



Big Blue Button

Open Source Online E-Learning Software

Using Big Blue Button for Language Teaching – Some Ideas

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If you're looking for a detailed tutorial about using Big Blue Button, please check out the excellent explanatory documents available through LearnIT2teach, which also includes some YouTube tutorials by Big Blue Button. **This document is primarily to give language instructors some practical activity ideas for using BBB with their learners.**

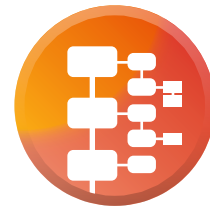
Some general principles:



"FLIPPED" teaching works well: have your students complete some activities before class to prepare and engage with the content, then use the class time to clarify understanding and go deeper into the content, and assign follow-up activities to be done asynchronously afterward.



"LECTURE-STYLE" teaching is very easy to fall into accidentally when using BBB – the platform is great for it, but you won't be getting the maximum potential out of the program or your students. Instead, if your students need to practise listening to longer talks/ presentations, record them ahead of time for students to listen to at their own convenience.



Having a **STRUCTURED VISUAL PRESENTATION** during your virtual class is key to keeping your call on track and your learners moving with your content

Considerations:

- **Are you using BBB with your whole class, a few students, or 1-on-1?**
 - BBB works well for any of these, but the activities you choose should be different and really emphasize the student *learning*, not the student *watching*...
- **What tech skills do your students have?**
 - Joining a session when already familiar with EduLINC is fairly easy for students (two clicks from a course page!), but some activities/features within BBB may take longer to become familiar with.
- **Do your students know how to reach you/troubleshoot in case of a connectivity issue?**
 - Give them instructions about joining the audio call by phone in case their computer audio fails. They will still see your slides and interact digitally, but will hear you and speak through the phone.
- **Do you have a backup plan and way to communicate that?**
 - For example, if the conference doesn't work, tell students to check the EduLINC class news forum, join a back-up Zoom call at this number, try again in one hour, etc.
- **Are you recording your session?**
 - If so, consider student privacy. In a recording, the class audio, your slides, and the chat box are visible, so that means students' names and voices are as well. If you are recording your session, **MAKE SURE** a Media Waiver has been signed by all your students.
 - How much of the session do you want to record? All of it? Just key content/new instruction?
- **How long does your class need to be?**
 - Learning online is great, but can also be mentally taxing. It is totally fine to plan for a brief break in the middle of your class, and/or to keep your class to 30 or 45 minutes – it all depends on your students' needs and levels.

Suggestions for beginning to use BBB for online classes in the era of COVID-19:

- It is possible you have been thrust faster and further into online learning and teaching than you were 'ready' for or than you may be comfortable with: **have some grace with yourself!** And keep in mind that your students are in the same boat, and perhaps that their 'boat' is even more difficult to maneuver because of language, literacy, or technology challenges. **You will not become an online teaching rock star in one week. Your learners will not magically become computer whizzes in one week. This is okay.**
- Use the first BBB class or two to have fun and focus on **using language to learn the platform, instead of solely trying to use the platform to learn language:**
 - Practise listening to and following instructions – use the features of the conference room (raise your hand, lower your hand, mute your microphone, share your webcam, circle something on the whiteboard, hide your webcam, type in the chat box, answer a poll, etc.) How much and how often you will need to do this will differ based on your students' language levels and computer competency, but even with highly-skilled, competent language speakers, it is a good way to become familiar with the platform.

Types of BBB features and some language activities that can work with them:

Discussion: (just using the regular audio/video and your visuals)

- **VIDEO/AUDIO CONFERENCING AT ITS BEST!** Ask some discussion questions about the homework/lesson content and have students take turns answering aloud. You can ask them to turn on their webcam when it is their turn so you can watch facial expressions and give better pronunciation feedback as necessary. Get students to raise their hand if they would like to share, or ask particular students.
- **MINI PRESENTATIONS:** Learners at any level can take turns sharing something they prepared for homework (from a brief summary of weekend activities/plans to an in-depth presentation, depending on level).
- **DESCRIBE A PICTURE:** Lower-level learners especially can practice describing what they see on the screen (photos), or reading aloud (great for fluency, and for literacy learners).
- **SPEAKING ASSESSMENT** (with/without sharing your webcam as necessary to simulate f2f or telephone calls, as needed by level).

Polls:

- **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:** Did your learners understand the content of the homework? Put some comprehension questions on a slide or two and use “Polls” to see what they understood. You can choose to publish the results of the poll or not, and you will know which students are having trouble or success, without them needing to attach their name publicly to their answer, as in a chat box.
- **CORRECT THE MISTAKES!** Do a grammar activity and put a selection of possible answers on the screen. Students choose the one that is correct.
- **SHOW A VIDEO / PLAY AN AUDIO TRACK** and have comprehension questions on the slide. (Keep in mind that students can only answer one poll question at a time, so you can ask them to jot down their answers on paper, then facilitate a review of the answers using a poll, going question by question.) Discuss the why of each answer. This will set your students up well to do similar skill using (SU) or assessment tasks (AT) independently on EduLINC.

Multi-user whiteboard: Annotate your slides and have your students help, (like inviting your students to a physical whiteboard/Smart Board).

