

Online Debate Tutorial



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Opening Notes

This is an ongoing document prepared by the Spartan Debate Institute to facilitate online debate instruction and competition. Given the rapidly evolving and newness of online platforms, this should be viewed as a “work in progress.” This document was created after hundreds of hours of beta-testing online instruction and completion but there is always room for improvement. Please direct questions, concerns, or feedback to debate@msu.edu

Part of the motivation for MSU Debate and the SDI working with online platforms is to increase access but the increase in online platforms also raises questions about accessibility. Addressing accessibility concerns is an ongoing part of this project as we work to ensure that this trend doesn't disproportionately disadvantage groups.



Technology Checklist

Required:

- Laptop or desktop
- Microphone
- Headphones
- Strong network connection (Ethernet is the best option)
- Camera if not built in to computer/laptop

Recommended:

- Headset (something [like this](#) works well to replace microphone and headphones above)

Nice to have:

- External monitor or TV to host the video aspects of the debate
- Use of a “smart classroom” with technology items listed above

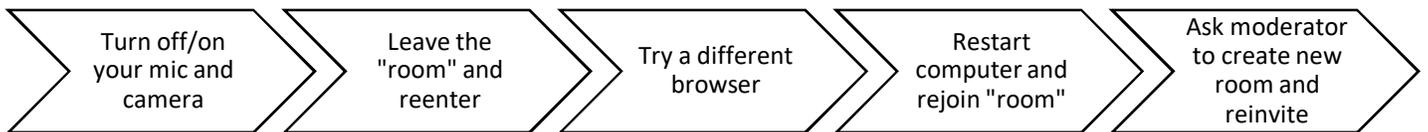


A note on network connections: You can use a strong wireless network connection (think campus, public library, hotel conference space). If you are on home Wi-Fi, you might want to consider using an Ethernet cable to connect to your router. Even just sitting closer to your router can make a huge difference in internet speed.

Before the Tournament or Round

- Reserve physical rooms somewhere with good Wi-F or set up your wired connection
- Do a microphone and video check using the platform the tournament or debate will be using
- Make sure you know how to use the platform the tournament is using and have read all guidance materials from them
- If possible, have practice debate and speeches using the tournament's platform
- Check your speaking rate - online platforms tend to pixelate sound occasionally - ensure that you're enunciating, speaking at a rate that is picked up by the tech and that you've maximized your microphone use. Try using your microphone at different distances and angles.

Troubleshooting Steps:



During the Tournament or Round

- Be sure to check-in to your rooms on time to disclose and make sure tech is working. It **cannot be emphasized enough** how important this is to efficiently execute online debates.
- Make sure that you are clearly named in the tournament platform using the tournament's given naming convention (e.g. "Participant – MSU – Carly Watson"). This allows the tournament host to clearly see who is in each room.
- Check your camera angle – make sure that your mouth is visible to the judge and try to minimize distractions in the background
- During speeches, everyone except the speaker should mute themselves. Debaters should double check both that everyone is ready for the speech and that they have their microphones turned off. It's also suggested that non-speaking members, turn off their cameras as well.
- Each speaker should keep a local recording of their speech and the ensuing CX. There is a built-in Verbatim recording option shown in the screenshot below.



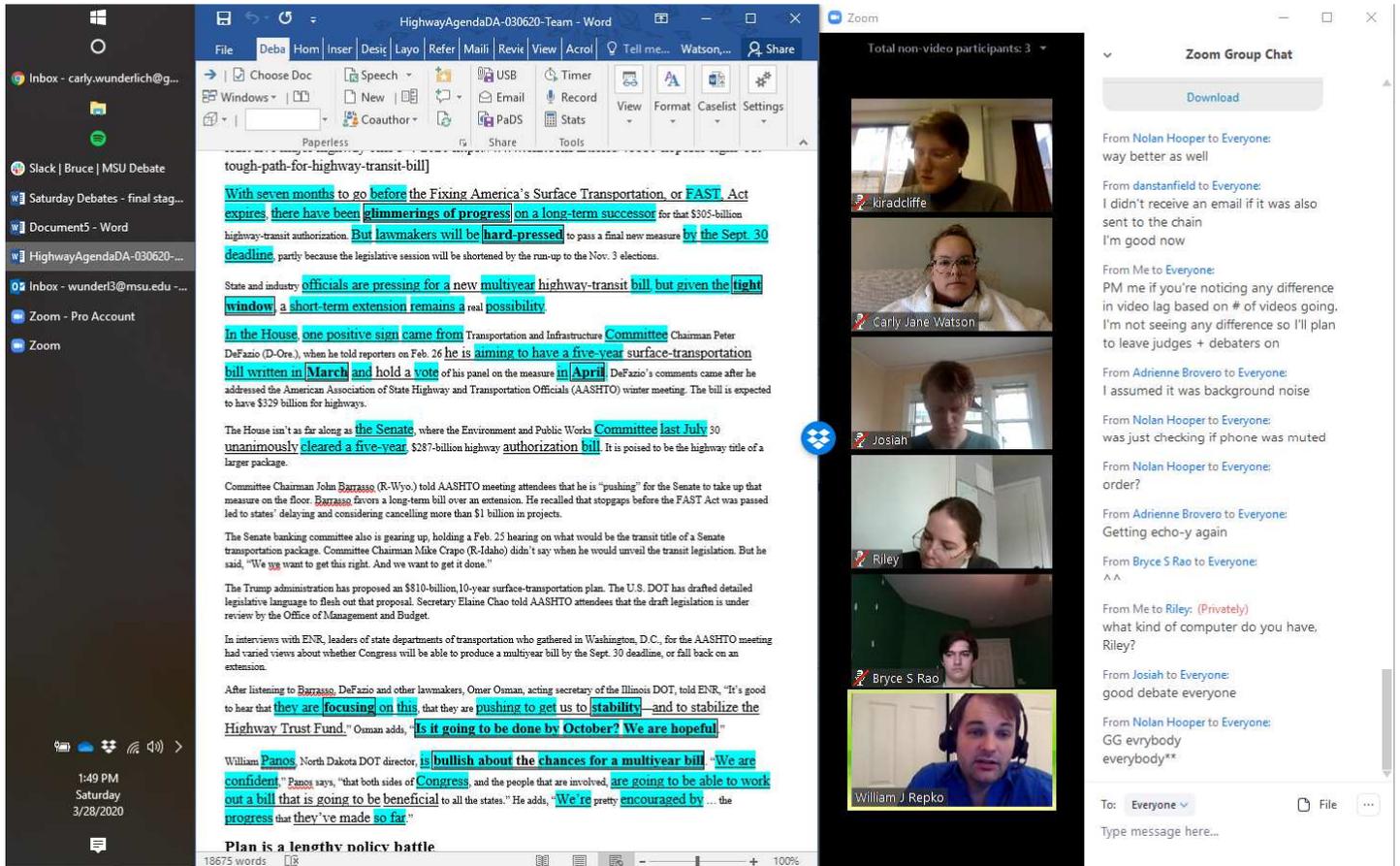
- Cross-ex is the worst audio when people talk over each other. Participants should be aware of this and seek to minimize cross talk.
- Judges should record their post-round feedback locally



