Zoom Break Out Rooms

The following steps will show hosts how to facilitate breakout rooms in Zoom. You must be in the role of Host to coordinate breakout rooms. This guide was written by Mary Stewart (mstewart@iup.edu).

Step 1: Navigate to Settings in your Zoom Account (iupvideo.zoom.us/profile). Then scroll down until you see the Breakout Rooms option and turn it on. You'll find many other features in Settings, like the Waiting Room or Polling, that you might also want to activate.
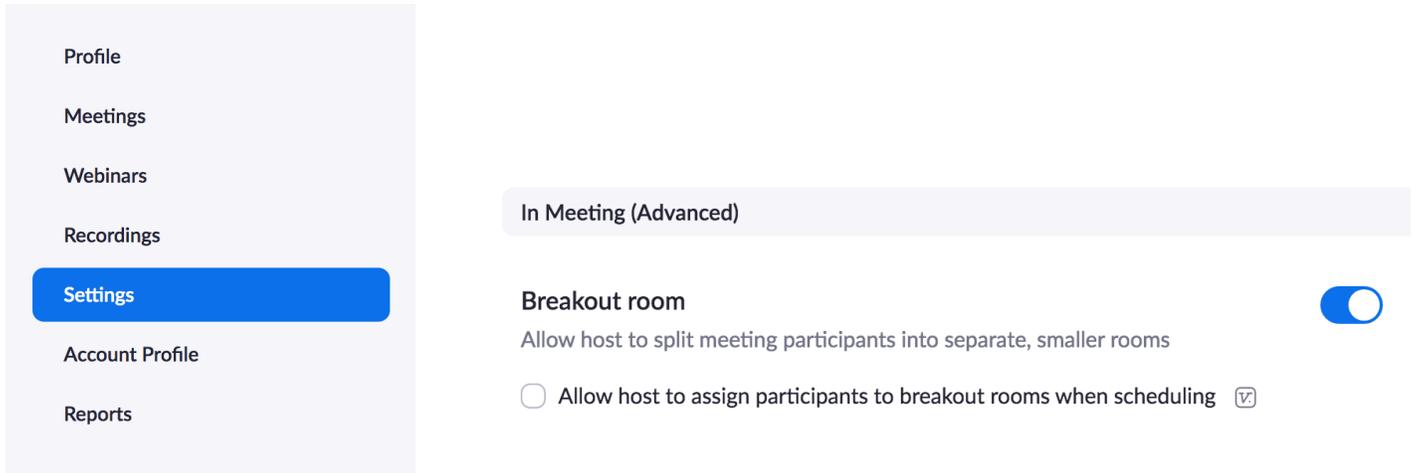
Step 2: Open your Zoom Room. You'll find that there is a now a Breakout Rooms option in the menu that appears when you hover at the bottom of your screen.

