

# WIR\_tuell

How to grow together  
in digital studies



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## LEGAL NOTICE

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Date: 28 May 2020

The project WIR\_tuell was developed as part of the hackathon of the Hochschulforum Digitalisierung on 06 and 07 May 2020. This manual is licensed under CC BY 4.0.



# Social relations in virtual teaching

How can students grow together as a group when they meet digitally only? How can teachers contribute to a feeling of togetherness?

Social inclusion and the development of personal relationships are conducive to motivation and sustainable learning processes, but are often made more difficult in virtual teaching and learning environments.

On the following pages we will help you to find solutions for your individual obstacles. We present means, methods, measures and interventions for various course formats that can help you as a teacher and student to build and develop a group feeling.

## What context are we talking about?



Digital classroom



Digital lectures



Digital group work



Digital Block Seminar



Digital self-study

# Students

As students, you use existing learning spaces or create them as needed. Do not only rely on the impulses of the lecturers, but become active yourself to grow together as a group.

In some elements, digital studies certainly differ from physical attendance - but perhaps not as much as you might think. In order to feel part of your course of study in the digital university environment, you can do the following:

- Choose a photo, picture, icon for yourself. This has recognition value beyond individual events and becomes part of your virtual identity. If all students assign themselves such a distinctive mark, it will be easier for you to communicate with each other.
- Take the initiative and e.g. form digital (learning) groups. Many students feel as isolated as you do, but not everyone dares to take the initiative.
- Give each other feedback. Fellow students can show you important and new possibilities in an uncomplicated way with your tasks, projects, homework etc. and help you with problems - just as you can help them.
- Also meet informally in the digital space to keep up to date with what is happening in your life.

Things do not always run smoothly. Digital studies can be challenging with regard to your group affiliation and team spirit. The following questions of self-reflection and self-analysis will help you to find a solution.

## Food for thought:

- What format / context is our meeting about?
- What exactly is bothering you right now?
- What do you fear that could lead to?
- What do you think is the cause of the problems?
- What can you do so that your fears do not come true? What tools / methods can you use to achieve improvement?

Even if you do not know a suitable method yourself, you might find a solution on the following pages:

- <https://wirlernenonline.de/>
- <https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/de/hochschulen-und-corona-was-jetzt>



# Digital Classroom

## What exactly is bothering you right now?.

- Overload of information.
- The agreements among all students are made through many different media channels and are very time consuming.

## What do you fear this might lead to?

- You can no longer see through all accesses/passwords/platforms.
- Important information slips through your fingers.
- Everything stays the same, the classroom does not catch on and nobody will use it.

## What do you think is the cause of the problems?

- New situation, a lot of information, sometimes chaos, the situation needs some geeting used to.
- Group dynamic effects: There are no rules for this space yet, the possibilities and chances for this space are not yet visible.

## What can you do to prevent your fears from coming true? With which tools / methods can you achieve the improvement?

- Try to stay calm. Pass on objective criticism to other participants. Try to improve the system. Everyone is grateful for constructive suggestions.
- Get involved in the virtual classroom.
- Give your virtual classroom its own logo.
- Give yourself a profile picture (or an icon, e.g. of your working environment).
- Create a netiquette with other students.
- Check if you have full access rights (to initiate rooms, meetings etc. on your own) and check if you are missing rights.
- Create protected rooms for study groups.
- Always meet in the virtual classroom, then go for video conferences from there.
- Communicate openly if you are looking for a learning partner\*in/ project partner\*in/ critical friend etc.
- Meet for digital coffee breaks.



# Digital Lectures

## What exactly is bothering you right now?

- The lectures are designed for a lot of input and there is little or no communication and interaction with and between students.

## What do you fear that could lead to?

- Another 90-minute web conference with a 90-minute input: You have already seen monotonous presentations and better slides. Will your fellow students find this as "existing" as you do? What was just said there? I didn't understand that at all. Should I ask my questions in the chat? Better not, otherwise the others may think I'm stupid. And now my teacher poses a question to the group. I will definitely not turn on my microphone and say something. Reflecting the lecture with my fellow students over a cup of coffee would be nice, but digitally this is simply not possible-

## What do you think is the reason for these issues?

- There are only a few opportunities to participate in a digital lecture. The lecturers hardly incorporate any interactions among students. So it's easy to withdraw.
- The above-mentioned problems already applied to classic lectures. Digitalisation reinforces this once again.

## What can you do so that your fears do not come true? What tools / methods can you use to achieve improvement??

- Use all possibilities of participation that do exist and dare to ask questions. Use the chat in web conferences and take an active part in discussions.
- Use other ways of communication with your fellow students or invite each other for a virtual coffee break.
- Dare to give feedback to your lecturers during the semester.



# Digital Groupwork

## What exactly is bothering you right now?

- Lack of communication with and/or limited availability of the project supervisor.
- No active participation of the group members.
- Lack of communication within the group.
- Group members do not appear at agreed web conferences / do not know when they will meet.
- Motivation problems.
- Bad mood / problems within the group.