Handling disconnection: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Ensuring good internet connection and platform practice will help minimize disconnections. If debaters are diligent about recording a local copy of their speech, disconnection can be followed by giving the person that disconnected a copy of the speech. In the same way computer crashes are negotiated in paperless debate, the disconnected individual should be given time to re-watch the part of the speech they missed.

Screen Set-Up for a Single Judge Round

If you're being judged by a single judge, you can set up your screen as seen below and have all the judges and participants visible. It also allows you to simultaneously see the chat function in Zoom.



Screen Set-Up for a Panel Judge Round

If you're being judged by a panel of judges, you can set up your screen as seen below and have all the judges and participants visible. Note that in this format, you most likely cannot have the Zoom chat also displayed.

The screenshot displays a computer desktop with a Microsoft Word document open in the foreground and a Zoom meeting window in the background. The Word document is titled "HighwayAgendaDA-030620-Team - Word" and contains an article about highway transit legislation. The article text includes several highlighted phrases in blue and red, such as "With seven months to go before the Fixing America's Surface Transportation, or FAST, Act expires, there have been glimmerings of progress on a long-term successor for that \$305-billion highway-transit authorization. But lawmakers will be hard-pressed to pass a final new measure by the Sept. 30 deadline," "State and industry officials are pressing for a new multivear highway-transit bill but given the tight window, a short-term extension remains a real possibility," "In the House, one positive sign came from Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), when he told reporters on Feb. 26 he is aiming to have a five-year surface-transportation bill written in March and hold a vote of his panel on the measure in April," "The House isn't as far along as the Senate, where the Environment and Public Works Committee last July 30 unanimously cleared a five-year \$287-billion highway authorization bill," "Committee Chairman John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) told AASHTO meeting attendees that he is 'pushing' for the Senate to take up that measure on the floor. Barrasso favors a long-term bill over an extension. He recalled that stopgaps before the FAST Act was passed led to states' delaying and considering cancelling more than \$1 billion in projects," "The Senate banking committee also is gearing up, holding a Feb. 25 hearing on what would be the transit title of a Senate transportation package. Committee Chairman Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) didn't say when he would unveil the transit legislation. But he said, 'We ygg want to get this right. And we want to get it done.'", "The Trump administration has proposed an \$810-billion, 10-year surface-transportation plan. The U.S. DOT has drafted detailed legislative language to flesh out that proposal. Secretary Elaine Chao told AASHTO attendees that the draft legislation is under review by the Office of Management and Budget," "In interviews with ENR, leaders of state departments of transportation who gathered in Washington, D.C., for the AASHTO meeting had varied views about whether Congress will be able to produce a multiyear bill by the Sept. 30 deadline, or fall back on an extension," "After listening to Barrasso, DeFazio and other lawmakers, Omer Osman, acting secretary of the Illinois DOT, told ENR, 'It's good to hear that they are focusing on this, that they are pushing to get us to stability—and to stabilize the Highway Trust Fund.' Osman adds, 'Is it going to be done by October? We are hopeful!'", "William Panos, North Dakota DOT director, is bullish about the chances for a multivear bill. 'We are confident,' Panos says, 'that both sides of Congress, and the people that are involved, are going to be able to work out a bill that is going to be beneficial to all the states.' He adds, 'We're pretty encouraged by... the progress that they've made so far.'", "Plan is a lengthy policy battle", "Dickerson 15 [Kelly, space reporter at Tech Insider. M.A. in science and health reporting from CUNY Graduate School of Journalism. 'Here's why NASA won't work with China to explore space' 10-19-15 https://www.businessinsider.com/nasa-china-collaboration-illegal-2015-10]", "18675 words", "100%". The Zoom window shows a grid of 11 participants in a video conference. The participants are: kradcliffe, Carly Jane Watson, Josiah, Riley, Bryce S Rao, Adrienne Brovero, danstanfield, Alan Coverstone, William J Repko, Mikaela Malsin, and David Helwich. The Zoom window also shows "Total non-video participants: 3".

