MAKING THE MOST OF RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING: A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

Our **Responsive Blended Learning** (RBL) model combines active, supported online learning with contextually appropriate on-campus learning opportunities, responding dynamically to the changing global context. This blended mode of study may be different to what you are used to so this guide provides you with information to help you get the most out of your studies. This includes how to structure your time so that you can make the most of live and asynchronous sessions (those which do not occur in the same place or at the same time) and your self-study time. Studying in RBL mode will enable you to connect with the global Heriot-Watt learning community and to build friendships and professional collaborations throughout your studies.

UNDERSTANDING RESPONSIVE BLENDED LEARNING

Your study will be a combination of live and asynchronous sessions, with wrap-around support from your course team to help you plan your studies. It is important to look ahead to each week of study and consider how you can most effectively use your time. This will include time to work through the material and activities as well as space to think and reflect on your learning.

- **Live sessions:** These may be online or on-campus. These sessions may be lectures, collaborative sessions (such as seminars or workshops) or a blend of both. Live sessions are timetabled each week. It is important that you do any preparatory work identified by the course team to ensure you really make the most of the live sessions on offer.

- **Structured asynchronous study:** Your course team will set activities and study which you should do in your own time. This is called asynchronous study. The course team may give you an indication of when to undertake this study or you may need to plan your study time yourself.

- **Self-study:** This is the time you spend researching, consolidating skills and reflecting on your studies. You can do this at any time. Self-study and reflection time will help develop and deepen your disciplinary understanding and skills.

- **Group work:** You may be asked to collaborate with others in your course. This may require you to interact live or to work asynchronously in your group. Whichever way you are collaborating, it is important to make sure that everyone in the group is included.

Studying in Responsive Blended Learning mode provides more structure to your learning. This means there will be clear guidance on what you should be doing with your study time. The overall hours of study have not changed, your course team have simply made the connections between self-study and supported live sessions clearer.

COMBINING LIVE AND ASYNCHRONOUS STUDY

To get the most from RBL, preparation is key. It can be helpful to use the live (online or on-campus) sessions as a focal point of study and then consider what you need to do to make the most of your study time:

1 BEFORE A SESSION

2 DURING A SESSION

3 AFTER A SESSION

Key to being prepared is to schedule time to look at preparatory material, take notes and review learning, as well as taking part in the timetabled sessions. Have a look at your timetable and identify times when you can do the pre- and post-session study.

It is important to look ahead to each week of study and consider how you can most effectively use your time.

1 BE PREPARED BEFORE A LIVE SESSION

Check what your lecturer has signposted as preparation.

You may be asked to watch a video, read material from an e-textbook or a journal article, or listen to a podcast.

You may also be asked to go to the discussion board in your course site and answer questions, or share your initial thoughts on a topic, prior to a live session.

Schedule enough time to be able to review the material and take notes.

And then do it. This preparatory work is the most important step as it familiarises you with the material you'll be exploring in the live session. Don't skimp on this stage.

Look for directions to help you with preparation for the live session:

- What material / activity should I review before the live session?
- Has the lecturer given me specific points to look out for while I watch / listen / read / participate?
- Has the lecturer asked me to answer specific questions related to the material?
- Have I been asked to prepare anything in a specific format?
- Have I been asked to share answers or examples in a specific place (in an Office 365 document, a discussion board, or Teams) before the session?

Preparation before a session familiarises you with the topic that is coming up in the live session. It also contributes to your wider understanding of the course. It may be revision for you, or it may be new material. Either way, if you have read it and tried to understand it before the session, you are in a better position to take part in the live session.

2 BE PREPARED DURING A SESSION

The purpose of the live session is not simply for you to listen to the lecturer talk; you've already done the equivalent of that when you prepared.

What is important now is that you apply what you have read / watched / listened to, because the best way of learning is by doing.

During a live session it is likely that your lecturer will have activities for you to do to help consolidate and extend your learning.

These activities will be easier if you have done the preparation before the session.

What might you experience in a live session?

- Asking or answering a question.
- Discussing and analysing a topic or issue.
- Listening to presentations by the lecturer or by other students.
- Answering a poll question – this may be a simple yes/no or true/ false question, a multiple-choice question, or a more complex question requiring a longer answer.
- Sharing your reasoning and answer(s) to a question, issue or problem e.g. demonstrating your working for a maths problem, explaining your logic in a debate etc.
- Working with other students in groups – for example, this might be to discuss a topic or to collaboratively produce an output.

3 BE PREPARED AFTER A SESSION

After a live session, take time to consolidate and extend your learning. Review the material, activities and your notes from the live session, continue with any pre-session study that you have not yet completed and undertake any post-session activities your lecturer may have organised.

MAKING CONNECTIONS, STRENGTHENING FRIENDSHIPS AND WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

Responsive Blended Learning enables you to connect with the Heriot-Watt community across the globe. Through your courses and student activities you can build connections, friendships and work collaboratively with students from any of our global campuses.

