



Conventional Practices for Participating in Remote Classes

While we lose something when we do not meet face-to-face around a seminar table, an online class discussion can become an excellent substitute for our classrooms when certain practices and habits are cultivated. Conversations consist of more than just words; they include gesture, body language and facial expression, to name a few, and while non-verbal communications such as these may not be as natural to us while online, some habits may allow us to communicate more fully and robustly. The practices suggested here are intended to help us, as a community, replicate much of the classroom experience of a conversation that includes listening, speaking, seeing one another and feeling ourselves to be surrounded by engaged participants committed to learning together.

- Students and tutors should be visibly present to one another throughout the conversation, attending to one another's remarks, as we do in person. Students should therefore enable their microphone and video feed (barring extraordinary circumstances), and they should consider the lighting, to ensure that they are present to their classmates.
- Please try to set aside a work space where you can attend to your class, and where others are not audible in the background. It is best if your device is resting on a desk or table and plugged in.
- A classroom, whether in person or remote, has a level of formality to it. We encourage you to appear and act as you would in a classroom: presentable for a shared space, in a location appropriate for study, and focused on the task at hand (without external distractions).

Attention to matters such as these will set the conditions for our conversation and help us to listen and learn better from one another. Recommendations on finer points will be communicated with tutors and students prior to the beginning of the semester. If you have concerns about setting these conditions for yourself, please contact the assistant dean, Nathan Dugan (nathan.dugan@sjc.edu), or the dean, Joseph Macfarland (joseph.macfarland@sjc.edu).

EXPECTATIONS CONCERNING INTERNET CONNECTIONS AND EQUIPMENT FOR STUDENTS AND TUTORS

The expectations and recommendations below are meant to ensure that students and tutors are able to engage in the core aspects of our classroom work at the college: conversation and demonstration.

Most crucial to accomplishing that task is a fast and reliable internet connection, but the hardware and software you use will also structure how—and to what degree—you are able to join the conversation and share your thinking with your classmates.

All of us sustain our minds and hearts around the table at St. John's College. The following technical recommendations are meant to help us continue to do so, despite the unfamiliar terrain—for many of us—of the newly expanded table at which we find ourselves seated.

MEETING THESE EXPECTATIONS

We understand that meeting these expectations, which make possible your full participation in online classes, presents a variety of challenges. Please see the EQUIPMENT section below for equipment cost estimates. If you need to purchase new equipment to meet these expectations, you can do so for around \$500. Students who require financial aid in order to purchase needed equipment or to secure internet services should contact the assistant dean, Nathan Dugan (nathan.dugan@sjc.edu). Funds are available from the CARES act and from other sources.

If you have technical questions, or need help navigating the right technology choices for your particular situation, contact ITS at helpdesk@sjc.edu. We are providing this technical information with the goal of making our classes more accessible to all—please be sure to ask questions if you are in need of assistance.

INTERNET CONNECTION

To participate in class, it is important that you have a smooth and stable audio/video connection. As noted above, students are expected to be visibly present to the class as contributing members of that class. This is controlled most particularly by your **upload** connection speed and not your download speed. Your internet connection should be robust enough to allow for reliable and clear audio and video, not just for you, but for your classmates. Just because you can hear and see everyone does not mean they can hear and see you. It is helpful, as soon as possible, to test your connection with a group to see if the computer and connection you intend to use are functioning properly.

If your internet connection does not allow you to reliably send and receive clear audio and video, the recommendations below may help you determine how to improve your ability to participate in class. However, they may not in all cases be sufficient to accomplish this goal. You may also need to adjust your individual hardware/software situation.

If you are signing up for new internet service, you should be aware that upload/download speeds quoted by internet providers are not reliably what you will actually experience.

If you already have internet service, you should test your actual download and upload speeds rather than relying on the connection speeds published by your provider; you may do so at speedtest.net. You should test your connection speeds at various points during the day to get a sense of what speeds you might get during your classes. You may also wish to compare wifi speeds to ethernet speeds and consider using a wired connection for classes (i.e., plug your device into the router).

Recommended: 50 mbps download and 5 mbps upload.

In most markets in the United States, the internet carriers that offer such speed are cable companies or fiber optic providers. DSL providers usually are not able to provide such speeds.

Adequate: 30 mbps download and 3 mbps upload.

NOT Adequate: Cell phone connections

Cellular data speeds are not “high speed” and are not sufficient for classes this upcoming academic year.