Online Tournament Administration Overview

- Set up clear points of contact with phone numbers and email addresses of people to contact in case of tech issues
- Create an “offline” contact sheet with emails and phone numbers of participants if you need to track people down
- Build room check-in to the tournament schedule and consider including enforcement mechanisms
- Add slack into schedule to allow for tech trouble-shooting and possible disconnects
- Account as much as possible for differing time zones in building the schedule
- Include in invitation language speaking directly to and discouraging potential avenues for cheating based on use of online technology

Sample Invitation Language to Address Cheating:

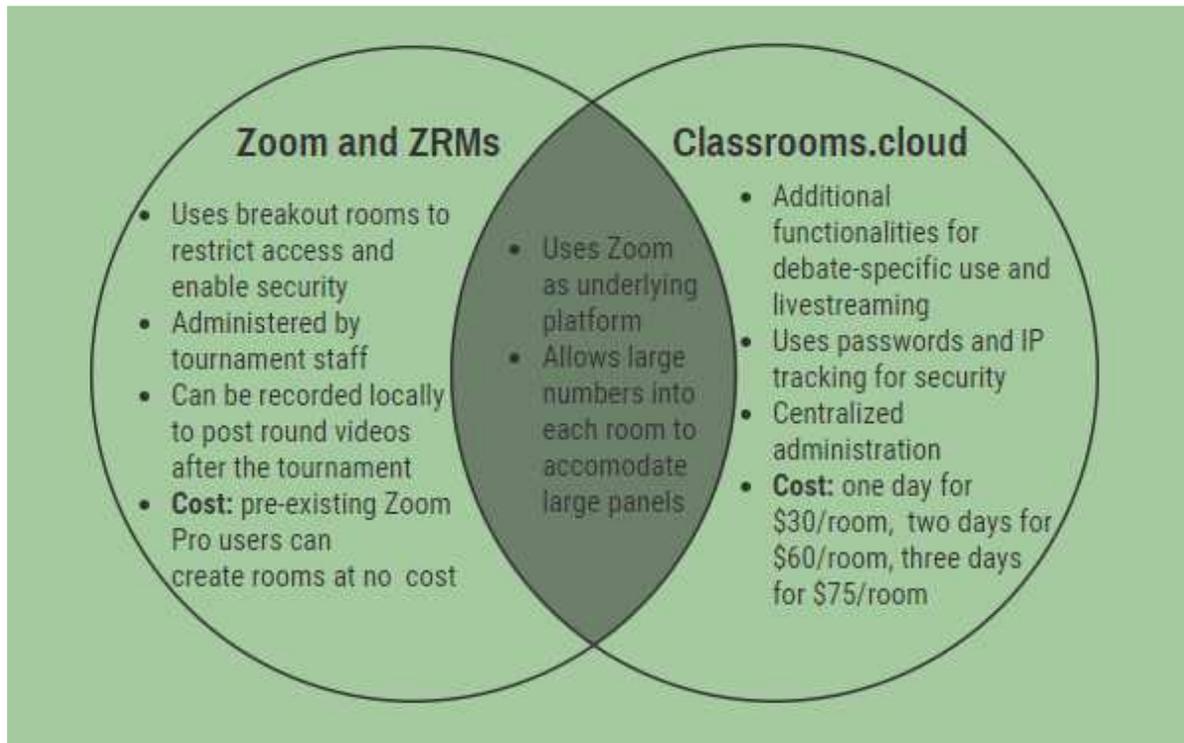
It is our expectation that participants will uphold the same values as it relates to cheating as they do during brick-and-mortar tournaments. It is unacceptable to accept outside help from anyone who is not your partner during the round. You should not use fabricated technological complaints or issues to falsely influence the outcome of the round.

Online Tournament Platform Choice

There are three primary choices that be used to host online tournaments (1) Creating Zoom rooms (2) Hiring Classroom.cloud to create Zoom rooms or (3) NSDA Campus. The choice depends on the size of tournament, willingness to centrally administer the rooms within the tournament staff, and cost.

Having the tournament create Zoom rooms and use Zoom Room Managers (ZRM)s has one main advantage over Classrooms.cloud – cost. For tournament administrators who are Zoom Pro users there are no technological platform costs associated with administering the tournament. As of this writing, Classrooms.cloud charges \$30/room for a one-day tournament, \$60/room for a two-day tournament and \$75/day for a three-day tournament.

The following graphic provides a summary of shared and unique advantages between ZRM)s and Classrooms.cloud



The following section will detail how to run a tournament using Zoom and ZRM)s.

Using Zoom for Debates

Zoom and ZRMs are a great option for hosting tournaments. We recommend limiting total capacity in a single room to ~20 policy debates but some of that will depend on the specifics of your Zoom account. Tournaments could have each Zoom room hold a different section of the bracket or have each division in a given room depending on what works best.

Tabroom's "map" option allows you to easily link Zoom rooms set up in advance with the specific Zoom Rooms. The tournament can also provide a list of Zoom URLs or dial-in information for participants if they will be using more than one.

In this section, we will describe some Zoom functionality and how it works when creating a debate tournament. Many of these screenshots assume that you have already joined or created a room. If you are the room creator, you'll need to select "Host a Meeting" and then invite participants. If you are joining a room, use the provided URL to enter the room.

If you are using Zoom and don't have the options described below, start in the "setting" section of Zoom to explore different functionalities. Many of the buttons in the room are described below.



