web room that will be used for the session. The link may have been emailed to you **OR** it will be located inside a folder on your unit's MyLO site. To enter the web room, click on the link or copy and paste the link into your browser's address bar. Doing this should take you to a *Blackboard Collaborate Login* web page. (Blackboard Collaborate is the new name for Elluminate.)

You will now need to Log In to connect to the session. When you do this, use your first name and surname so that others can identify you during the session, then click on the *Log in* button.

☑ Once you have logged in, you will probably see a message saying 'Java Starting' (this sometimes does not appear – don't be alarmed!) This means that you are in the process of downloading the files for the session to run. Be patient as this can take some time.

You may receive warning messages during this process. They can relate to blocking a website from displaying content, permission to download a file, blocking active content, invalid security certificates, or running an application. In these cases, you should be given the option to answer with something like *Display Blocked Content* **OR** *Agree* **OR** *Run* **OR** *Download file* **OR** *Continue to Website*. For more information, [click here](#).

☑ The Blackboard Collaborate window will open and you will be prompted to enter your connection speed. Select the appropriate speed for your connection and click on the *OK* button. As a general guide, if you are using a dial-up connection (you have to disconnect your phone to access the internet), select the *56Kbps* option. If you are using a wireless connection or broadband, select the *Wireless (300Kbps)* option. For information on selecting the appropriate connection speed, [click here](#).

☑ You will now see your name appear in the *Participants* window. Don't worry if you are the only person there to start with. Others will join the room closer to time. You will now need to set up your audio using the *Audio Setup Wizard*. This will ensure that you can speak and listen during the session.

Using the Audio Setup Wizard

Open the *Audio Setup Wizard* by clicking on *Tools*, then select *Audio* and *Audio Setup Wizard* (see image on right). The *Audio Setup Wizard* will open. Work through the steps shown in the *Wizard* to configure your audio for the session. If you have difficulty setting up your audio, please visit our [web page](#).

Selecting Audio Input and Output Devices in the Audio Setup Wizard

Depending on the computer that you are using, you may have several *audio input* (speakers) and *output* (microphone) *devices* available to choose from. You will need to choose one of each when you work through the *Audio Setup Wizard*. Experiment with different device options until you find a combination that works for you.

Communicating during a session

There are four methods of communicating during a web conferencing session. The session Moderator should tell you which methods they want you to use as well as when and how to use them.

Emoticons (see image on right)

Use these buttons to indicate whether you agree/disagree, are happy/ill-at-ease or to give applause. You can find a list of available Emoticons in the Participants window by clicking on the button to the far right and selecting an emoticon from the list. Your emoticon will be shown to other participants in the Chat window.

Chat window (shown above)

Use this feature to type questions, comments or feedback. Always use appropriate language – no swearing or put downs. Remember that the Moderator can see all chat messages.

Talk (microphone button) – Use this button to turn your microphone on so others can hear you speak. Use the same button to turn your microphone off when you have finished speaking. It is polite to wait until you are prompted by the Moderator, before turning your microphone on. The appearance of the button will change depending on whether the microphone is on or off.

Whiteboard tools – These tools appear to the left of the *Whiteboard*. They allow you to interact with the contents of the board in different ways. Your Moderator may direct you to use the tools in different ways.

What do I do if something goes wrong?

From time to time, you may experience difficulty accessing a web conferencing session, configuring your audio or retaining a good connection to a session. If you are experiencing difficulties, contact your Moderator to let them know that you are experiencing difficulties, either by email or, if you are in the session, using the Chat feature.

To find solutions to common problems, visit the Blackboard Collaborate Support site at:

http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/Support/Support-for-Blackboard-Collaborate.aspx

You can search the **Knowledge Base** for solutions to common problems. Alternatively, contact Blackboard Technical Support by following the link on the Support site or by **telephoning 1800 267 338**.