PLEASE NOTE: Required minimum connection speeds as published by platforms like Zoom and Teams are significantly lower than what is recommended here, but experience has shown that the published minimum speeds are not sufficient for full participation.

EQUIPMENT

For conversation it will be necessary to use a PC or laptop for Zoom video conferencing. Your computer screen should be large enough that you can see each member of the Zoom discussion, even when they are not speaking, so that you can pick up on nonverbal conversational cues that can be missed when all participants are not displayed. Your device and operating system should be capable of downloading the Zoom app rather than accessing Zoom through a web browser.

For demonstration and other in-class writing and drawing, we strongly recommend a tablet with a touchscreen and stylus. We anticipate that in many classes board work will be done on a website called Ziteboard (see below), independently of Zoom. If you do not have a separate touchscreen device (aka tablet) you will need either to split the screen on your computer between Zoom and Ziteboard, or toggle between the faces of your classmates and whatever program or application you may be using for board work. If your computer, like most, does not have a touchscreen, this will also require drawing or writing with a trackpad or a mouse. Some tutorials may use other methods for board work. However, a tablet supplement is still advantageous: it will allow you to dedicate your primary screen (your PC or laptop) to video conferencing, so that you can see your classmates’ faces while simultaneously looking at or working on a virtual board on your tablet’s screen.

Expected: Recent Generation Windows PC or Mac

The primary criteria for determining what computer to use is that it is capable of downloading and running the current version of the Zoom app.

Any computer running, or able to run, a current operating system (Windows 10 or Mac OS 10.15 (Catalina)) is sufficient for this task.

1. To find out what operating system you are running on a Mac, click the Apple icon in the upper left corner of your screen and click “About This Mac.”
2. To find out what operating system you are running on a Windows machine, type “info” into the search bar next to the Windows icon in the lower left and select “System Information.”

If you are purchasing a new machine, here are some helpful hardware recommendations from ITS. However, *many machines that do not meet these standards are still capable of meeting our primary goal that your computer be capable of running the Zoom app* and of sustaining a reliable internet connection so that you can attend class.

1. 2 GHz i5 processor or faster
2. 8 GB RAM or greater
3. 128 GB system storage or larger, preferably solid-state drive
4. USB 3.0 port or adaptor

You can purchase a basic machine (such as an HP laptop or other simple PC) for under \$500.

Unacceptable: Phones and Chromebooks

1. Phones are not adequate to our needs, both because of limited Zoom functionality and limited visual engagement with the class.
2. Chromebooks are not adequate because they cannot run a native Zoom application; they run Zoom only through the browser.

Recommended Supplements: Touchscreen and Stylus

Tablet with sizeable touchscreen

As noted above, *we very strongly recommend* an inexpensive tablet for use with board work in classes.

1. A tablet can serve as a second screen for shared drawing on a whiteboard app (such as Ziteboard), or other uses to supplement video conferencing on your main device.
2. You can purchase a basic tablet (such as the Kindle Fire 8 for under \$100) that will be sufficient for classroom use for whiteboard work. A larger tablet will be more convenient (such as the Fire 10, Samsung Galaxy, or many others); larger tablets are available at a wide range of price points, from \$150 and up.

Stylus for more precise writing/drawing

1. The use of a stylus will improve your ability to draw on a tablet.
2. The price of a stylus can range widely (\$8–\$140). Please verify that the stylus you purchase will work with your particular tablet.

Drawing pads

In place of a tablet, one may use a drawing pad; with this device, what you draw appears on your computer screen.

1. An inexpensive drawing pad (e.g. Wacom or Huion) can also be used to make drawing possible on computers that lack a touchscreen. For most users, the drawing function of a touchscreen tablet, especially with a stylus, is more intuitive and precise.
2. A drawing pad can be purchased for under \$50.

SOFTWARE RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to a computer that is new enough, with a screen that is large enough, to fully participate in video conferencing, we also recommend the following software.

1. Microsoft Office 365 and its downloadable apps, using the license provided by St. John's College to all students. Please contact ITS at helpdesk@sjc.edu for assistance.
2. An up-to-date antivirus program.
3. Ziteboard. In anticipation of the start of term, you may want to become familiar with this collaborative whiteboard website and see what you are able to draw, either with your mouse/trackpad on a laptop or with your finger/stylus on a touchscreen. Go to ziteboard.com and sign up for a free account. Documents and videos about the use of Ziteboard will be forthcoming.

Individual tutors/tutorials may provide or ask you to obtain other free software to enhance your ability to participate in class.