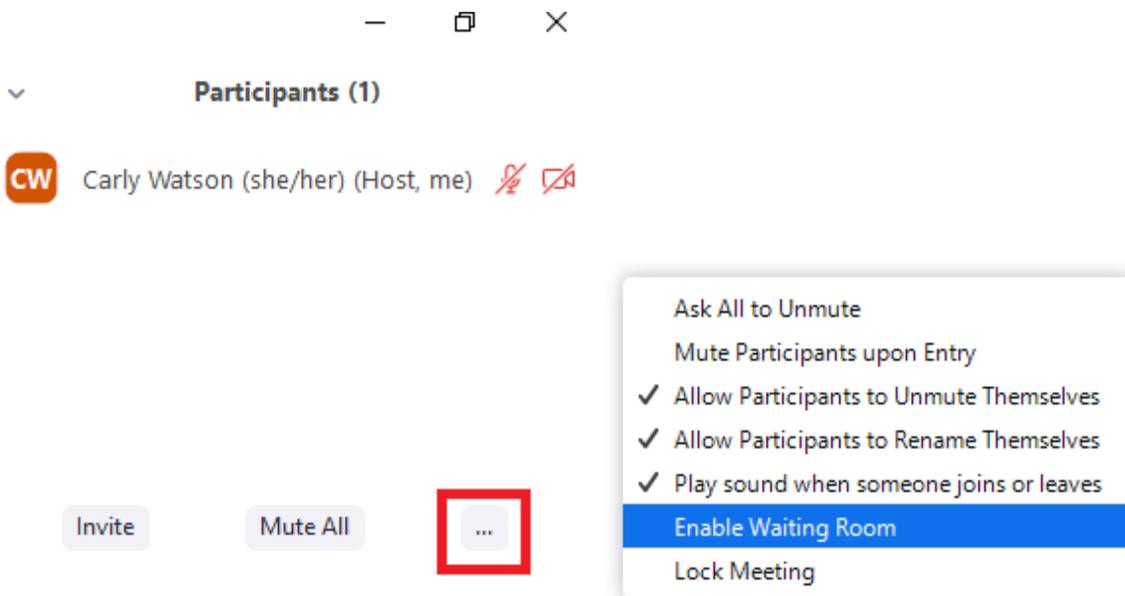
Security

Security and access control is of paramount importance when tournaments are hosting (especially for high school youth). There are three primary methods of creating access-control to the meeting:

1. **Meeting password** – setting up your meeting with a password that’s only given to tournament participants creates a first line of defense for controlling access
2. **Waiting room** – enabling a waiting room allows the host to admit only those who are affiliated with the tournament. Directions on enabling a waiting room are provided below.
3. **Manually sorting to breakout rooms** – an additional layer of access control exists if the tournament host manually assigns participants to breakout rooms. This is a double check on making sure that everyone is where they ought to be.

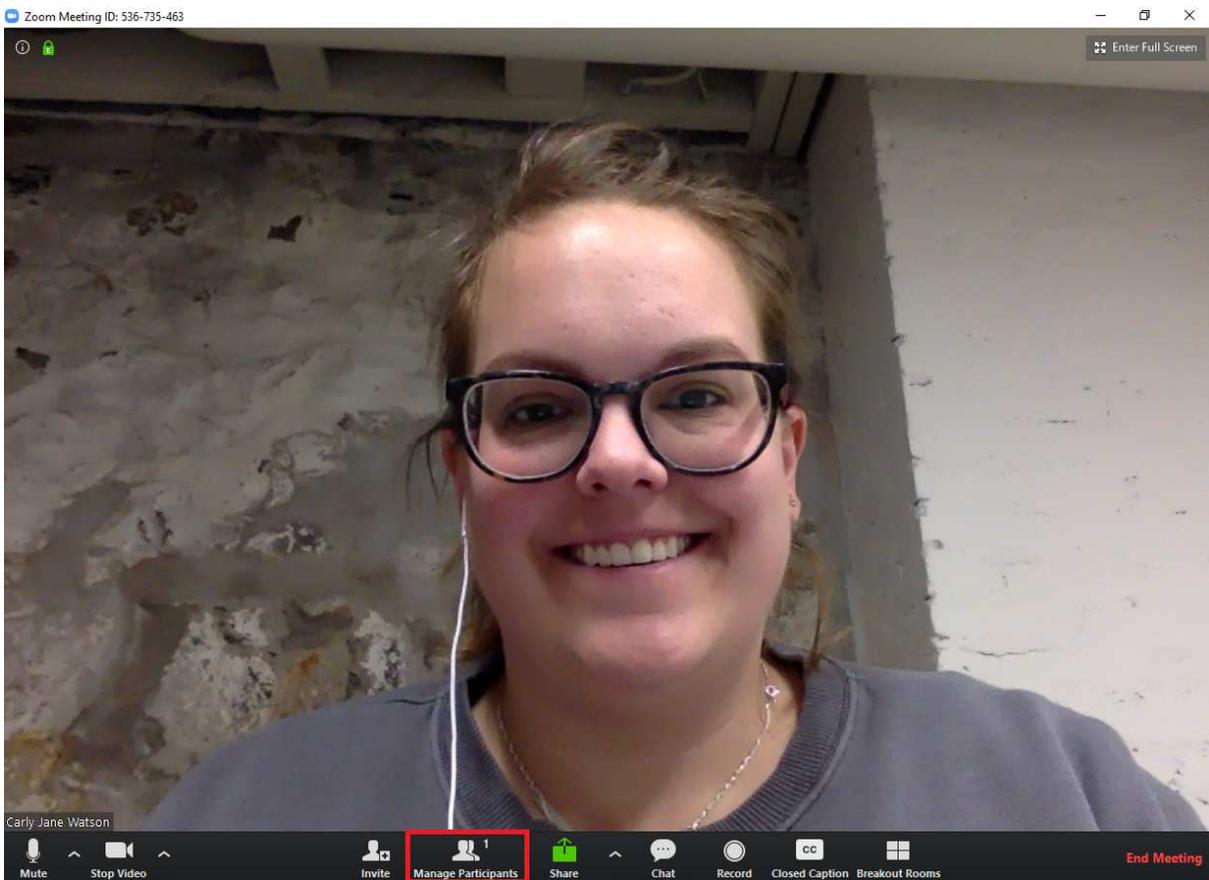
Enabling a Waiting Room

Hosts can enable a breakout room when they first set up the meeting or you can do it once the room is open. In the lower right of the “Participants” tab, the “...” will allow you to select “Enable Waiting Room.”



