

Building a Community Online

The King's community exists not only on campus, but also online. Studying with others is an integral part of life at university, not just to exchange and build on each other's academic ideas, but also because we all need to feel that we belong. For those accustomed to studying on campus, interacting within an online community can seem a little strange so here are some practical tips. These cover both formal settings (such as online seminars linked to your programme of study) but also less formal group study contexts.

KEEP IN TOUCH...

Keep in touch with King's

Check the [King's website](#) regularly for up to date information on how King's is responding to the Coronavirus outbreak. This area addresses key questions for students and researchers. Check your University email for important updates and information.

Keep in touch with your department

How does your department usually contact you? If it is by email, **check your King's email regularly** for updates, bearing in mind that your tutors are currently busy adapting your course modules and assessments to fit with the new circumstances. This takes a little time. Check **KEATS** and ensure that notifications are switched on for course announcements. (See [Learning Technologies at King's](#) for further information.). Check whether your tutors are holding **virtual office hours** and how to access these. If you have any concerns regarding your study or assessments contact your personal tutor by your usual means.

STUDYING WITH OTHERS

How studying with others can help you

You can engage with your peers to hear different perspectives, talk through an idea to deepen your understanding and test out theories by listening to and sharing with others. When many share their concerns, it provides support and makes you feel like you aren't alone.

Participating in online discussions

Make the most of existing online communities and any that are created to compensate for the lack of on-campus activity. These can take place in real time (virtual seminars, online meetings) or may be asynchronous, that is consisting of people contributing at different times. The latter is particularly important when people are based in different time zones or studying at different times of day. If you are involved with the latter, it is good practice to read through discussions before posting and, if the asynchronous conversation is linked to your course, make sure that you are up to date with what others have contributed before the next lecture or seminar.

Connecting with your peers

If you don't have existing networks, do you have existing connections with other students via WhatsApp or Facebook, Discord or some other means? If so, could you set up a study network? It is really important that being physically separated doesn't lead to social isolation.

Advice for setting up your own network

Be realistic! Most people are living, let alone studying, in a situation that has no precedent for them. It's important therefore to give each other, and yourselves, a break. You probably won't be as effective as if you were studying normally and it's not realistic to expect to be. At the same time, one of the benefits of forming a peer group to discuss academic work is that it can provide some sense of normality and structure, while offering reassurance that others are facing similar challenges.

For any online community to work, you need a shared understanding of what it's for and how it's going to work. This can involve agreeing on what you will focus on, whether you will get together synchronously or asynchronously (or a combination) how often you'll meet/post, how you'll structure meetings, what sort of records you'll keep (will there be a note-maker for each meeting, for example) and so on. While this can seem a bit formal, agreeing some ground rules early can avoid problems later for any type of group activity.

There are various tools you can use to keep in touch. While purely social apps or tools can be useful, particularly if members of the group are limited to using their phones. However, it can be more productive to use more formal tools to separate study and social interaction.

A word of caution when studying with others

Working with others is an integral part of studying at university. A challenge with this is that it can lead to (often unintended) collusion, defined by King's as 'when two or more students collaborate, without permission, to produce individual assessments that when compared significantly overlap in content, order, structure and/or format' ([King's Academic Integrity and Honesty, 2019](#)). Studying together online can increase the risk of colluding as people share documents and notes more than they might do normally. To avoid colluding, there are various things you can do:

- Make sure in your notes that you distinguish between your own ideas and those of others
- Don't rely on other people's notes from lectures, books or articles.
- While it's good to discuss themes, issues, problems etc, don't work together when planning or writing up your individual assignments

More detailed advice on how to avoid collusion can be found in the [Academic Skills and Avoiding Plagiarism](#) KEATS module, part of King's Academic Skills for Learning which you can self-enrol on.

Build community for your mental health

Did you know there is a [Big White Wall](#), where the King's community can support their own, and others' mental health anonymously? Log in using your King's email. For further information see [King's Counselling and Mental Health Support](#) (scroll down the page). This page includes links to [Student Services Online](#) with their option to [contact us for further support](#).

Interacting with others online

Interacting with others online is different to interacting in a face to face environment. For example, in a typed chat you may seem rude, because your tone of voice cannot be heard and your smile cannot be

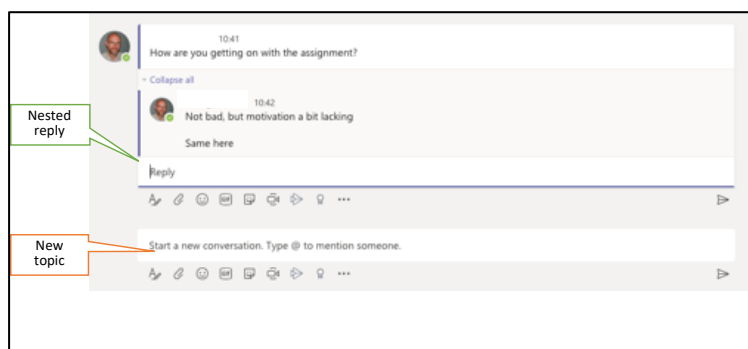
seen. Your interactions may be synchronous (real time) e.g. via video chat or live forum, or they may be asynchronous, e.g. via discussion forum.