- Show choices
- Error recognition
- Fill in the blank activities
- Have students underline words in a short reading passage, (new-to-them words, certain parts of speech, tenses, etc.)

Share an external video:

- Watch a YouTube/Vimeo video (or other supported platform) as a listening SU or AT task (some “videos” don’t have a visual component if you’re assessing listening comprehension over the phone; other true videos are great for listening tasks that require visuals/f2f components), return to whiteboard or PowerPoint (i.e. stop sharing external video) for comprehension/discussion questions

Shared Notes:

- Brainstorming, group writing, public/group editing, teacher-shared notes with further explanations → final document can be exported (html or plain text) to share via email or post on EduLINC

Screen Sharing:

- Demonstrating processes: EduLINC course access, navigating YouTube, online banking tutorial video
- Students sharing their screen to show pictures, PowerPoints for presentations, troubleshoot problems on their computer

Break out room:

- These can be a bit more finicky to arrange, but if well-planned can be a great opportunity for student collaboration. I recommend waiting to use break-out rooms until you and your students are comfortable with the general features of Big Blue Button.
- Use break-out room for students to practise role-plays, peer edit/provide feedback, plan a group project, do a jigsaw reading activity, and more!
- Use tutorials available from Big Blue Button to learn how to “wander between the tables” and listen in on your student groups, or even join them.

Recording: *see “Considerations” above for a note about privacy*

- Save your “class” in a recording for students to review, or who couldn’t attend.
- Pronunciation practice: Students can watch you say something (webcam) and hear you and repeat.
- Record a speaking task/assessment to help you with your marking and for the student to do a self-reflection, or for students to give peer feedback.

Some tips for your visuals:

1. The PowerPoint file you create may only be about 12-15 slides long for a one-hour call. (Convert to PDF for easy upload and no file compression errors...and no need for fancy animations/timings either)
2. As with regular lessons or presentations, leave lots of blank space – you (and the students!) can use the whiteboard features to circle, annotate, underline, and add to your slides.
3. Share your PDF (or select pages) on EduLINC after your conference for students to review.
4. Copy and paste anything you would eventually want to include in a custom poll, in shared notes, or as a URL to an external video into one location before your call, be it an online notepad in a different tab, or in a separate Word document.

Conclusion:

Please see page 5 for a sample lesson outline – just an idea. Customize for your needs and to suit your learners.

These are some introductory ideas, but should hopefully help you use this great software in harmony with your EduLINC courseware and engage your learners in interactive language activities. You can also watch a sample “class” that demonstrates most of these features and content. Click [here](#) to view the demonstration class or go to <https://youtu.be/fZ8NDkxagkc> in your web browser.

All the best in your online teaching endeavours!

A sample general lesson procedure for a 30-minute to 1-hour BBB conference:

- **Welcome, warm up, and norms: (10 minutes tops)**
 - Use the first 3-5 minutes of the call to engage with each learner and check in – does their microphone work? Are you hoping they will use their webcam? (If so, does it work?) Check individual settings for each student at least for the first 2 or 3 calls until everyone gets comfortable with the virtual classroom.
 - Have your learners respond to an opening question in the chat box. This gets them using the platform and also gives them something to do right away upon entry into the classroom, in case you're waiting for a straggler or two. Questions may be social in nature, or related to the homework.
 - Go over the outline of your call, just like you might go over your agenda for your lesson.
- **Review the homework: (5-10 minutes)**
 - Ask some comprehension/discussion questions (to answer aloud, in the chat, or via poll).
- **Delve deeper into lesson content: (5-10 minutes)**
 - What else do students need to know and get directly from you/each other before they will be successful doing a task more independently?
 - Think of this as a mini-lesson in your planning.
 - Should you enable your webcam for this?
- **Check for comprehension: (2-3 minutes)**
 - Do a few poll questions or have students respond aloud or in the chat.
- **[Optional] BREAK TIME – 5-8 minutes**
- **Practice: (5-10 minutes)**
 - It is okay for a conference to be silent for a few minutes!
 - Give the students an activity to *do*:
 - a fill-in-the-blanks activity to practice (type your answers in the chat)
 - a few minutes to prepare an oral answer to a prompt question / scenario
 - listen to an audio track and answer questions individually
 - time to practice or create a role-play (using a breakout space)
- **Review together: (7-10 minutes)**
 - Share answers, present role-plays, etc.
 - Immediate feedback from instructor
 - Correct any misunderstandings, go back a few slides to review the content as needed
- **Assignments for before next time/Announcements (3-5 minutes)**
 - How will the students use the content they have learned in your group session to complete their homework?
 - Will you schedule a smaller BBB call for students to present the role-plays they began to create, or for individual speaking practice/assessment?
 - Link the content of the call to the content they need to submit/complete on EduLINC as much as possible. Keep the learning moving forward.

Katie Wightman has over six years of experience teaching EAL to adults – from Foundation Literacy to multi-level language for employment. She develops EAL curricula for sector-specific employment language training as well as blended language-learning content using EduLINC. She first began using Big Blue Button in 2018 to facilitate online English courses for master's degree students in Europe, and has since enjoyed introducing it to her EAL students in Canada through EduLINC.