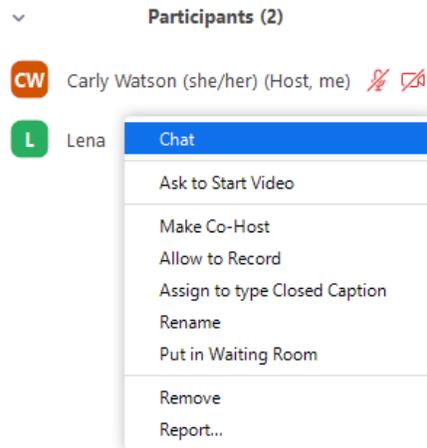
“Participants”

“Participants” allows the host to mute audio or video for any participant (e.g. if a debater forgets to mute themselves when they’re not the speaker).



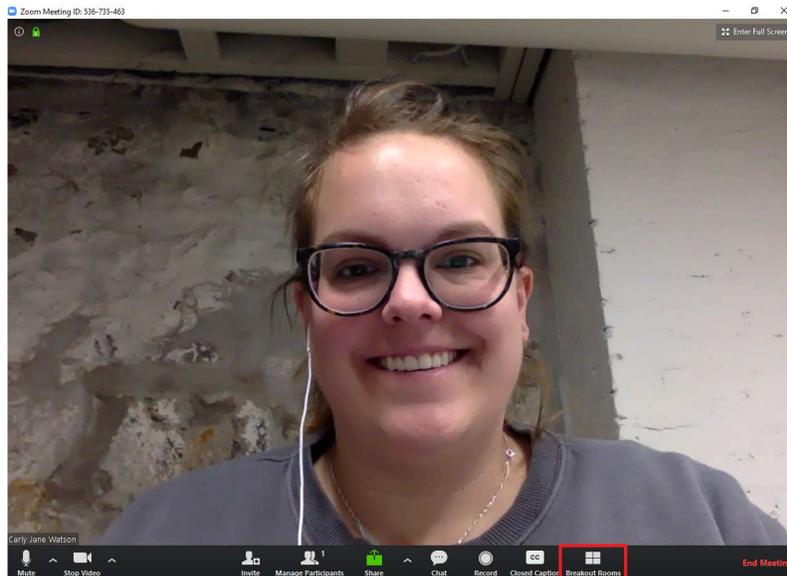
Assigning a Co-Host

The participants view is also how you assign a co-host or assign a new host. When you hover over the other participant's name, you select "Make Co-Host." This creates redundancy in the meeting. If the host loses their connection, the co-host automatically becomes the host. This is strongly recommended to avoid single point failure when tournament hosting.

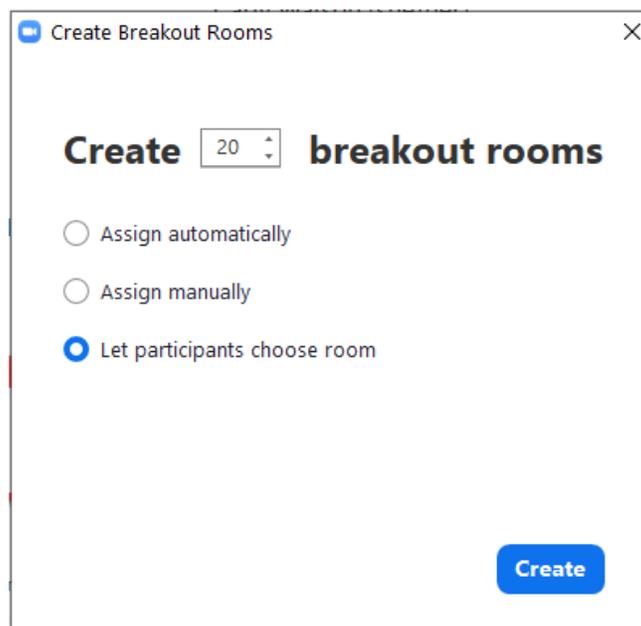


Breakout Rooms for Debate Tournaments

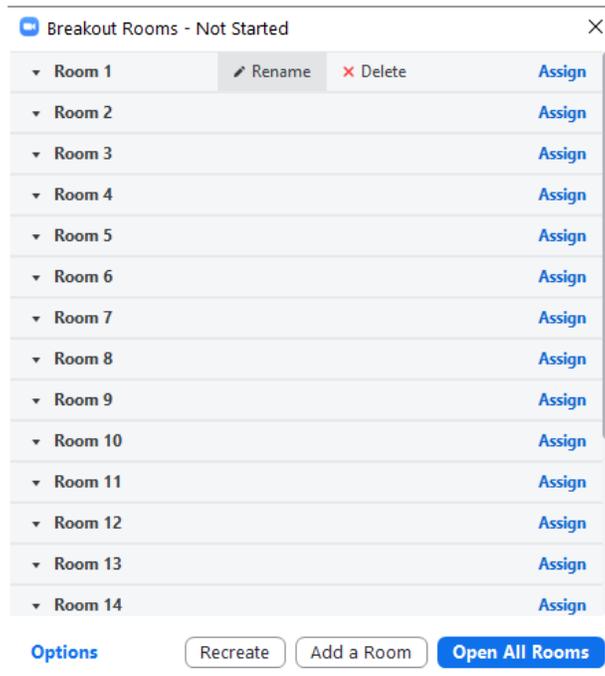
“Breakout Rooms” is useful for tournament administrators setting up multiple rounds from a section of the bracket. This allows you to select which room participants go to, control observer access, and rename the rooms. For example, if your pairing used rooms numbered 1-20, you would name each breakout room 1-20.



