Quick Guide to Online Learning at Royal Holloway

1. Finding your module, and other support, in Moodle

You will find vital resources and learning activities in our Moodle virtual learning environment.

Go to https://moodle.royalholloway.ac.uk/

Log in with your Microsoft Office 365 ID (i.e. the format: abcd123@live.rhul.ac.uk).

To find your academic subject modules, click on 'My courses'.

To find other courses, such as academic skills courses, click on 'All courses'.

To find courses on how to use our E-Learning services, and links to other sources of support, click on 'Find out more' under 'Students'.
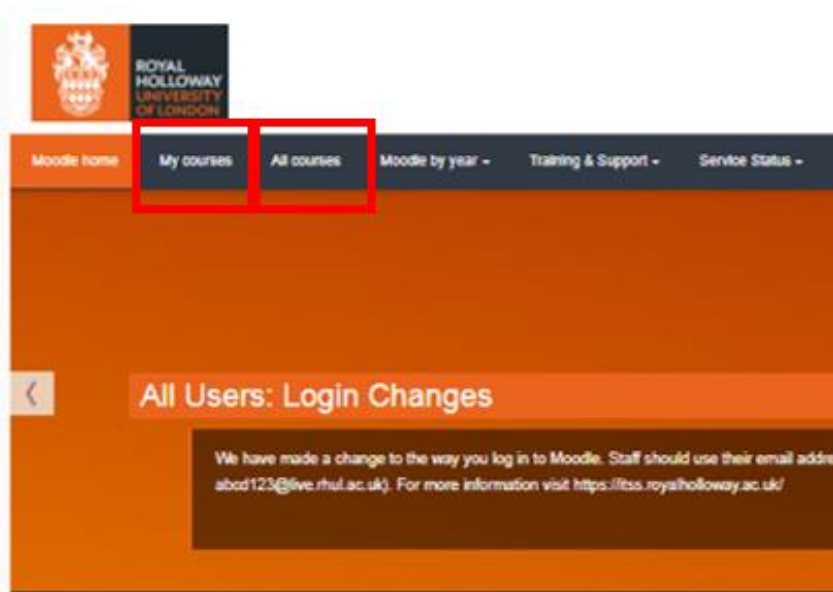
2. Taking part in on-line lectures and seminars in MS Teams

Download the Microsoft Teams App. Find out how to do this, and how to obtain other free software at the Free Software page.
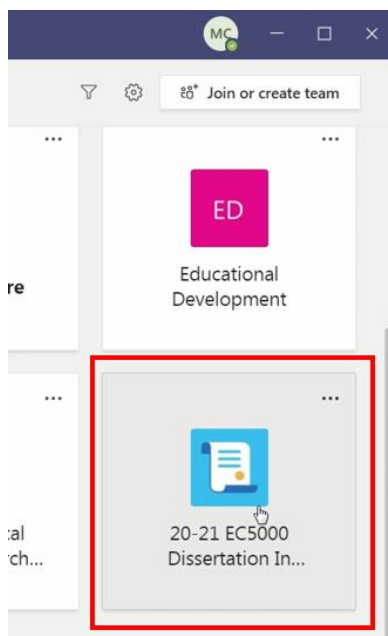
In order to make use of the latest features of MS Teams, please regularly update the software, following this guidance.

About 10 minutes before your timetabled session, log in to MS Teams with your Royal Holloway account.