In your course context you can connect with others before, during and after live sessions. You might like to set up a study group or find a study buddy either within your course or programme or within your other social groups, such as students you share accommodation with.

Even if you're not studying the same subject, studying together can help you to stay motivated. You can use the University online platforms and campus spaces to meet together or you might prefer to use other communications tools. Talking to other students might seem a bit daunting at first, but informal chat before and after a class can help to make connections, as can speaking up in class or during group work.

If you're working collaboratively, make sure you agree clear ways of working. If your group is across multiple time zones it might be best to work asynchronously, by email, text, shared document or discussion board, rather than trying to meet in person. If you prefer to meet in person, consider the various online platforms you can use for this such as Collaborate Ultra or Teams. If you meet in person on campus make sure you follow the appropriate physically distancing guidance for the location in which you are meeting.

EXPLORING TOOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Your course may use a variety of tools to support your study online. Some examples of key tools and how to use them are explained below.

COLLABORATE ULTRA

This is the main way which live online sessions are delivered. It has several useful tools:

- **Microphone and video** – you can use these to contribute to the session and to get to know others in the session.
- **Chat** – you can contribute to sessions using the text chat, either in the main room or in breakout rooms.
- **Hand-up** – this enables you to indicate to the rest of the session that you would like to contribute by putting your hand up and then putting your mic on to answer).
- **Polling tool** – this can be Yes / No or multiple-choice questions on which you can vote
- **Share** a file, or your screen – this can be particularly useful when working collaboratively.
- **Annotation tools** – you can use these to write, draw or type on slides or a whiteboard e.g. to answer a question, demonstrate your working, make collective notes etc

You won't be left on your own in a Collaborate Ultra room. The lecturer is still in charge of the session. They are there to help you work on problems and examples and give you time to practice and ask questions about the topic.

TEAMS

Teams is another online communication tool. Like Collaborate Ultra, it can be used to deliver live online sessions. It has some of the same features including:

- **Microphone and video** – you can use these to contribute to the session and to get to know others in the session.
- **Chat** – you can contribute to sessions using the text chat.
- **Hand-up** – this enables you to indicate to the rest of the session that you would like to contribute by putting your hand up and then putting your mic on to answer).
- **Share** a file, or your screen – this can be particularly useful when working collaboratively.

Because Teams is part of Office 365 it is easy to link with other Office 365 documents.

Teams also has a breakout rooms function similar to Collaborate Ultra.

DISCUSSION BOARDS

Discussion boards in your course site are a really useful way to communicate and learn when you are studying in online or blended mode. You may be directed to a discussion board before or after a live session (or sometimes the discussion board is the live session). Examples of how discussion boards are used include:

- Answering a question related to the session in a discussion forum
- Collaborating with other students in a discussion forum
- Commenting on other student comments in a forum
- Asking questions in a Q&A forum

COLLABORATION TOOLS

On-campus you may work in physically distanced groups, sharing information through discussion or shared documents hosted on Office 365; in an online live session in Collaborate Ultra or Teams you may work in a **breakout room** before coming back to the main room to share your findings, **or through shared documents**. You might also collaborate across on-campus and online groups using Office 365 documents.

EFFECTIVE LEARNING ADVISORS

The Effective Learning Advisors offer a number of study skills classes and 1:1 support that are designed to help students achieve their academic potential, covering topics such as:

- Planning and organising your studies (e.g. time management, organising coursework and balancing priorities).

- Academic goal setting and maintaining motivation.

- Effective note taking and note making strategies.

- Critical reading and evaluating information.

- Academic writing skills.

- Revision and exam techniques.

- Reflective learning practices.

For more information on how the Effective Learning Advisors can support your studies go to **https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/is/learning-teaching/learning-advisors.htm**

Even if you're not studying the same subject, studying together can help you to stay motivated.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT & LIAISON LIBRARIANS

Finding and using quality information and acknowledging this in your work is a key skill for academic success. The Academic Support & Liaison Librarians offer study skills classes and 1:1 support designed to help students achieve their academic potential, covering topics such as:

- Finding and selecting good quality information sources for your course work enabling you to build knowledge based on good evidence.

- Unlocking the potential of the library collections to support your studies and making use of key or industry standard databases.

- Good citing and referencing practice in your written work and avoiding plagiarism.

- Endnote reference management software to help with citing and referencing.