Begin by clicking “Breakout Rooms.” Then you’ll choose the number of rooms (in this case, 20). The host then has two options, either you can choose “Assign manually” and sort participants into the specific rooms or select “Let participants choose room” and people can then join the correct room. We suggest letting participants sort themselves to reduce administrative burden. Hitting “Create” will then open the breakout room view.



In this view, you will have the option to rename the rooms or assign participants. To change the room names, you hover over the room and select “Rename.” Once the breakout rooms are renamed you select “Open All Rooms” and participants will then be able to self-sort and enter the rooms.



Unassigned participants will appear in the top section and from there you can easily sort them to rooms if you’re manually sorting.

Once people have joined your meeting, this view will also give you a clear idea of who is in the specific breakout rooms, who’s missing, and who has potentially dropped from the call.



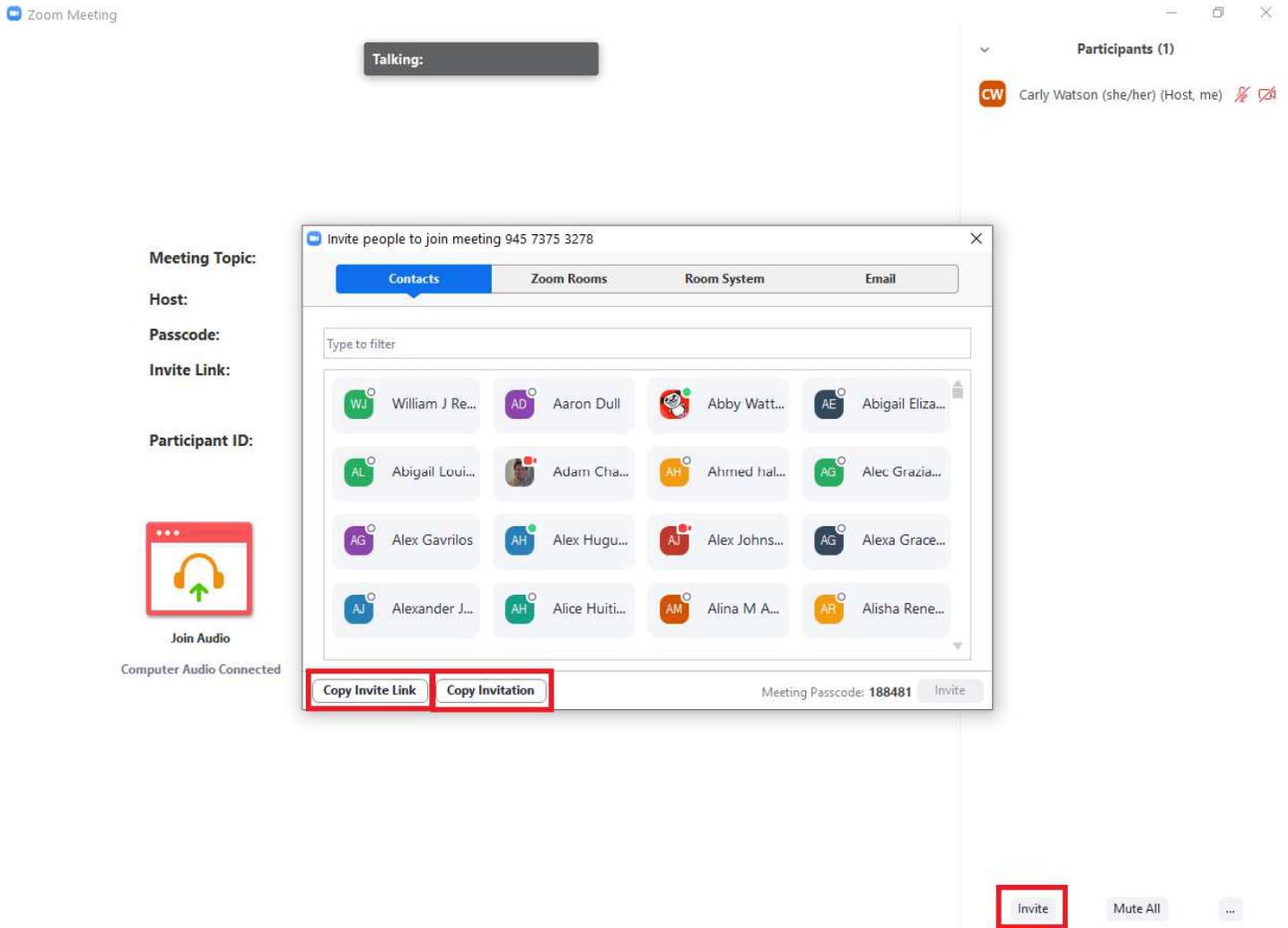
Note: Once the host has created breakout rooms for the given meeting, you’re unable to *add* additional rooms. Make sure that when you originally create the breakout rooms you give yourself some spare capacity just in case. That will avoid having to end the meeting to add breakout rooms.

Troubleshooting Steps:



“Invite”

If you’ve already created a room, the participants tab allows you to invite others to join the meeting. Select “Participants” from the bottom panel then “Invite.” “Copy Invite Link” will copy the URL and meeting password. “Copy Invitation” will copy the full Zoom invite including the dial-in information.