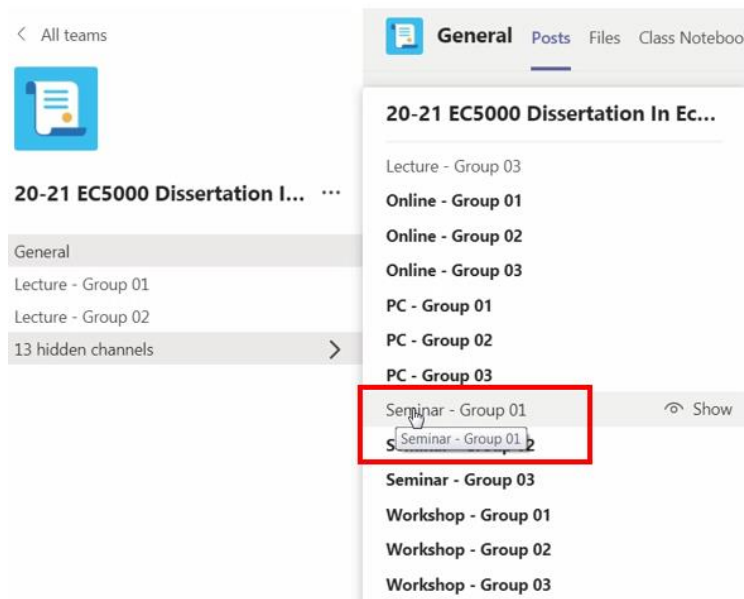Click on the 'Teams' icon in the toolbar, maybe more than once, to see all your teams:
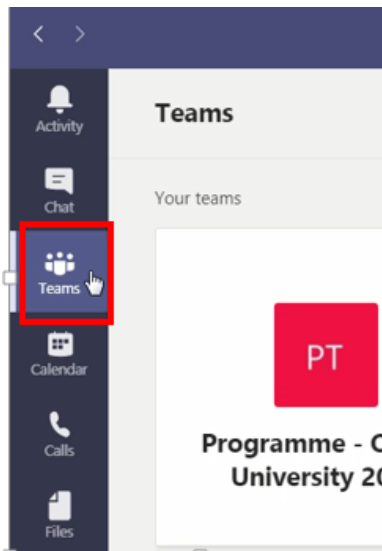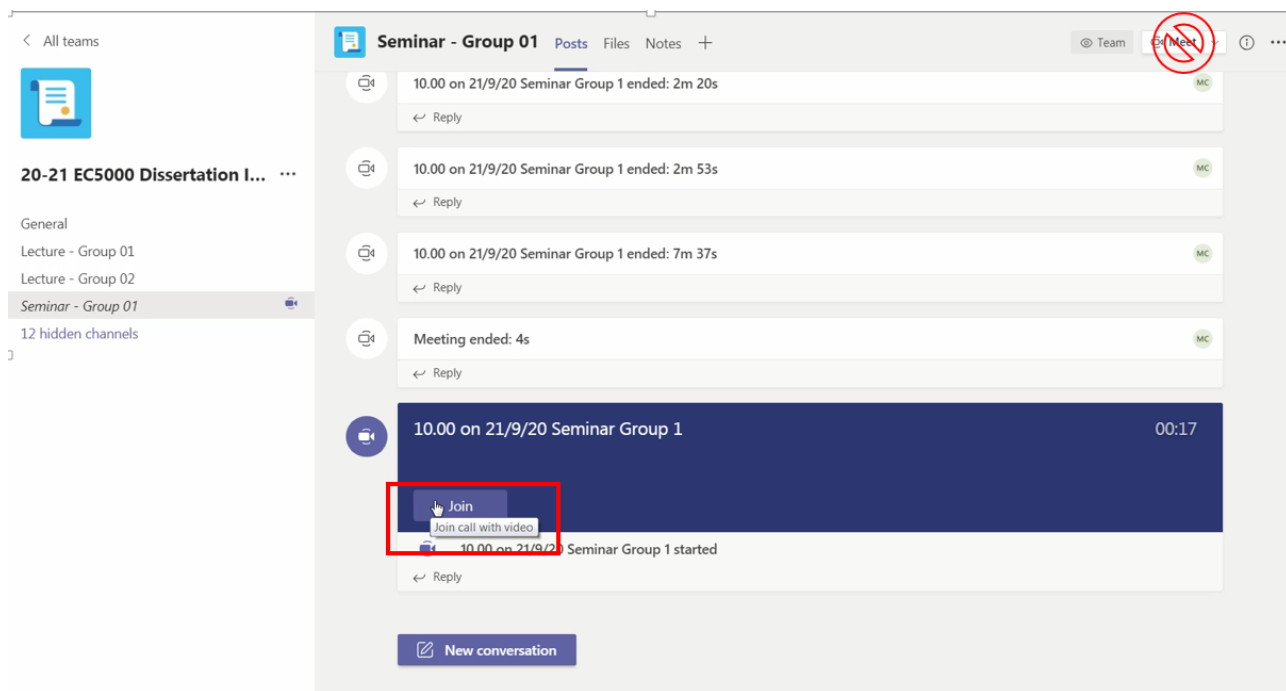

