

Strategies and Best Practices for Taking Attendance (Fall 2020)

Clarifying the Difference between Attendance and Participation

At the beginning of the semester, be certain that you understand your supervising professor's expectations and preferences for tracking student attendance so that you can communicate this information early and consistently to your students. You may ask for this clarification in a staff meeting, over email, or in office hours. Make sure you repeat the attendance policy included in your supervising professor's syllabus in your own course policies sheet and/or on your class Canvas page to ensure that students have multiple means of accessing this information.

Remember to clarify in your Course Policies sheets how you **differentiate between attendance and participation**. If you expect that students will actively engage with you and their peers through comments, collaborative group work, and/or assignments, indicate that simply showing up for a class will not ensure full credit for participation. In some classes, attendance may be mandatory but may not factor into students' final grades. A good rule of thumb is to ask students to let you know before (or at least as soon as possible after) class when they are absent. This will help ensure that you are both on the same page about the students' number of absences.

Makeup Policies

Ask your professor if students may have make-up opportunities if they miss an online synchronous or in-person session. It is imperative that your policies are consistent with your supervising professor and peer TAs. If your professor permits you to offer make-up opportunities, consider using the following questions to jumpstart this team conversation:

1. Can a student watch the recorded version of the synchronous lecture/discussion session/lab and then submit a 1-2 page debrief in order to obtain participation and attendance credit for the day? If so, what should be the turnaround time for the student to submit the reflection (i.e. one week after the video is posted?) Barring extenuating circumstances, should there be a limit on how many times a student can do this over the course of the semester?
2. What, if any, safe makeup opportunities might be available for in person sessions?



Attention and Participation in Zoom

When using Zoom, you might consider using the **Attendee Attention Tracking feature** to help track whether participants are focused on your presentation or group discussion. Here's a [link for more information about this tool](#). In the interest of full disclosure, you may wish to tell your students that you have access to this information in an effort to proactively foster attention and participation.

Maintaining Attendance Records

No matter how you chose to take and track attendance, be certain that you **keep multiple records of your attendance records and grades** in case you lose your main copy. Many TAs will keep an electronic copy (i.e. an Excel spreadsheet) and a hard copy (i.e. a grade sheet or gradebook). A good rule of thumb is to update the attendance page on Canvas for your class(es) within 24 hours after you teach. This will help prevent misunderstandings or disputes down the line and will help students accurately track their own attendance patterns. This is especially important in cases when your department and/or professor enforce a strict attendance policy.

CLIPs Class Info Pages

Class and Photo Rosters

Through the CLIPs Class Info page maintained by the Office of the Registrar, you can access your **Official Class Roster and your Photo Roster**. If you wish, you can download these documents to familiarize yourself with the names and faces of your students before the first day of class. Please note that this information is protected by FERPA and you should never post or share this information with anyone (including peer TAs and substitute teachers). Please also give your students the chance to share their pronouns and preferred names or nicknames with you when they introduce themselves so that you do not accidentally misname or misgender any of your students.

Clips Permissions and Support

If you are unable to access your course page, please reach out to your supervising professor. Some TAs may not have access privileges based on the nature of their appointments. If this is the case, your professor may be able to help you access relevant information regarding your course roster. You may also [contact CLIPs directly](#) for additional support and clarifications.

Absence/Failing Reports

As a courtesy and if necessary, you may submit an **Absence/Failing Report** (<https://registrar.utexas.edu/staff/clips>) for a student nearing the semester absence limit through your course CLIPs page. If a student is permitted 5 absences before their grade is affected or they automatically fail the course, consider sending an absence/failing report after 2 or 3 absences. You want to leave enough of a grace period so that a student can avoid reaching the limit even if they cannot prevent some future absences. This absence/failing report will generate an official email from the university that will be sent directly to the student and his/her/their advisor who will then reach out to the student to touch base. Please note that the absence/failing report will not show up on a student's record or transcript. It is much better to send a report and hope that the student reaches out to you than to wait until your student has missed too many classes to succeed in the course.

Services for Students with Documented Disabilities (SSD) and Attendance Accommodations

Please be advised that the Services for Students with Disabilities Office recommends leniency with attendance if possible given the high stress associated with current global events and the technical and scheduling difficulties associated with online learning. Though you cannot set the course attendance policy, make sure you stay in close communication with your supervising professor so that you know how to proceed if a student is absent often. Please note that **some students may have accommodations through the Services for Students with Disabilities office** that require you to be flexible with regard to attendance. If a student or your supervising professor (who has access to accommodation letters) shares this information with you, you are legally obligated to meet this accommodation. You are not permitted to ask the student to share their diagnosis or explain why they need this accommodation. If you have questions about a student's accommodations or how to best meet these accommodations, please contact the students' SSD coordinator. This contact information can be found on the student's official accommodation letter. Please touch base with your supervising professor if you require this information and do not have access to it.

Taking Attendance

Asynchronous

- If your students watch asynchronous lectures on Canvas, ask your professor to include reading check-ins staggered throughout the video to ensure that students are watching the entire lecture. These check-ins, which might take the form of a poll or brief, one-question quiz, are ways to assess attendance and continued engagement during the session.
- If you moderate discussion boards, provide clear guidelines regarding how often students must post, how long their posts should be, and what the deadline(s) for their posts is. For example, you may say that by Friday at 11:59 CST a student must post a

reflection (approximately 200 words) and respond to at least one peer's post (approximately 100-150 words). Here timely participation and attendance go hand in hand. A good rule of thumb is to respond to each of your student's posts as soon as you are able so that students know you are reading and engaging with their contributions.