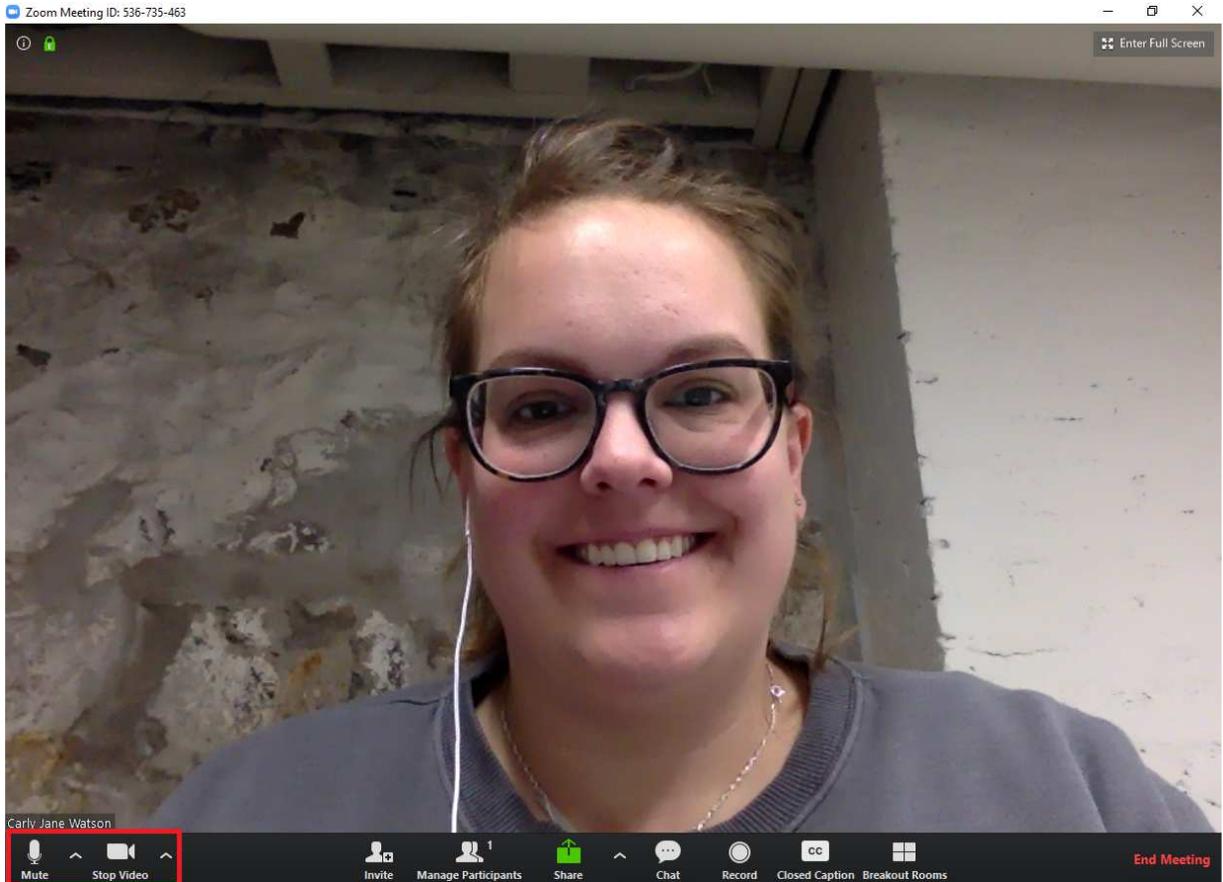


“Mute”/“Stop Video”

The “mute” and “stop video” buttons are important so that you know how to mute both your audio and your camera. Using the arrows to the right of the buttons, you can select the source for your audio and video (helpful if you’re using an external microphone for example).

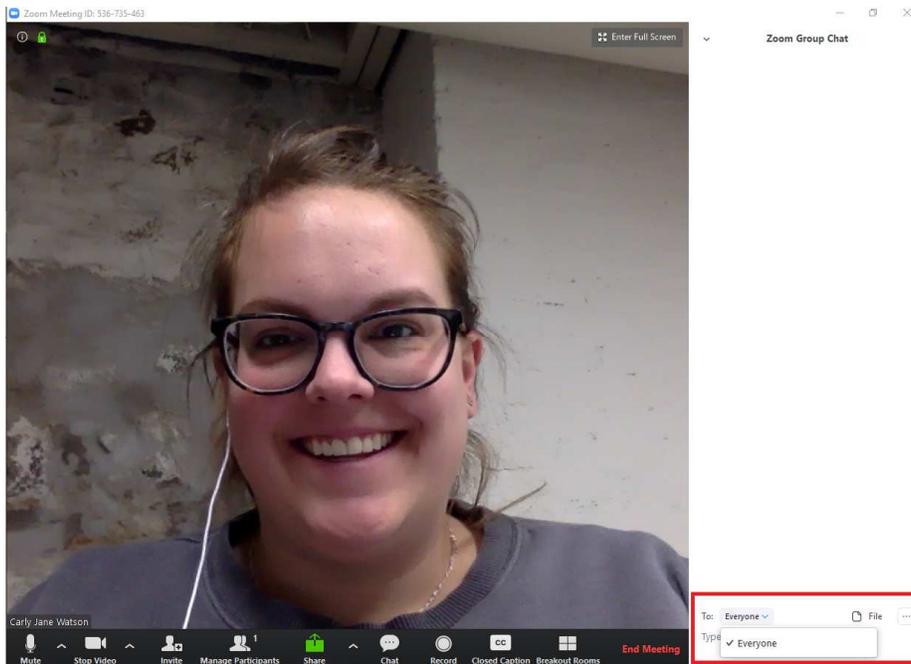
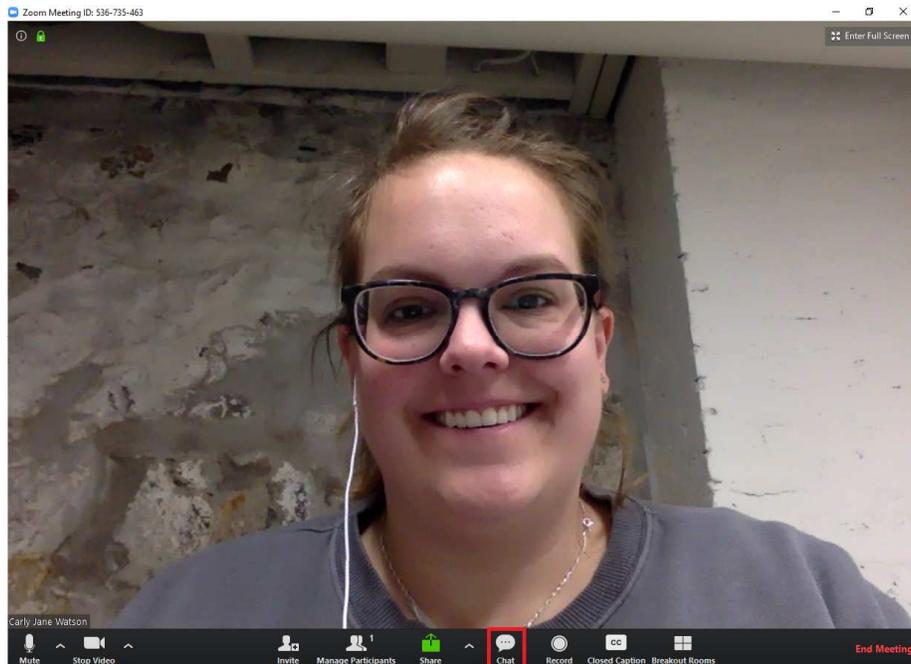
Mute keyboard shortcut – Alt + A