Click on the team for your module:

Click on the channel for your session, it may be among the hidden channels:

Wait for the session's blue box to appear, and click 'Join'. Please do not click on 'Meet':

Here is a short instructional recording about joining a session:

How to join a timetabled teaching session in MS Teams

In an MS Teams session, please use the microphone icon to mute your input unless you are speaking:

You can control whether your camera is working with the camera icon:

If you are on camera, bear in mind the location or setting will also be visible and should either be neutral or set to be blurred using 'Apply background effects'. First, click on the three dots in the toolbar:

And then choose 'Apply background effects':
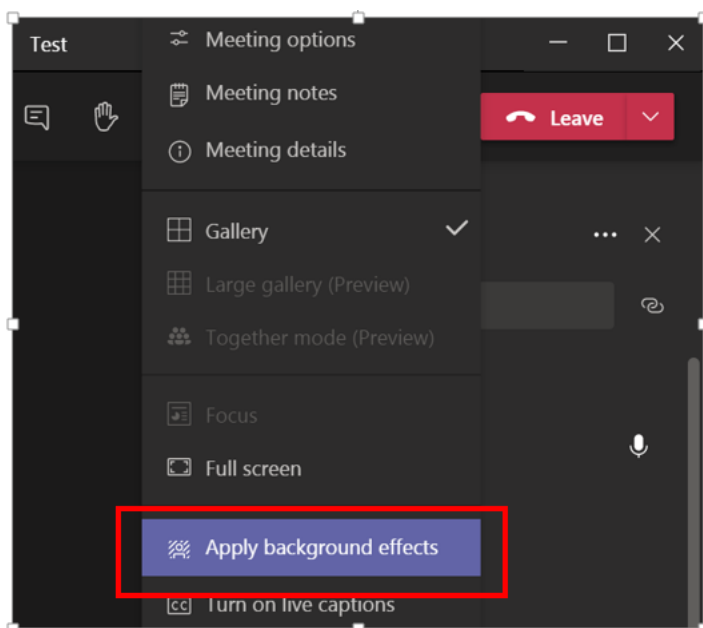
You can make contributions to the academic discussion in the chat, using the chat icon:

If you want to make a verbal contribution, please use the 'raise hand' icon first:

3. Online Learning Etiquette Guide: 15 principles to help

We have experienced great change recently but in many ways this is just the start of the journey to new learning platforms and ways of working. The following principles are intended to help with appropriate conduct for online lessons or meetings. College policies and regulations apply to all classes and other work or study interactions, and these principles work with both and do not replace any element of either. The appendix has links to College policies.

While many of these guidelines may seem obvious, a new medium of communication can tend to throw off some of our instincts for proper etiquette, so we thought it would be helpful to provide a baseline of expectations that academics and students can draw as they work to develop an ideal online atmosphere for learning, social and professional interactions.

Communication and interaction

1. Be kind, professional, and on time

Make a point to be kind and respectful in your comments; never forget it is a human being at the other end of the conversation. Online communication comes with a level of anonymity that doesn't exist when you're talking to someone face-to-face. Sometimes this leads people to behave rudely when they disagree with one another.
Both students and staff should be organised to ensure the event can start on time and without disruption. Punctuality is especially important for online events, because we are working in the absence of normal checks and it is challenging to signal for everyone's attention for the class or meeting to start.

2. Be visible when speaking

Everyone is strongly encouraged to switch on their camera when speaking in order to engage in discussion. Speak clearly as this will help anyone using captions to follow the conversation. For some classes, the conventions and expectations may vary and please follow what is agreed between staff and students there, but the norm is for visibility, when speaking, where possible.