Good practice for participating in audio or visual meetings and seminars

- Log in in good time to make sure that you have your audio and video set up before the session starts. Making adjustments during the session is very distracting to other students and the facilitator.
- Turn off other devices during the seminar. Having a phone ringing during the session will be distracting for everyone while even having a mobile phone in close proximity to your microphone can also cause noise interference.
- Switch off audible alerts on whichever device you are using for the meeting so others won't hear every time you get a message.
- Speak clearly, and don't speak over people or interrupt. Use the options provided by the online tool e.g. raising your hand.
- Mute your microphone when not speaking as this can cause echo and interference.
- Try to find a quiet location to participate in the seminar and avoid making too much background noise, such as rustling papers.

Participating in text-based discussions

- Treat all participants with respect. Comments or images that would be inappropriate in a face-to-face environment are also inappropriate online.
- If you are participating in a discussion as part of your programme of study there may be a moderator who can remove posts. If this is not the case, it is even more important that all participants treat each other with respect.
- Ensure you only post messages that are related to the discussion and avoid posting the same message multiple times.
- When sharing images, documents and other resources make sure to reference your source and check you can share it.
- Avoid taking discussion threads off-topic or make off-topic posts within threads. Off-topic posts may be removed at the discretion.
- Make sure you post comments in the right place. If you are responding to a point in an ongoing conversation, 'nest' that within the thread by using the 'reply' option. If you are starting a new discussion point, create a new post (see examples from Teams below).



- Audio or video discussions should not be recorded as a general principle. There may be exceptions, but only if **all** participants have clearly stated that they are happy for the discussion to be recorded.
- Please make sure that all discussion (including text chat) is in a language understood by all participants.

TOOLS

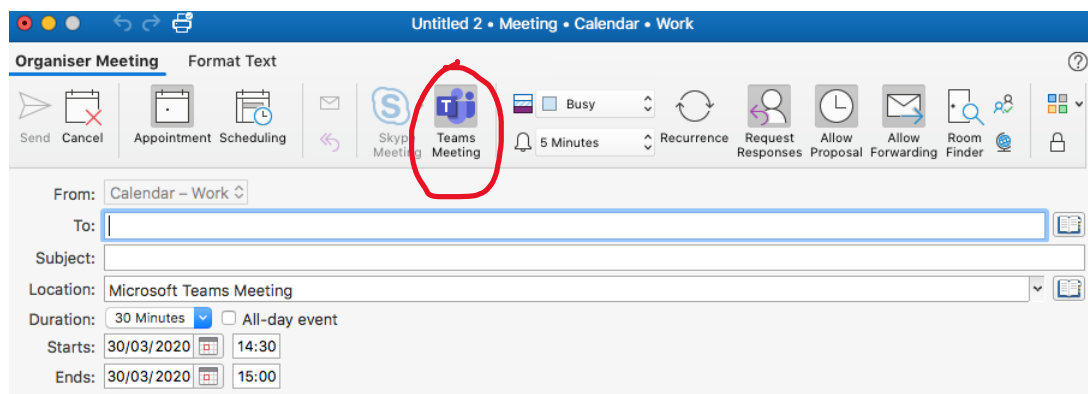
You will be using a variety of tools to interact with others online. Some of these you may be very familiar with, others perhaps not so.

Using KEATS

You are likely to be very familiar with using KEATS as part of your course already. However, there may be more use made of discussion forums. For further information please see the [KEATS & Turnitin](#) section of [Learning Technologies at King's](#).

Using Microsoft Teams

Everyone at King's can use Microsoft Teams to communicate with each other. With the changing circumstances, your department may use this to communicate with you more. You can also use Teams to set up meetings with your peers. King's has produced this [student guide to using Teams](#) plus this guide to using [Chat, audio and video call functions](#). You can also set up your own Teams meeting. The easiest way to do this is by sending a meeting invitation from Outlook, ensuring that you choose the 'Teams meeting' option



Using Zoom

Some departments are using Zoom to share lectures and communicate. For support on using Zoom, please see the [Zoom Help Center](#)

COMMUNICATION AND PLANNING TOOLS

There are a variety of tools and technologies that can help you to communicate and collaborate with others, in addition to Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Use Office 365 to work collaboratively on documents using OneDrive, OneNote, Word or Excel online.

There are a variety of tools and technologies that can help you to plan your time. In addition to using Outlook Calendar to organise your time, set deadlines or arrange meetings. Other tools you might find useful include:

- [Todoist](#) – a list based time management system which integrates with Microsoft Outlook
- [Trello](#) - a more visual approach to managing time and projects.
- [Habitica](#) – gamify your time management; set your own rewards and manage home, study and work in one place.
- [Asana](#) – a project planning tool