

Comparison

Blackboard Release 6 has created two tools within the Collaboration area: the Virtual Classroom and Lightweight Chat. The Virtual Classroom may load and perform slowly. As such, instructors may wish to use the Lightweight Chat whenever possible. These tools may be used separately or together but their features may not be combined. The following describes the functions of these Collaboration tools.

Virtual Classroom Features

Feature	Description	Tips for Instructors
Chat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Virtual Classroom is a synchronous tool; that is, participants log in and participate simultaneously. ▶ Participants type messages in the message box and press the enter key to submit. ▶ Submitted message - prefaced by the submitter's name and time stamped - appears for all participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Discussion is not threaded and may be more difficult to follow. Chat works well for brainstorming or if format is well structured ahead of time. Guidelines for the chat session may be developed ahead of time and posted at the of the session or posted elsewhere in the course. ▶ If text to be typed is greater than a sentence or two, break text into short blocks. Type "more..." at the end of each block and "end" when complete to enhance the continuity of discussion. ▶ Encourage learners to type up longer thought pieces ahead of time. These can be pasted into the chat textbox or posted in email or on the discussion board before the chat session. ▶ Learners with superior typing skills and a faster connection may have an advantage.

Feature	Description	Tips for Instructors
Chat, continued		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The display wants to size for screens at 1024 x 768 pixels. If your screen is not set at that resolution, you may find that the chat text entry panel falls outside of the screen. In this case, simply drag the screen to see the tool components. An alternative is to select View > and Show in Separate Frame option. ▶ Sessions may be recorded, paused, or bookmarked using the Record Menu in the Menu Bar located across the top of the window.
Question and Answer (Q&A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Individual participants may ask questions. Instructors may provide public or private answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Inbox is used to receive and answer questions. An alert will show next to the Question Inbox designating the number of waiting questions. While instructors may display all questions (answered and unanswered), it is recommended to select the Show Unanswered Only option to avoid possible confusion. ▶ Once a participant sends a question, s/he will not be able to see the question until the instructor posts the answer. Then both are viewable under the Question Inbox. ▶ Learners will see the instructor's Q&A tools as grey-out icons. This may cause confusion and the instructor should be prepared to coach learners on using this tool.
Whiteboard - Draw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Contains drawing tools. ▶ Can type text as well. ▶ Participants can edit/modify and add drawing pages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Font size, styles, color, and line width can be set. ▶ Shapes can be brought to the front or sent to the back. ▶ To draw and end a line, hold down mouse until finished, then let up. ▶ To draw and end a shape, hold down mouse and click for each line. Double click when finished. ▶ Whiteboard drawings must be created during the pertinent session and cannot be saved from session to session. ▶ If an archive is being recorded, a snapshot of the Whiteboard image may be created by selecting Snapshot button in Menu Bar at the top of the window. This snapshot will be added to the archive.

Feature	Description	Tips for Instructors
Whiteboard - Display Pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participants can create pages that can be drawn upon. ▶ Participants can add and display pages as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participants may add and draw on pages once the session has been enabled. Participants may “turn” the pages by selecting the page and the Display option. ▶ The pages will not be included in the archive unless a snapshot of the Whiteboard image is created by selecting Snapshot button in Menu Bar at the top of the window.
Group Browser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Participants can type URLs in the Address box. ▶ Sites may be either previewed or displayed to the entire group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Web addresses need to be entered with the http:// preface. ▶ Participants may navigate in the site they have browsed to, however the chat interface and navigation bars disappear after the second level of navigation. In order to return to the chat room, you will need to use the Back option that appears at the top of the menu when the user has clicked the right mouse button.
Break Out Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Allows a sub-set of learners to enter a private chat area and use the virtual classroom tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ During the conduct of a session a sub-set of learners may create a breakout session which allows the self-selected group to enter a private virtual classroom. ▶ There is no carry over of materials from the breakout session into the main virtual classroom area. To leave the breakout session and return to the main virtual classroom, the learners need simply to close the breakout session window.

Lightweight Chat Features

Feature	Description	Tips for Instructors
Chat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Virtual Classroom is a synchronous tool; that is, participants log in and participate simultaneously. ▶ Participants type messages in the message box and press the enter key to submit. ▶ Submitted message - prefaced by the submitter's name and time stamped - appears for all participants in the text box above. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Discussion is not threaded and may be more difficult to follow. Chat works well for brainstorming or if format is well structured ahead of time. Guidelines for the session may be developed ahead of time and pasted into the chat session at the beginning or posted elsewhere in the course. ▶ If text to be typed is greater than a sentence or two, break text into short blocks. Type "more..." at the end of each block and "end" when complete to enhance the continuity of discussion. ▶ Encourage learners to type up longer thought pieces ahead of time. These can be pasted into the chat textbox or posted in email or on the discussion board before the chat session. ▶ Learners with superior typing skills and a faster connection may have an advantage.

Settings

In both Collaboration tools you have the option of setting:

- The name of the Session
- The dates and times of availability
- The collaboration tool to be used (Virtual Classroom vs. Lightweight Chat)
- If archives are visible to learners