Synchronous (Online)

- Be certain that students are logged in and using their UT-affiliated Zoom accounts. This will ensure that students do not have any issues signing into class or accessing necessary polls, registration features, or content.
- Consider using the "Registration" feature when setting up Zoom class sessions to track attendance. Students will need to register to enter the session, and you will be able to revisit and track their attendance this way. Here's [a link for more information](#).
 - You can also generate meeting reports for registration and polling in Zoom [by following this process](#).
- Consider designing a brief activity/icebreaker each day that uses students' names as an interactive way to take attendance.
- If your class is small enough, you might take attendance by flipping through the "Gallery" page(s) on Zoom and marking down the names of present students in an Excel sheet and/or gradebook.
- Consider using a Zoom poll or linking out to an external site (i.e. Slido, Canvas Instapoll, Google form) at the beginning of class and asking students to respond to a question in order to confirm their attendance. You may design this question simply as a check-in (i.e. "Are you here today? Yes/No") or as a short written reflection, word cloud, or multiple-choice quiz to help jump start discussion (i.e. "What are three words you would use to describe this character in the novel?" or "Which of the following characters was present at the trial in Chapter 3?"). If you select this method, please ensure that you require students to enter their names before they submit a response so that you will have a full list of present students rather than an anonymous list or number of students.
- Consider asking students to type a quick "hello" or "present" or discussion question in chat when they arrive on Zoom. When you have a moment (i.e. as you wait for all your students to arrive or later in class when students are working in breakout rooms) scroll through the chat history and mark down the names of students who are present based on their comment. If you are unable to do this during class time, you can download a transcript of chat afterwards in order to check attendance.
 - If possible, start your Zoom class session 5-10 minutes early. This will allow students to congregate and chat as they might before class starts in person while giving you a jumpstart on taking attendance in real time.
 - Make it clear from the first day of class how you will assess attendance over Zoom. Consider, for example, whether you will require students to use their video function for the length of class in order to be counted as present for the day. Remember that all students may not have access to a camera or wifi reliable enough to support video conferencing. If you will require students to use their videos, make sure you share a technology accessibility survey before the first



day of class to ensure that all students will have access to the technology and wifi they need. Do not penalize those who cannot use their video feature, but make it clear to your class that you expect them to use this feature if possible.

- Consider how you will address some of the following questions regarding attendance on Zoom and be clear and consistent in communicating these expectations to your students:
 - Will a student's attendance or participation grade be affected if they turn off their video once class is under way? How about if they wander away from the computer?
 - Will students be required to speak at least once (either verbally or through a written comment in the chat) in order to receive participation points for the day?
 - In what ways will you assess participation in the main Zoom room and in breakout rooms?
 - If a student needs to leave class early or consistently arrives late, will this affect their attendance and/or participation? Set very clear guidelines in your course policies sheet at the beginning of the semester and remain consistent. Here's an example policy based on a 50 minute discussion section: If a student is late by 5 or more minutes and/or leaves class early by 5 or more minutes a total of three times over the course of the semester, this will equal one absence. Email your student as soon as possible if this happens to avoid misunderstandings at the end of the semester. What is your make up policy for the semester?
- If you are required to take attendance for your supervising professor in a synchronous, online lecture, develop a system with your peer TAs to make this system as streamlined as possible. Here are some ways you might take attendance in real time:
 - Link out to a Google form or website each lecture period and ask students to fill out the following information: 1) Student First and Last Name; 2) TA First and Last Name; 3) Email Address and/or eid. Check the digest after class to identify which students signed in.
 - Ask your supervising professor to make each of the TAs co-hosts during the lecture. Then, ask your students to send you a quick message in chat at the top of the lecture to let you know they are present. Make it clear to students that it's their responsibility to check in with you in order to confirm their attendance.
 - If possible, scroll through the "gallery" page(s) during lecture to double check your attendance records. This is a great way to confirm attendance but may not be the most efficient way to track attendance alone.



In-Person

- In order to practice safe social distancing, avoid taking attendance in any way that involves shared papers, writing utensils, or proximity (i.e. a sign-in sheet). Consider instead projecting information that students will need to access an external site (i.e. Slido, Canvas Instapoll, Google form) at the front of class and asking students to respond to a question in order to confirm their attendance. Remember to require students to sign in with their names so that you will have an accurate report of who has responded to the prompt.
 - You may consider generating a QR code for a Google attendance form and projecting the code on the board at the front of the classroom. Ask students to scan the code as they enter for the day to sign in and confirm their attendance. Here is [a link with more information about how this process works.](#)
- Ask students to create, keep, and place name and pronoun tents in front of them each time the class convenes. (Students may use folded paper, manila folders, or index card as long as their name is legible). This will allow you to still call on students by name to facilitate discussion and will prompt you as you take attendance at the beginning of class by ticking off the student's name in your grade sheet, gradebook, Canvas page, or Excel spreadsheet. For the sake of consistency, you might ask students to sit in the same seat or area over the course of the semester in order to help expedite roll call and facilitate participation.
- If you prefer to take roll the old-fashioned way, consider going around the room and asking students to share their preferred name and last name. Please note that this method may be difficult since everyone will be wearing a mask and will not be able to rely on lip reading if necessary. As always, announce loudly and clearly. Repeat the student's name back to them to ensure that you heard them correctly and to help students who may need to hear the name spoken again.