What Zoom Room Are You in? Waiting and Breakout Rooms: How They Work and Why They Matter

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Introduction:

Zoom has two types of "Rooms" that are useful and important: Waiting Room and Breakout Room(s). Note these are different than Zoom Rooms which is a licensed subscription app that allows participants in multiple physical and virtual places access a meeting (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/207483343-Getting-started-with-Zoom-Rooms#:~:text=Zoom%20Rooms%20is%20a%20software,or%20from%20their%20mobile%20device.).

When a Waiting Room is enabled, a host can see all meeting participants seeking to join the meeting and ensure only those invited are actually admitted. Breakout Room(s) "break out" or divide up the meeting into smaller multiple "meetings within a meeting" where participants can talk to only a few other people and have a larger voice.

Let's explore these Rooms in more detail to see how they work and why they matter.

Waiting Room:

The Waiting Room is enabled under Settings - Security – Waiting Room and disables its opposite counterpart Join Before Host (also in the Settings). Note: either can also be selected when you Schedule a Meeting. (If Join Before Host is enabled, it can add flexibility for participants to meet amongst themselves beforehand. Unfortunately, it poses a potential security risk if someone joins the meeting who should not be there and the host does not realize it.)

During a meeting, participants who have already been admitted but are being disruptive can also be sent back to the Waiting Room. Also, sometimes participants need to leave the meeting and come back; they can be re-admitted from the waiting room as long as the meeting has not been Locked Down.

In the 5.2 version of Zoom released in early August 2020, there is also a new popup window that displays the Waiting Room (https://blog.zoom.us/enhanced-waiting-room-notifications-more-ways-to-transfer-zoom-phone-calls/) during a live meeting for those seeking admission to the meeting even if the host cannot see the Participants button.

This is useful prompt in case the host's screen is minimized or being shared or a when a participant comes late or has to leave and rejoin the meeting.

With a Zoom Pro account, there are additional Waiting Room Options (Settings – Security) to select which participant groups must go to the Waiting Room and customize the waiting room's name, description, and even appearance (with your logo).

Why It Matters: The Waiting Room is an important security feature (along with several others including having a meeting password and securing the meeting once everyone is present) and prevents anyone from joining the meeting and potentially causing mischief or "Zoom Bombing."

Breakout Room(s):

Zoom Breakout Room(s) are here to stay and considerably more complex than the Waiting Room. Breakout Room(s) have to be enabled under Settings – In-Meeting (Advanced). Also, if Allow Host to Assign Participants When Scheduling is also checked, the host has the option to assign participants (up to 200) **manually** during Schedule a Meeting under Meeting Options.

At any time in the live session, there is a Breakout Rooms button on the bottom panel that can be activated for **either manual or automatic assignment** of participants and the host can create up to 50 Breakout Rooms and add up to 500 participants. Note: The participant number per room rises as the total number of Breakout Room(s) decreases.

There are also several Breakout Room Options:
- Allow participants to Return to the Main Session at Any Time
- Breakout Rooms Close after X Number of Minutes
- Countdown after Closing Breakout Room - Set Countdown Timer X Seconds.

You can also Rename and Delete Breakout Rooms.

Audio, video, and screen sharing are not limited by breakout rooms, but recording is. For recording, only the main meeting will be recorded unless a participant in a Breakout Room records the meeting locally. A Breakout Room cannot be recorded in the cloud available for main sessions to all paid subscription tiers

Coming in September, 2020, participants will have the "ability to select a breakout room and move between rooms" which will greatly expand the Breakout Room(s) options for participants if the host allows this setting (https://blog.zoom.us/teachers-top-features-for-securing-virtual-classrooms-enhancing-student-learning-experiences/).

There is additional information about Breakout Room(s) (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476313-Managing-Breakout-Rooms/) beyond the scope of this article.

Why They Matter:

- For a meeting, Breakout Room(s) are useful for icebreakers or brainstorming in smaller groups that ultimately reconvene with the larger meeting.

- For a conference, Breakout Room(s) may not be the best option but instead sending individual links for each session even if several occur at the same time. If Breakout Room(s) are used for meetings or events and they need to be recorded, someone needs to be assigned to do so for each room and then upload and share the recording (YouTube, Vimeo, and Dropbox, etc.). Each Breakout Room will be only saved locally on that person's computer and cannot be saved to the cloud even if a recorder can save the main meeting to the cloud (available with a paid subscription).

- There will be increasing flexibility for participants in Breakout Room(s) starting September 2020.

  - The meeting host/co-host should monitor closely and make ground rules ahead of time and be prepared to close the Breakout Room(s) or end and re-start the session if need be.

  - If participants want to network during or after a main meeting, the host/co-host can set up empty Breakout Room(s) ahead of time for participants to via chat to self-assign later. The host needs to continue to host the meeting until all breakout rooms have completed their discussions. The co-host presently can only participate in assigned breakout rooms though that may change soon.

Conclusion:

As can be seen, both the Waiting Room and Breakout Room(s) while serving quite different functions can both considerably enhance a Zoom meeting. One improves meeting security while the other provides meeting flexibility. The Waiting Room ensures the participants who should be at the meeting are, while the Breakout Room(s) mixes and matches the participants to foster new and more extensive discussion and networking opportunities than can be done in the main meeting.

If you have other innovative ways and contexts that you that you use these two rooms, please feel free to email your ideas at roger@rogermagnusresearch.com and I can share them in a future article.