3. Don't dominate the discussion

Enable everyone to participate and give those who need a pause in between comments the opportunity to do so. Some silence in an online class is acceptable and not all gaps need filling.
Lecturers and tutors sometimes need to manage the discussions as part of managing the class, but everyone should respect all individuals in the group and not prevent them from taking part. Students should not block other students in their attempt to communicate. The chat box is useful for sharing ideas and asking questions related to the topic. But it can be a helpful resource or a major distraction. Treat it like the learning tool it is meant to be, and read what is in the chat box before replying to avoid repeating or restating content that fills the space unnecessarily. Consider using the thumbs up. Try not to take it over or distract your classmates with off-topic discussions.

4. Set a respectful tone

A certain level of formality is needed in online interactions even where the setting can seem informal. Be respectful of individuals and the group.
Communication online can come across differently from in presence communication. The online environment affects how we read facial expressions and other nonverbal signs. Words take on different meanings when spoken or written, and the tone and the temperature of our interactions with others may be misread or less obvious.
Use of video will help with facial recognition, but the display may be delayed or affected by a screen.
With chat box comments, always make an effort to use proper punctuation, spelling and grammar and avoid colloquialisms. Trying to decipher a string of misspelled words with erratic punctuation frustrates the reader and distracts from the point of your message. But be reasonable about others' grammar mistakes students may be studying in a second language, or using accessibility tools. Nobody likes the grammar police. Be tolerant and respectful, and avoid taking offence by something unexpected or unintended. Avoid sarcasm altogether in an online discussion and, instead, lean toward being polite and direct in the way you communicate.
We are going to have to relearn some of our social interactions to avoid any misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

5. Think before you type

Think carefully about how what you write in comment boxes can be read and be careful about how the tone can come across. A passing comment spoken in class can be forgotten a few minutes later, but what is typed or shared can have great impact. Also, remember what is written or shared in an online classroom cannot be deleted once

posted. Be guarded when it comes to personal information, and as respectful to others as you would be if you were sitting in the same room together.

Engagement

6. Stay focussed

Focused attention is important to an effective learning environment and please resist the temptation to use another device or engage with someone or something else in your surroundings rather than the online class or meeting. Avoid side conversations or running other applications and respect the group in the session.

7. Participate

Be an active participant in learning, in class and outside. Participation may look different depending on the class or particular activity. This may mean both paying attention or speaking up and sharing. An online format may increase the tendency to sit back and observe. Make the most of each online session by being as active a participant as you can.

8. Ask questions and contribute to the effective learning environment

We are all adjusting to new ways of delivering material and sometimes a crucial detail may be jumped over, as lecturers and tutors, and students focus on so many new dynamics. It will help the process of transition if you engage with making the class effective and ask the questions that you have.

If you are still experiencing some confusion or have a question, it's likely that someone else has that same question. Speak up!

Supporting an effective learning environment also includes; sometimes not sharing thoughts, for example answers, shortcuts the syllabus is coming to later, or inaccurate or untrustworthy information. Be active in countering misinformation.

In larger groups, the number of questions and the timing of them may need to be managed by using the chat box or setting times for responses. But in general, view an online class or meeting as the prime time to ask questions that the whole group will benefit from and to support the group's learning.

Effective study

9. Keep on top of your work

Your preparation may impact the learning experience of others. Make use of staff office hours for questions you may have. Respect the learning of the whole class by planning your work times well and keeping up with the preparation. One of the challenges posed by online learning is the increased level of responsibility that students will have for their own learning; and both staff and students have for managing the time when the boundaries between work and home life become blurred. Resources should be readily available and accessible. Keep to routines for yourself and adopt a mind-set that separates work or study time and time off.

10. Attempt to find your own answer

The online environment can be confusing. Take the time to try to figure out questions you have as part of your learning. For questions related to class structure, such as due dates or policies, refer to the syllabus and course materials. For other questions refer to the FAQs on the 2020/21 Information hub. Attempt to find the answers to any other questions on your own through searches and research.

11. Look out for instructions, guidance and messages about change

Assignments, instructions, and links to online classes or messages will all be sent out in the standard communication formats. Watch out for the messages and remember that while we will try to keep to the schedules, we have to expect change and disruption. Check your College email, it's where updates will be sent to you.

And, more general principles:

12. Remember you're on camera in how you dress and your background

Teaching and learning from home can make for a relaxed environment, or dress that is not dictated by the weather, but we should still be presentable and professional in our interactions with each other. Bear in mind, the location or

setting will also be visible and should either be neutral or set to be blurred. For both dress and background we want to avoid any unnecessary distraction.