Stop video keyboard shortcut – Alt + V



“Chat”

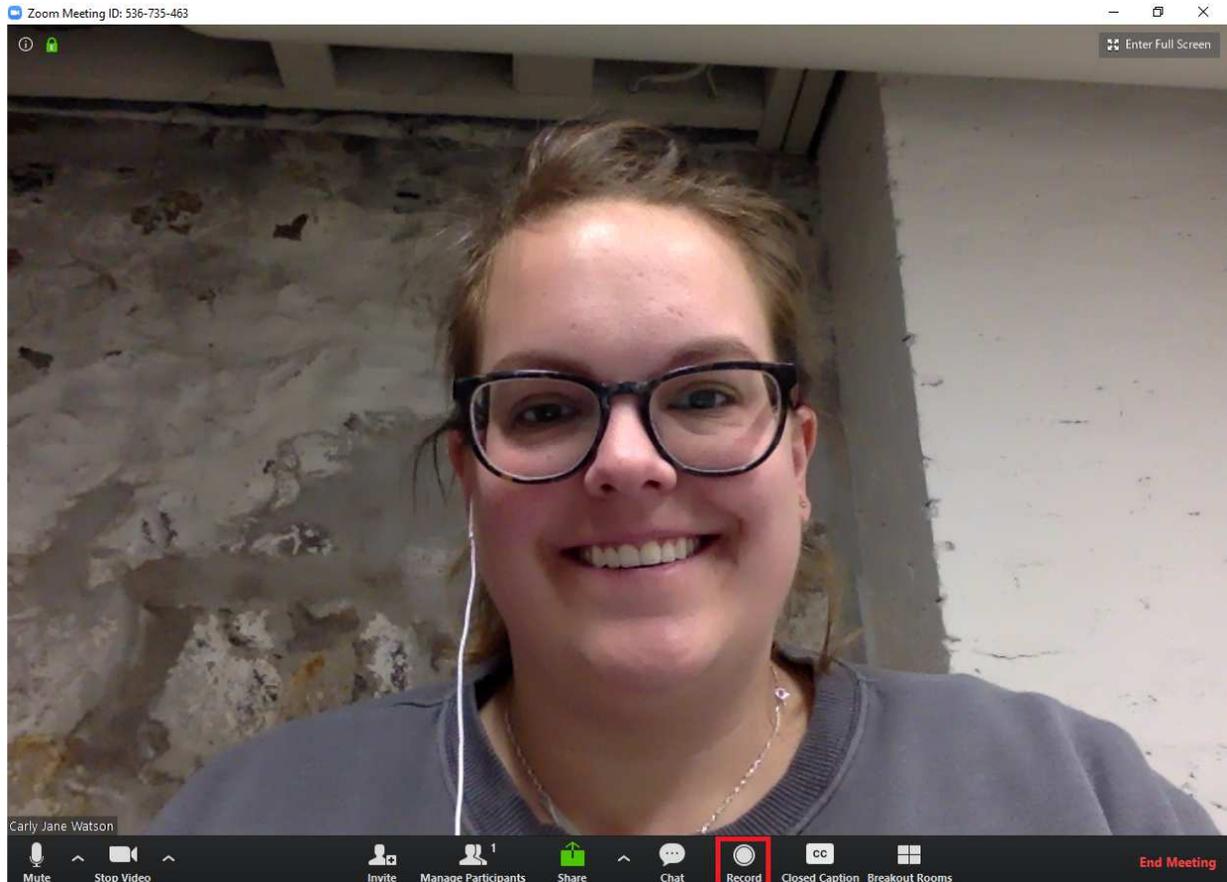
The “chat” function can be used to communicate throughout the debate with the whole room or individuals. There is also a setting where the rooms you create allow files to be sent over the chat. In order to streamline the number of windows open, you may want to use the chat function to send speech docs for the round.



“Record”

The “record” button will record a local copy of the entire round to your computer. You won’t be able to use this as the local recording option for speeches because if you end the recording, you have to end the meeting to access it. It does however provide a good tool to keep recording of full debates to watch later or review with coaches.

Best practice suggests that you should only record a local copy of the debate if your opponents and judge agree to appear on the recording.



“Share Screen”

The “share” button allows you to share your screen with participants. In the end, this could be woven in to debates as debaters try to emphasize certain parts of cards in cross-ex. In the short term, you don’t have to worry much about this button for tournament hosting.

