

Tips and Best Practices for Presenting Online

CAL Business Services Interest Group, June 2010

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- **Plan, rehearse, and test!**
 - **Structure is important**—online sessions are less forgiving and don't allow for as much flexibility as face-to-face sessions. Thoughtful planning of your presentation, including interactive components, will minimize issues.
 - **Rehearse** your presentation with co-presenters and producer so all are clear on roles, and you can fine-tune timing, pacing, flow, transitions, etc.
 - **Test the software** so you know things will be working when you're ready to go live.
- **Include presenter photos** to give participants have a sense of who you are.
- **Include a welcome exercise** to establish rapport with participants. For example, have them click on a map to show where they're from, or answer a poll question. At the very least, welcome participants and set a tone of participation.
- **Pad in time to troubleshoot tech issues.** Note that often the welcome exercise can double as tech troubleshooting time.
- **Set expectations.** For example, expect to participate, expect to be called on, how to ask questions and when; should they raise hands, just speak out (and if so, ask them to say their name when they speak!), use chat vs. voice? Online participants don't necessarily recognize their responsibility to participate and/or expectations around **how** they'll participate. Also, be sure to model any ground rules!
- **One minute per slide.** It's a best practice is to use more slides, with less content per slide, if at all possible.
- **One idea per slide**, or, no more than 3-4 bullets if possible. Note that George Miller's "magical number 7" is not in line with current thinking on working memory and cognitive load.
- **Use a handout** if you have a lot of text that you want to disseminate, rather than putting a lot of text on your presentation slides.
- **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. A great tip is to use physical gestures when speaking – even if they can't be seen, they come through in your voice.

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- **Allow others to speak.** A variety of voices being heard is very helpful for adding interest and keeping your audience engaged (in addition to the crucial function of allowing participation). Calling participants by name is also a great way to engage the audience and keep things social and personal. If participants won't be speaking in your session, at least allow a co-presenter or the producer to have a speaking role to lend multiple voices and bring variety to the audio experience.
- **Plan to multitask**, or, have someone help you follow the chat conversation and respond to raised hands.
- **Incorporate contributed material from the chat** into your presentation. Repeat the question or comment, and discuss if time allows. Participants can better integrate contributions from chat when they're spoken, and incorporation of their ideas makes for a more collaborative session.
- **Plan interactivity every 3 to 5 minutes** but be sure it's on topic and not frivolous!
- **Be specific** with what you want participants to do. For example, say what tool should be used and how: "Use the green check if you agree, and use the red X if you disagree. If you disagree, type in the chat some reasons why."
- **Plan for technology gaps.** Dead air needs to be filled – if you're transitioning and there's a lull, have participants chat about something relevant or complete an activity.
- **Avoid quickly moving cursors**, polls, windows, anything viewable to participants. This could be a poor experience for participants who may be on slow connections.
- **De-emphasize the technology.** The platform should support your presentation and not be central. Don't apologize for the technology if things are not perfect.