

Zoom Breakout Rooms

This information was collected from several different sites around the Internet with comments by Arlynn McMahon, DTM

A Zoom host can create up to 50 breakout rooms for use by groups of participants. These rooms can be used to facilitate private discussions between mentor and protégé or a guest with a VP Membership. Breakout rooms can also facilitate speech contests. Zoom has training videos and articles about the basics of breakout rooms. Go here: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476093-Getting-Started-with-Video-Breakout-Rooms> Also, here is a nice YouTube video made by a Toastmaster for Toastmasters, go here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUQZEGPhtIE&feature=emb_logo

The Zoom “HOST” is the person who starts the Zoom meeting, sets up the breakout rooms, and manages which participants move into different rooms. The HOST can also name one or more co-HOSTS who can assist with breakout rooms and other tasks.

Online Contest Briefings

- If the Online Contest Chairs chooses to hold Contestant and Judges Briefings the day before the contest, then it's easier to schedule separate meetings rather than using breakout rooms.
- If briefings are to be held just before the contest, as is traditional with in-person contests, then using breakout rooms works. One breakout room can hold members in the Contestants Briefing and another can hold the Judges Briefing.
- Name breakout rooms appropriately to help identify which group is in each room.
- When creating breakout rooms, one of the options is “*Allow participants to return to the main session at any time*”. If that option is selected, participants in breakout rooms can return to the contest room when they wish. Otherwise, someone must contact a HOST (i.e.; by text message) to return participants.

Sequestering Contestants

- During Tables Topics® and Evaluation contests, contestants must be sequestered in a separate room and brought into the contest room one at a time. Breakout rooms can be used to sequester contestants.
- When the contest begins, the first speaker stays in the contest room while other speakers are moved to the breakout room to await their turn.
- After each speaker finishes, during the minute of silence, a Host moves the next speaker out of the breakout room; into the contest room. However, there is no method in Zoom to move a participant from a breakout room without ending the breakout room, in which case all contestants are moved to the contest room at once.

Below are a couple of common workarounds for this situation. My titles should indicate my personal opinions as an experienced BreakoutRoomMaster.

#1 My Fav: Allow contestants to move themselves to the contest room. Turn on the above-mentioned option.

This method is the easiest to manage and is the least work on the HOST assigned to the task. However, it does require that contestants pay attention; and, not hit the *Return* button until they are told to.

- Appoint a HOST to communicate with the breakout room. When the previous speaker is finished, the HOST texts the next participant that it's time to move to the contest room. That contestant then selects "Leave Breakout Room."
- Else another way is to, appoint a Breakout Room SAA (BORSAA) who will move to the breakout room with all contestants and be the point-of-contact for the HOST. In this way a HOST is communicating with only one person rather than all the contestants. The BORSAA is also there to answer contestant questions and keep their energy up.

#2 A Good Option: Identify the contest room and the sequestering room both as breakout rooms.

If you decide not to allow sequestered contestants to move themselves then a HOST must move them. As mentioned, there is no way to move only one contestant from a breakout room to the main room – it's either all or none.

- When the HOST initiates the meeting, create two breakout rooms. One room is the contest room and the other is the sequestering room.
- As participants log in to the meeting, a HOST moves them to the contest breakout room. Therefore, when the contest begins, all participants are in the contest breakout room.
- When it is time to sequester contestants, a HOST moves them to the sequestering room.
- It is then a quick and simple step to move each contestant to the contest breakout room when it is their turn.

3 Too much work, IMHO. Close and reopen the breakout room for each contestant. Another approach is to end the breakout room after the first speaker. That brings all remaining contestants into the contest room. Then the HOST returns all but the second speaker back to the breakout room

With this method, the breakout room is closed after each speaker, then reopened to sequester the remaining speakers. Suppose, for example, there are four contestants in a Table Topics contest:

- When the contest begins, the first speaker remains in the contest room. A HOST moves speakers 2 through 4 (possibly with an assistant SAA) to the breakout room.
- When the first speaker finishes, the HOST ends the breakout room, automatically moving speakers 2 through 4 back to the contest room. The HOST immediately reopens the breakout room and moves speakers 3 and 4 back to it. Both of these steps are performed during the minute of silence.
- When the second speaker finishes, the HOST ends the breakout room, automatically moving speakers 3 and 4 back to the contest room. The HOST immediately reopens the breakout room and moves speaker 4 back to it.
- When the third speaker finishes, the HOST ends the breakout room, automatically moving speaker 4 back to the contest room.

This is a lot of work on the HOST assigned to the task and a lot of movement for contestants. However, it is fairly simple to do.

#4 Easy but not fun. A final option puts each contestant in a separate breakout room.

At this point, explaining specific steps is probably not needed. This option works and it's not intensive for the HOST but it is not enjoyable for the contestants. They are stuck in a room by themselves. Especially the last contestant has spent almost the entire contest alone.

Make it easy on HOSTs

In even an average size contest, the HOST must scan down a long list of participant names to find the right people to move into the right breakout room. This can be very time consuming.

- Rename functionaries with their title in all caps, followed by their first name. (expect the judges, as they are secret).
- Rename contestants (for example: Contestant #1 or #1, Kathy))

Conclusion

Zoom allows you to move people to separate rooms and to conduct your speech contest as required by Toastmasters International.

The Contest Chair, Contest Master, Chief Judge, and BORSAA(s) **must practice** using breakout rooms **as a team** at least once before the day of the contest. Until your members are experienced in juggling multiple breakout rooms, plan a separate meeting just for the practice.

Lead by example. Prepare for success. Demonstrate professionalism. By rehearsing the process with your team, it increases the likelihood of having a smooth and enjoyable contest experience for everyone. No one enjoys long delays as HOSTS figure out how to get the right people into the right rooms.

Advanced Add-On's

After your team has mastered the basics you can really jazz it up. Consider the following:

- Unique virtual backgrounds for functionaries (not judges, as they are secret)
- Pleasant but peppy music during the one minute breaks. Instrumentals are recommended over songs with words as they may be distracting to judges.
- A chime or other sound effects to signal a change in contest segments.
- An applause soundtrack after each contestant.

THE END