

For Instructors & Faculty: Guidelines for Student Camera Use in Classrooms

Below are some guidelines for students using cameras in online synchronous classrooms that are intended to help you navigate some of the following questions:

Is it ok for students to choose not to turn on their cameras? Should I ask students to turn on/off cameras? When and why? What is the most ethical way to communicate about it?

There is no set answer to any of these questions. Much depends on the class dynamic, you and your students, and the situation. That said, it is important to recognize that there are numerous reasons a student might not activate their camera during an online class--ranging from technological issues to discomfort appearing via camera. As a starting point, check in with your students to learn more:

1. Ask the Student:

- a. If a student doesn't use their camera in a synchronous class, **consider asking the student why after the class**. You might alleviate their worries or clarify their concerns. It might also open opportunities for alternative student participation (see pages 2-3 under "suggestions").

2. Ask/Address the Class:

- a. **If you have many students opting not to turn their cameras on, you might address this with the class**. If a class culture of students turning their cameras off is negatively impacting class dynamics, you might state your preference and reasons for people participating with their camera on.
- b. **Stress safety protocols** (e.g., Zoom privacy features), then ask people to reach out to you if they are uncomfortable or unable to use their cameras.
- c. **Consider an anonymous survey**. You might learn about your students' concerns, then address them without compromising student privacy.
- d. **Use or modify the below, student-facing talking points** (pages 2-3).
Page 2 offers accountability, transferable skills, and classroom cultures.
Page 3 offers student resources for online learning and engagement.

Student-Facing Talking Points: Cameras & Online Classrooms

There is no program or university policy around camera use. This page and the following are talking points that might help you and your students navigate camera use in online classrooms. They are organized first as queries with follow-up suggestions you can make.

1. Accountability and Power Dynamics with Classmates:

- a. *Query:* How is camera use part of sharing respect and accountability with your fellow classmates? When you turn on your camera but other students do not reciprocate, **how does this dynamic feel?**
- b. *Suggestion:* If you are unable to have your camera on, **what other options for engagement** will support your fellow students? I.e, volunteer as a notetaker in the chat, keep your microphone unmuted, etc.

2. Accountability and Power Dynamics with Instructors:

- a. *Query:* To what extent is being in class with your camera on part of sharing respect and accountability with your instructor? While sharing that space will always be informed by different social and authority positions, how does sharing with the presenter or instructor also support responsive teaching within the virtual classroom?
- b. *Suggestion:* When you participate with them by contributing course content on camera, you are **supporting the educational and professional environment** that, by attending a synchronous class, you are also requesting.

3. Transferable Skills:

- a. *Query:* In what contexts do you have meetings over webcams: classrooms, work, social events? What, in those spaces, are **shared expectations around cameras and mics?**
- b. *Suggestion:* This class is a great opportunity to **build and practice contemporary communication, writing, and presentation skills in a low-stakes environment.**

4. Technical Issues? That's ok!

- a. **Perfection is not demanded** of anyone this quarter, but attempting to participate with your peers builds a sense of community.
- b. **Demonstrate intent:** [are you volunteering alternative ways to engage that show you are "there."](#) such as note-taking the chat? Are you asking housemates and family for an hour where the only internet usage or browser(s) open are for your class. [Even if your own camera freezes up](#), by turning it on you are demonstrating your intent.
- c. **Ask and advocate for alternatives** to [synchronous](#) requirements.
- d. **Utilize online learning resources:** i.e.:
 - i. Academic Success Coaching via these [one-on-one Zoom coaches](#) help you maximize online learning strategies.
 - ii. This [Netiquette graphic](#), while for discussions online, teach skills that apply to video conferences.
 - iii. [This UW-specific Netiquette guide](#) will also help you most effectively communicate your needs to your colleagues, professors, and fellow students.
- e. **Just feel awkward?** Try out:
 - i. [virtual backgrounds](#)
 - ii. ["Zoom touch-up" feature](#)
 - iii. [Webcam do's and don'ts](#)
 - iv. And, above all, rather than striving for perfection, have fun with the Zoom settings to help you feel more comfortable on camera.