Another factor is the possibility of background noise. If family members are likely to be heard try to find a quiet location and/or make use of a headset to reduce background noise when not muted which will make the choice of location much more flexible.

For staff we urge the use of professional backgrounds with an image of College (or other) and please be aware of your safety online.

13. When not speaking, use the mute setting

Set to mute automatically when joining a session, and switch to mute after speaking. This is particularly important when in larger groups and even taking notes by typing can be distracting where the microphone picks up tapping the keyboard.

14. Apologise for any accidental breach of online etiquette

We all make mistakes, and mistakes are even more likely when a new set of experiences and challenges interrupt our normal routine. Online learning involves that sort of interruption, and no one is expected to be perfect. However, if you do break one of these etiquette guidelines—whether it's not being on time, loud background noise, dominating the discussion, or not being prepared—come right out and apologise sooner rather than later. This shows you are aware of the problem and not oblivious.

15. Practice makes perfect

We are all learning how to operate in a new environment. We will all get better at it.

Frequently asked questions to support online etiquette principles

1. The etiquette principles note the strong encouragement to use a camera, but I don't want to/cannot.

   Using the camera is encouraged for lecturers and students as engagement is easier when participants are visible. There may be good reasons why a student is reluctant to use their camera and they shouldn't be challenged in front of their peers about having their camera on. Sometimes cameras slow down the connection and need to be switched off to allow full engagement.

   Generally, the camera should be on for lecturer, where possible. Guidelines are provided for lecturers about where they should be based, if at home, to maintain an appropriate learning environment and to use a blurred background, if this is not possible.

2. How do I ask questions during an online session?

   MS Teams has a raised hands function and a chat box for questions. Each lecturer should clearly define their preference for use in the class.

3. How do I use the mute function?

   Please join the session on mute and mute yourself when you're not speaking. Students should not mute others students.

4. What are the protocols around oral and written/chat discussions?

   The chat box should be confined to academic discussion as outlined in the online etiquette principles. The use in each session should be agreed with the participants keeping in mind any students who are unable to access the chat due to existing disabilities.

5. What happens if someone leaves the session?

   The online class is still a class and engagement with the whole class is expected. Students should inform their session leader beforehand if they need to leave. If a lecturer wanted to keep a check on whether students were still there and engaged, they could request that students use the 'thumbs up' reaction or comment in the chat box.

   There may be technical reasons why a participant 'leaves' which will be treated sympathetically while we get used to the new technology.

6. What are the conduct and behaviour expectations?

These are set out in the online etiquette principles.

7. What are the issues relating to behaviour outside of the learning environment, for example in meetings, other online work activities, and in student organised platforms (social media or other forms of communication)?

Students should use College platforms and communication means (moodle, College email). Online harassment is no different to in-person harassment and will be dealt with in the same way. Students are reminded that there is social media use guidance from the College and Students Union. Support can be provided from the Student Advisory and Wellbeing team and the Students' Union and students can report their concerns anonymously via the RH BeHeard reporting tool.

8. How do I contact staff?

Staff and students should use their Royal Holloway email addresses unless specifically asked to do otherwise (i.e. logging in through MS Teams or Moodle). Please don't expect immediate answers to all questions; staff will have office hours that are set aside for student queries.

Emails coming from personal email addresses are likely go into a staff junk email folder and will delay or preclude response.

Use of private phone numbers by students and staff is discouraged unless absolutely necessary. Where they have been used, numbers should be deleted afterwards. If staff do contact students on their private numbers, then they should use the 141 function to withhold their number.

Out of office message use by lecturers should provide details of a return date and alternative contact.

9. How can I access more support for my online learning?

There are a number of ways that we will be providing support for students with additional needs. Each students needs are unique, Disability and Dyslexia Services provide range of support.

10. What if issues arise around bullying online?

It's important to underline the academic focus on all online forum for education – keeping discussions on track and within agreed boundaries. Student Wellbeing can be a source of support beyond your School. The RH Be Heard platform (RH BeHeard) allows for reporting.