## What do you fear this might lead to?

- Your project is not progressing as you would like it to. You would like to discuss some aspects with your project supervisor, but you do not know how to reach them.
- Help! Your group work starts on Thursday and you don't know anybody from your group. You will feel uncomfortable because the other students know each other from their bachelor's degree. Therefore you do not dare to talk.
- You have been talking to the others in your group via webcam for 3 hours. Slowly you don't feel like talking anymore. You think about whether you should simply turn off your camera / your laptop. Nobody would notice anyway.

## What do you think is the cause of the problems?

- Communication channels with the supervisor are not discussed in advance.
- Dealing with questions that arise / feedback discussions were not clarified.
- In groups that have newly formed, a group feeling and familiarity in dealing with each other is missing. Group members may feel inhibited in their participation.
- Especially in front of the PC, motivational problems often arise. This results in communication problems. Long web conferences are also perceived as strenuous.

**What can you do to prevent your fears from coming true? With which tools / methods can you achieve the improvement?**

- Sets up dates in advance for feedback meetings with your project supervisor. He/she could also attend at the beginning of your first meeting.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help. Many things can already be clarified in an email. Others can be solved in a web conference. Some people also offer the possibility to call.
- Get to know your project partners in an (informal) kick-off meeting before the actual project start. Short games can help you to get to know each other.
- Write to each other in the chat before the actual group work.
- Discuss organisational matters at the beginning of your project work.
- Which channels do you want to use for written communication?
- Which channels would you like to use for video conferences?
- Also pay attention to manners when using chats.
- Make sure that there is enough room for everyone to speak in video conferences.
- Set rules if necessary.
- Divide tasks sensibly, define responsibilities (different roles) and set internal deadlines. For example, create an online document that can be viewed by everyone for monitoring your project.
- "Celebrate" small successes and bigger milestones. Make yourself aware of your successes.
- Create regularity in your meetings. For example, set a binding appointment at the same time every week when you meet in video conferences. Regardless of this, you can schedule additional meetings.
- Loosen up your meetings with playful elements. How about a game of scribble or lunch together?
- Don't keep your web conferences unnecessarily long.
- Try to solve interpersonal (communication) problems. Bilateral discussions are often enough.
- If you feel like it, meet outside the group work for a beer after work.



# Digital Block

## What exactly is bothering you right now?

- Do you know the feeling? A block seminar on Saturday morning, nobody wants to talk to each other and everybody hopes that time will pass quickly so that they can still use the weekend? And now you get to experience this digitally?

## What do you fear this could lead to?

- Block seminars - for many students this means sacrificing the weekend to the learning material and filling their heads with new content all day long. Maybe for you, too? With block seminars there is the danger that you will break up as a seminar group before you have even grown together as a group. In the long run, little will stick, both in terms of content and contact with other students.

## What do you think is the reason for these issues?

- What is the reason? Usually you don't make long-term contacts in a block seminar because there are no reunions with the other participants throughout the semester. Exciting contacts can also be made in block seminars if the contact is actively organised.

## What can you do so that your fears do not come true? What tools / methods can you use to achieve improvement?

- Have a look at the list of participants before the block seminar - maybe you know some of the participants? Then you can prepare for the block seminar together. For example, you can create notes for the block seminar together, e.g. in an etherpad. You might also want to spend the breaks together, at a digital lunch. Also, talk to the people you find interesting and who have similar interests. Maybe you can also network beyond the block seminar. How about a digital block seminar group so that you can exchange ideas later on, for example when working on your exams?



# Digital Self-Study

## What exactly is bothering you right now?

- There is a lack of motivation, security and social exchange among each other.

## What do you fear this could lead to?

- Especially with digital self-study there is a great danger that your motivation will decrease. This can be the result of a lack of (social) exchange with fellow students or lecturers. Some students also lack social and organisational security with this form of teaching. All this can limit and endanger your sense of “we” as a group. Can you find yourself in these scenarios?

## What do you think is the reason for these issues?

- The fact that students and lecturers in digital self-study behave more passively/can retreat more easily is jeopardising the lively exchange among each other. All you have to do is leave the forum or the video conference, or exhibit video and/or sound at it, and you are already absent. As long as you as students do not actively seek the exchange, it is thus possible to go passively through the whole semester more quickly and for some of you the motivation suffers. If the known forms of interaction are not used due to shyness, demotivation, passivity or the state of anonymity, there will be no "we" feeling.

## What can you do so that your fears do not come true? What tools / methods can you use to achieve improvement?

- Try to join together with one or more fellow students as a learning community / learning partner or as "critical friends". Together you organise and reflect on each other's small tasks and projects. The continuous exchange and regular feedback in small groups / with a partner can increase your motivation and create a sense of community. In the best case, a permanent support method will be created for you. You can also invite each other in digital rooms, exchange and communicate there or simply work on learning modules alone in silence.

