Tips and Best Practices for the Synchronous Virtual Classroom

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General Tips and Best Practices

1. **Immerse yourself in being a participant.** Take webinars and other free sessions, preferably that are learning based (e.g. *Learn How to Learn Online*). What are they doing? Is it effective?

2. **Learn your technology platform fully** depending on your role – facilitator, producer or both.

3. **Create a Participant Guide** that includes ground rules and expectations, as well as exercises for learners to complete before or during classes.

4. **Create a Facilitator Guide** that outlines the class, including objectives, slides, timing, scripts or talking points, activities for each portion and specific roles for facilitator(s)/producer.

5. **De-emphasize the technology**. The platform should support learning and not be central. Don't apologize for the technology if things are not perfect.

Production Tips and Best Practices

1. **Decide on your audio approach.** Teleconferencing and VoIP both have pros and cons to be weighed when planning.

   a. **VoIP** requires learners to have a headset, takes bandwidth and requires some technical know-how.

   b. **Teleconferencing** allows for optimal audio quality but typically requires additional cost.

2. **Create a checklist** for production tasks to be done in advance of and during the meeting: invitations, loading material, changing permissions for learners, starting the recording, etc.

3. **Preload slides** and other material into the room before the event.

4. **Test the software** with all facilitators, using the same equipment that will be used in the live event.

5. **Pad in class time to troubleshoot tech issues**. Note that often the welcome exercise can double as tech troubleshooting time.

6. **Orient learners to tools** they'll be using in the class.

7. **Prepare a text file of troubleshooting steps** to paste into chat if needed during the session.

Facilitation Tips and Best Practices

1. **Plan a collaboration, not a lecture**. Consider whether a lecture is better delivered asynchronously.

2. **Rehearse!** Practice pacing content, timing and flow, use of tools and transitions.

3. **Include facilitator photos** if you're not using a web camera to give learners a sense of who you are.

4. **Include a welcome exercise** to establish rapport with learners. For example, have them click on a map to show where they're from, or answer a poll question. At the very least, welcome learners as they enter the room and set a tone of participation.

5. **Set expectations.** For example, expect to participate, expect to be called on, how to ask questions and when; should they raise hands, use chat or voice? Online learners don't necessarily recognize their responsibility to participate and/or expectations around **how** they'll participate.

6. **Use handouts or your Participant Guide** if you have a lot of text to disseminate, rather than putting a lot of text into a presentation. Cognitive load is an issue since learners aren't able to control the flow of information.

7. **Use your voice**. Voice inflection is the way to gesture in the online environment. Use a full range of inflection and express emotion to keep the energy up.

8. **Allow others to speak.** A variety of voices being heard is very helpful for adding interest and keeping learners engaged. Allow a co-facilitator or the producer to have speaking roles to lend multiple voices and bring variety to the audio experience.

9. **Plan to multitask**, or, have someone help you follow the chat conversation and respond to raised hands.

10. **Bring in learner contributions.** Peer examples are realistic and relevant, and encourage participation from other learners. Also, learners can better integrate contributions from chat when they're spoken.

11. **Plan interactivity every 3 to 5 minutes** but be sure it's on topic and not frivolous!

12. **Be specific** with what you want learners to do. For example, say what tool should be used and how: "Use the green check if you agree, or the red X if you disagree. If you disagree, take 1 minute to type in the chat some reasons why."

13. **Avoid quickly moving cursors**, polls, windows, anything viewable to learners. This could be a poor experience for those on slower connections.

14. **Schedule more time** than you think you'll need – and be sure to end on time!