

Tips for Succeeding in Virtual Presentations



KENAN-FLAGLER
BUSINESS SCHOOL



Virtual presentations put you 'in people's faces' (as the primary voice on a call or through a laptop webcam's view) and create a distance with the audience in an inherently distracting environment. Cool. Here we go!

The Essentials

Virtual environments present significant obstacles to interactivity & attention-level



Consider doing more with less. Virtual presentations involve myriad micro-lags: delays from technology hiccups, transitions between things, confusion about technology and transitions, longer waits for questions—all accumulating to a significant chunk of time. Safely assume you'll lose 15-20% of face-to-face efficiency.



Prioritize interactivity. The space allows for a lot of distraction. Consider sending information in advance and using the synchronous time for interaction. Drop the 'talk at'/lecture model and consider breakout work, discussion, group contributions or activities, and breaks in extended-time situations. Encourage non-verbal feedback (head-nods, thumbs up) as tech allows.



Familiarize yourself with the technology. Find time for a dry run (ideally with at least 1 other person). Google search for technology-specific tips and typical problems (hopefully including workarounds). Use virtual opportunities to build new skills and sensitivities—and don't try to become an expert overnight.



Plan your approach in advance. Some presentation methods convey through technology but not all (simply standing and speaking often fails). Start with the same 'real world' strategies you've used; preserve the strategies that convey well virtually and abandon those strategies which do not convey well.



Design to limitations in tech or other abilities to engage. Some individuals in your audience face additional challenges due to technological limitations, different learning styles, varying physical and processing abilities. Everyone benefits from accommodating the remarkable. *Thanks April!*



Convey emotionality and enthusiasm. Effective engagement (from phone to augmented/virtual reality) still depends on over-the-shoulders strategies: personable/authentic vocals + vocal inflection + strategic pauses. Eye contact (with the camera) + facial expressiveness add enormous value when you can broadcast your face.



Use movement cautiously. Quick, small and uninterrupted movements (fidgety gestures, pacing around your space) distract when the audience can see you and increase the likelihood of technological problems. Use specific gestures and strategic movement with clear purpose. Don't be stiff in any case.

Your voice = your most powerful tool. Articulate clearly to deal with technological buzz and lag. Avoid monotony.

Technology Prep

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Other Contextual Considerations



Confirm best-possible audio quality. Audiences will forgive or ignore poor video but need to hear you clearly.

Work from a quiet place. Background noise only adds distraction. Coffee is fine; cafes, not great.



Maximize your bandwidth. Seek strong wi-fi and turn off unnecessary apps that access the Internet.

Focus on the camera (if available). Come as close as possible to conveying a focus on the audience.



Learn any keyboard/keypad shortcuts. These shortcuts often work more quickly & involve less obvious motions.

Tidy the background. A real or virtual background should not distract and doesn't need to impress.



Obscure your tech. Consider headphones that go in-ear with wires, if any, running behind your head

Pay particular attention to time. Presenters often run long, and audience attention spans run short.



Prep for tech failure (yours or others'). Offer advice if possible, have alternatives ready (ex: speak all info).

Know that distractions are real, and problems happen. All you can do: prepare and do your best.



Stand (even if camera only sees your head) for more ease in stillness and conscientiousness of motion. Thanks Matt!

Quick Tips: Running a Virtual Session

Bonus: all the not-tech-specific strategies below work as well face-to-face or voice-only

Have more than 1 plan for when things go wrong	Plan to run out of time unless you target 85% of time	Ask everyone to join by video for interactivity and accountability	Use the time while the group assembles to socialize	Have and follow an agenda with routine reminders	Start with goals and highlights for today and for next time
See pre-/post- and meeting (all 3) as iterative of same info	Share only specific windows not the full desktop	Encourage interaction as much as feasible don't just talk	Minimal text + rich visuals for key info will keep interest up	Announce intentional shifts in strategy or technology	Keep quiet and kind to yourself over minor flubs
Keep energy and interaction up w/ breaks/breakouts	Use public 'sideline' comm (ex: chat) to keep things moving	Use 'Back-channel' comm with cohosts to manage problems	Integrate vids, polls, slides, other activities to change things up	Sum-up & tee-up including callouts to upcoming speakers	Wait for questions or contributions longer than usual
Prioritize one-off rather than all-in questions/prompts "Let me know if you can't hear me" not "Can everyone hear me?"			Key info & action items: review along the way and sum-up at end; don't obscure good stuff and assume random arrivals/departures		

Effective Presentation Structure

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Related Slide-Design Components



Open: essential info, mtg. goals, an agenda, action items
Along the way: speak summaries of 'so far' and 'up next'
All the while: encourage interruption and interactivity
At the end: offer nothing new; reiterate opening info

- Navigators/trackers and slide numbers
- Titles that boost interest & summarize content
- Clear visuals + concise support info + whitespace
- Clear take-aways/kickers that emphasize value



Embrace 'Quiet':
More = Less:

Breathe, stretch, smile between points; rushing fails fully. Build uncluttered, visually rich, bulk=burden
 Take your time, plan for the unexpected, allow others the space they need to think and interact

Broader Technology Choices

Leverage all the technologies with which you are, or will soon become, comfortable:

Thanks
 Marion!