Step 3: Create Breakout Rooms. When you click Breakout Rooms, you'll be given the choice of assigning your participants automatically or manually. Automatic assignment is much less work for the instructor—you simply decide how many rooms you want (I normally set it up so that there are 3-5 participants per room), and click "Open Rooms." This sends students a message inviting them to join their assigned break out room.
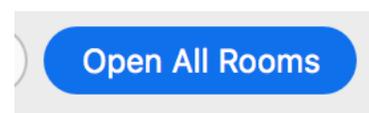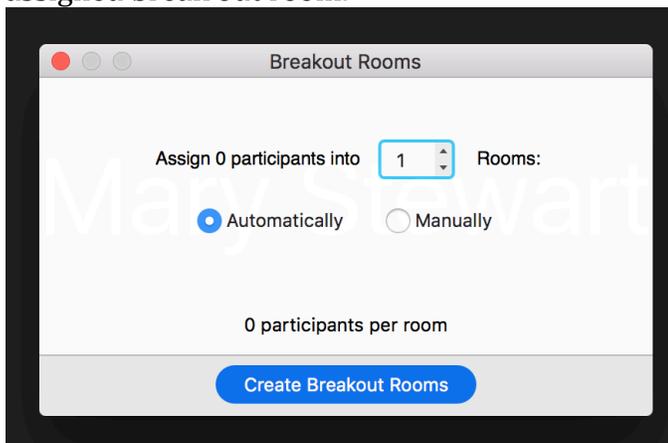
If you are facilitating something like peer review where you need students to be in specific groups, then you will want to set up the rooms manually. Zoom will open a dialogue box with an "Assign" button next to each room. When you click "Assign" you'll be given a list of all participants currently on the call. You'll check the box next to their names to assign them to a specific room.
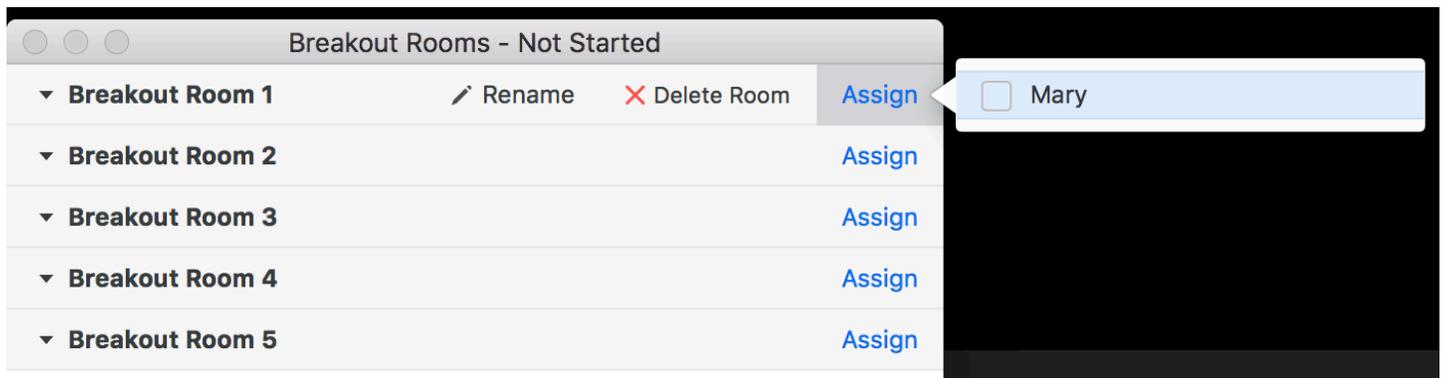
Note: Manual assignment requires a high literacy load. I have a list of their peer review groups open on my computer prior to the meeting, and I use that to inform my assignments. When I first started using breakout rooms, I tried to do the assignments as students entered the room, which meant I was trying to greet them while making assignments. I've since changed my strategy and make assignments as a form of role call, saying "Mary, can you hear us okay? Great. I'm going to put you in Breakout Room 1." I also recently saw a feature in Zoom that lets you assign breakout rooms in advance, so that might be something experiment with.

Please also note that students won't receive the invitation to join a breakout room until you click "open all rooms," which you do after all assignments are complete.

Step 4: Facilitate Breakout Rooms. Once all students have joined their breakout rooms, you will be alone in the main room. In the Breakout Room dialogue box, you'll find the option to "Join" the various rooms. I normally spend 5 minutes or so checking in with each small group. The breakout room participants also have an "ask for help" button that they can use to send you a direct message asking you to join their room.
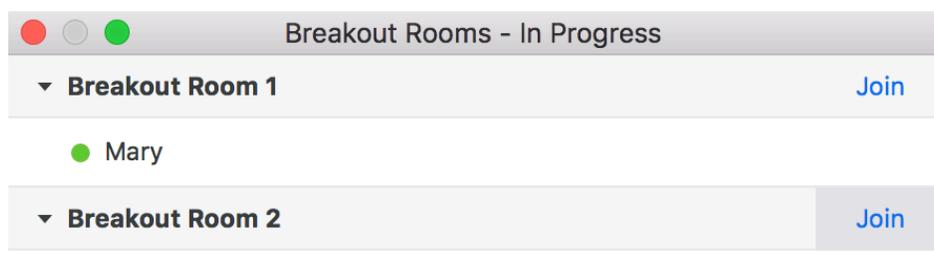
At the bottom of the Breakout Room dialogue box, there is an option to "broadcast a message to all." This will create a message that pops up in each break out room. And when you are ready to call everyone back to the main room, simply click "Close All Rooms." This sends students a message saying that breakout rooms will the automatically closed in 60 seconds, or they can choose to return to the main room immediately.