To find the Academic Support & Librarian for your School and how they can support your studies go to **https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/is/learning-teaching/liaison-librarians.htm**
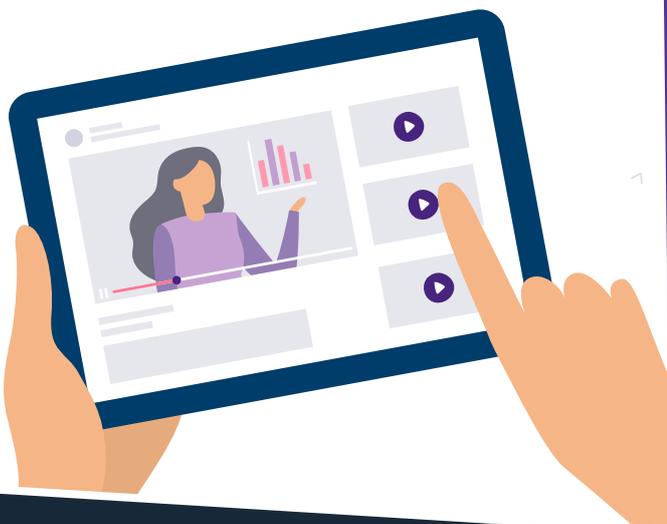
MAKING THE MOST OF BREAKOUT ROOMS

Breakout rooms are spaces for small group interaction within the larger live online session. Breakout rooms tend not to be recorded. Both Collaborate Ultra and Teams have breakout rooms. These rooms are often used for group conversations and activities during a live session. Breakout rooms are often the place where you develop your critical understanding of the topic and get to practice applying your skills, as well as building connections with others on your course. Breakout rooms are also an opportunity to get to know other students while you work together on a topic. You could also think about forming a study group, or pairing up with a study buddy, from the people you meet in the breakout rooms.

- Your lecturer sets the scene and then gives you a question to answer, a problem to solve or a topic to discuss. They will then either randomly assign you to the breakouts or put you into pre-assigned groups. In the breakout you work together on the activity set by the lecturer. You might be asked to report back after the breakout or to use your results for another activity.

- Being in a breakout group with people you don't know yet can feel a bit daunting. Remember, others will be feeling just the same. Whether you chat using the mic, text chat or writing on the whiteboard, it is important to talk to each other so that you can get the most from the breakout session. If it's the first time you've met the people in the group you might like to quickly introduce yourselves before starting on the activity.

- If you've been asked to report back to the main room at the end of the breakout, agree in advance who will do this so that they can be prepared. Discuss your ideas, share your solutions and working with each other, and make your decisions so that you have an answer by the end of the breakout room timing.

- When you return to the main room, it's likely that your lecturer will invite the groups to share their work with the main group. This is the opportunity to get feedback on your work, so make sure you are prepared to share your work and stick around for this. Your nominated person will report back to the group, but there should also be an opportunity for the other members of the group to add their points as well. Support your spokesperson when they are reporting back.

MAKING THE MOST OF DISCUSSION BOARDS

Discussion boards can help you make sense of topics you are learning and are a useful repository of work done in a course. You can record your thoughts, ask questions, and answer other learners' questions. You can also keep in touch with classmates, your tutors and lecturers.

- **Time to think**
  Working on discussion boards gives you a chance to think about what you are going to say before you post your message. You may need extra time if, for example, English is not your first language or you are new to the subject matter.

- **Range of opinions**
  Depending on your disciplinary area, you may come across different opinions. Sharing your opinions or reasoned arguments on a particular topic gives you a wider breadth of understanding, and you can comment on other people's posts to add to the discussion.

- **Working in groups**
  Discussion boards are a great way to work in groups, especially if the group is spread over more than one location or timezone, or some students have work or caring commitments. The boards mean that individuals can make their contributions at a time that suits them, but everyone in the group can see the progress that is being made.

There are many different ways you can participate in your learning, no matter where you are. If you're not sure about anything then do get in touch with your course team and / or personal tutor – they are here to help and support you.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Vital communications from the University are sent to your Heriot-Watt email address. It is important that you check this at least once per day.

Your course lecturer is your main point of contact and your course page on the VLE (Canvas) provides you with course-related information and support.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Use the right channels to solve your problems. Is it something you can solve yourself, perhaps with a look on Google or YouTube? Or if your reading link is broken, try searching for the journal article yourself by using the library search engine (Discovery). If you can't solve the problem, then use the right channels to access help and support. This will be signposted for you in your course / the student portal. Contacting the correct person will help you get your problem solved more quickly.

If you require IT support, are having difficulty accessing online Library resources or help from the Library or the Effective Learning Service, then contact **ISHelp@hw.ac.uk**

If it is course related, then contact your course leader via the contact details provided on your course site on the VLE (Canvas).

FURTHER RESOURCES

RBL student resources
https://lta.hw.ac.uk/resources/rbl-student-resources/

Academic Study Skills guide
(includes contact details for the Heriot-Watt Effective Learning Advisers)
https://isguides.hw.ac.uk/academicstudyskills

Free access to Microsoft Office for Heriot-Watt Students
https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/is/it-essentials/office-365.htm

Getting started with online learning
https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/get-started-online-learning/content-section-overview?active-tab=description-tab

Heriot-Watt Advice Hub
https://www.hwunion.com/advice-hub

Heriot-Watt Student portal
https://portal.hw.ac.uk

Heriot-Watt Power Hours
https://www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/is/skills-development/power-hours.htm

Preparing to learn online at university
https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/preparing-to-learn-online-at-university

Time management advice
https://isguides.hw.ac.uk/academicstudyskills/timemanagement

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CONTACT US
E: LTAcademy@hw.ac.uk

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