Chat/Text/Messaging	see 'back-channel' & 'sideline' below: not to distract but to manage snaufs, keep things going
Cloud Storage/Intranet	store and exchange files (including shared editing if applicable)
Learning Management System	post announcements, assignments, policies, schedule in a single, central location
Pre- and post-meeting work	provide exactly the same value/likelihood that people will read these materials as in real-life
Polls, Surveys, Activities	offer functional variety through smaller-scale access to info, interactivity, accountability
Recordings	allow review, access, reflection, flexibility in many combinations of audio/video/slides/links
Short Videos	convey info, change the pace or frame discussion (before, during, after the session)
URLs/Web-links	share proprietary, lengthy or complex materials (before, during, after the session)
Traditional Strategies:	<i>start with readings, write-ups, quizzes, prework, homework, assignments of most any kind</i>

Some Terminology

Apologies for the disregard of punctuation, sentence rules and 20/20 vision.

Asynchronous (<i>short form: "async" spoken as 'AY-sink'</i>)	A fancy way to say "not at the same time" (posting materials for participants to read before or after a session, recording an entire presentation in advance, using technology to have discussion beyond a meeting)
Back channel communication	Non-public communication between individuals rather than among the entire group: often distracting for participants and valuable for hosts and partners (who can check-in, tee-up next steps, manage problems without interrupting the broader public flow of information and ideas).
Breakout Rooms (<i>short form: "breakouts"</i>)	A feature of many conferencing tools which allows participants to interact with smaller subsets of the group and then report back to the host and/or larger group. Tip: integrate small-group work as much as feasible/valuable.
Chat (<i>also IM or instant message—noun or verb. "Text" refers to messages by phones.</i>)	Real-time, text communication (not email). Many services offer chat—the names often act as verbs or shortcuts ("Facebook me," "Let's IM on Insta later," "Hit me on WhatsApp"). <i>For students, the term defaults to virtual; use a reinforcer to convey 'face-to-face' ("Can we step into the hallway and chat?" "Let's chat in person.")</i>
Cloud Storage (<i>often 'the cloud'</i>)	Vast storage space accessible over the Internet (like an enormous USB drive not connected to your computer) useful to share big files and backup important files. Ex: Apple iCloud, Microsoft OneDrive, DropBox, Google Drive.
Co-located	In the same location (room, building) and able to interact directly (<i>see "distant or distance"</i>).
Distant or Distance	<i>Not</i> in the same location and still able to interact by using technology (<i>see "remote"</i>).
Host (<i>Insert covid-19 pun of questionable taste here.</i>)	Refers to the person in charge of the virtual meeting. The host, generally, arranges the meeting and required technology--and acts as facilitator and has control over the meeting software (possible to share and shift control).
Post (<i>works both as a noun and a verb</i>)	To contribute something (text, picture or media) to an online group communication ("discussion"), page (often, but not always, "blog") or shared platform ("social media").
Remote (<i>works both as an adjective and verb</i>)	Not the main location(s): "remote location" (satellite office, café) + "work remotely" (work outside the office, from home, on a trip, from a café (to enjoy a vente Frappuccino while pretending to work)).
Screen Sharing	A very useful videoconference feature allows you to choose to broadcast ("share") some or all of what you see on your own computer screen with the rest of the people in the videoconference for as long as you'd like.
Sideline communication	Public communication operating as a supplement to the main information flow. Examples: using a chat box to share resources or collect questions, head-nods on video feeds or using 'hands-up' avatars for immediate reaction/ polling.
Synchronous (<i>Short form: "sync" pronounced 'sink'</i>)	A fancy way of saying "at the same time" without meaning "in the same place"—interacting simultaneously without necessarily seeing each other. Easy example: telephones. Modern example: all this "virtual" stuff.
Video teleconference (<i>video conference, teleconference or conference</i>)	Bringing people together, sometimes with specific equipment (computers, smartphones, cameras, big screens—or some combination). "Video conference" (a noun and verb) generally means you can see each other and share computer files. Video conferences can become tedious unless you pay attention to page 1 of this document.
Virtual (<i>has many, mostly positive meanings</i>)	Tricky: meaning 'online,' 'not physically connected (but still connected),' 'driven by technology,' 'accessible over the Internet,' and, more aspirationally, 'futuristic,' 'ephemeral,' 'soon to be real.'
Webcam (<i>short for "web camera"</i>)	Almost all (all?) laptops (and all smartphones) have a built-in camera, or 2, (usually along the top screen edge), or you can buy a separate camera to connect to your computer to record videos and broadcast yourself out to the world.
Webinar (<i>short for web, or webcam, seminar</i>)	An interactive communication event that depends on the Internet to work. Synchronous or asynchronous? Video or voice? Educational, business or fun? Any or all of the above. All the nuance of "seminar" + Internet.
Zoom (<i>as a noun or verb</i>)	A videoconference app (others: Skype, Teams, NetMeeting, Slack, WebEx) allowing people to interact, through computers and smartphones, with voice, video, "screen sharing," more: a way to react to pandemic, enforce social distancing, encourage interactivity, and keep education going all the while. Boom. Zoom.