The Virtual Classroom allows for real-time (synchronous) interaction between participants in your course. Sessions can be teacher- or student-lead and an archive of chats can be saved for those who are unable to participate or for future reference. Since the interaction is in real-time (synchronous), all the participants must connect to the Virtual Classroom at the same time.

**Entering the Virtual Classroom**

1. To use the Virtual Classroom, log into your course and click on the Communication link under **Course Tools**.
2. Click on the **Collaboration** link in the Communications list.
3. You will be given a list of sessions to join, choose the one assigned by the instructor by clicking on the **Join** button.

A new window will open up that looks like the one pictured on the next page. Be sure to have any **pop-up blockers turned off** or you will not be able to open the Virtual Classroom. Also, if you do not have the Java plug-in installed on your computer, the Virtual Classroom will not work. See “Troubleshooting the Virtual Classroom” at the end of this document for help.

**Using the Virtual Classroom**

5. The Virtual Classroom has a number of components used for interaction. These areas include:
   A. chat area
   B. whiteboard for sharing drawings and text
   C. participants list
   D. set of tools for use with the whiteboard
   E. clickable menu of additional tools
   F. toolbar for recording and saving Virtual Class session recordings

A description of how to use each area follows.
Using the Text Chat Area

6. All discussions in the Virtual Classroom occur via text chat. The chat history is located in the larger window and postings are stamped by author, date and time.

7. New messages can be composed in the textbox at the bottom of the Virtual Classroom. Simply type in your message and click Send.
8. Alternatively, you can click Compose and type your message into the pop-up textbox that appears, and then click Send. This pop-up Compose Message box also contains an equation editor for typing in mathematical equations. Click Send to post anything typed within the Compose Message pop-up box.

9. You will know that you have posted a message in the Virtual Chat correctly when your message shows up directly above the compose bar in the chat history.

Using the Whiteboard
You can share images and text in the whiteboard by clicking on a drawing tool from the “Tools” menu (see image for Step 5, D), and then clicking on the whiteboard space to draw or type (see image for Step 5, B). To add a blank whiteboard screen, click the Control tab (see image for Step 5, D) and click the + to add a new whiteboard, select the new whiteboard from the panel of whiteboards (should be selected by default) and then click Display. You can also go forward and reverse through whiteboards you’ve created from the Control tab by selecting the whiteboard you wish to display and clicking Display.

Group Browser
You can share webpages with other participants by clicking on the Group Browser option (see image for Step 5, E) and then typing in a web address. Some students will need to click on the weblink that appears in the chat area to view the page, or in rare cases, copy and paste the URL into a new browser.

Course Map
You can navigate through your course content as a group using the Map option (see image for Step 5, E). Simple click on this option and then use the course tree to navigate to the content of interest.

Recording a Virtual Classroom Session
To record a session for archival, click on the Record (circle) icon in the Virtual Classroom (see image for Step 5, F). You can give your recording a unique name or go with the default session name (based on the time and date of the recording). You can pause recording with the double-line icon and stop recording with the square icon (see image for Step 5, F). Recordings will be accessible both during the recording process and after the recording process is complete. To access recordings, navigate to the screen when you clicked “Join” and click on “Recordings” instead (see Steps 1-3).
Other Virtual Class Options
Additional options in the Virtual Class include an Ask Question tool and a Question Inbox, the ability to create Break-out groups of students (which divides a large group of virtual class participants into several smaller groups), Private Messaging (to say something to just one participant privately), and the ability to modify the Controls available to users in the Virtual Class (such as turning on and off private chat).

Troubleshooting the Virtual Class
The Virtual Class, like any other web-based tool, is influenced by both the server it is running on and the user's system as well. Most troubles with the Virtual Class are due to settings on the user’s computer, which vary widely, so only general troubleshooting steps are provided below. If the steps listed below do not help alleviate any issues, please use the support services found at http://esupport.wilmu.edu.

1. Make sure you have any pop-up blockers turned off. To test to see if you have your pop-up blockers turned off, please navigate to the following webpage: http://www.bio101.net/LBO/biological_organization.htm Click on the Biosphere Level of Biological Organization listed to the left. Then click on the words "How big is the biosphere?", and a pop-up window should appear similar to the one below.

![Pop-up Window](image)

If you see the pop-up window, you have all of your pop-up blockers turned off and you can move on to the next troubleshooting step. If no pop-up window appears, disable any pop-up blockers until you can see the pop-up (you may have several pop-up blockers to turn off, found in browser toolbars, security software or in the browser itself) or contact http://esupport.wilmu.edu for additional assistance.

2. Make sure you have a working version of Java on your computer. To test if you have a working version of Java, navigate to the following webpage: http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/microscopy/simplemagnification/index.html

Once this page is loaded, you should see a box showing the progress of an applet loading onto your computer, and then an image of a flower, a lens and an eye:
If you see the Java applet image on your web browser, then you have a working version of the Java plugin and you should move on to the next step. If you do NOT see the images above, then you will need to download and install the Java plug-in from the following website: http://www.java.com/en/download/manual.jsp

3. For Internet Explorer users, you may need to make sure your Active X Control is running. This is accomplish by clicking on the yellow bar that appears at the top of the webpage and choosing Run Active X Control.

4. For Mac users, you may need to use Firefox as your web browser instead of Safari. To download and install Firefox, navigate to http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/ and follow the directions.

If none of the steps above assist you in accessing the Virtual Classroom, contact http://esupport.wilmu.edu for additional support and notify your instructor as well.

For more information . . .

Additional support for Blackboard tools can be found at http://esupport.wilmu.edu, by clicking on the Help! button in Blackboard, at http://www.wilmu.edu/instructionaltech/index.aspx and in the User Manual linked from Course Tools in Blackboard.