

Virtual Presentations – Best Practices for Presenters

Presenting in the virtual sphere is becoming a required skill for speakers. To help you do this well, we've pulled together some best practices for virtual presentations.

Creating Your Presentation

In the virtual world, presenters no longer deliver information, but become facilitators who engage participants with the information. Engagement is a key element of every session experience.

Here are some ideas to help you become an engaging facilitator:

Start at the Beginning

- Be crystal clear about what you intend to accomplish with the presentation and what the audience will get from the presentation.
- Recognize that you are not going to accomplish as much in the virtual presentation as in a live session and be aware of the time limits for your session.
- To help clarify and simplify the content, break it up into smaller chunks of information.
- People can only concentrate for 18-20 minutes at a time in a virtual setting before they click away or get up and leave. At the 10-15 minute mark make a change in your presentation.
- Here are some ideas for changing up the presentation and creating activities that make new information stick:
 - Answer some questions from the chat
 - Conduct a poll related to the content or in order to get attendee input
 - Bring in another panelist
 - Provide a speaker-directed exercise
 - Have attendees share insights, discuss and apply the information

Presentation Software Techniques

- Leave some space on the top right of your presentation software slide template to allow a window for your presenter video feed.
- Keep the text in your slides to a minimum and try to keep it visually interesting with bullet points, images, animation and video.
- Cautionary point: When using images, animation or video keep it simple with lower resolution and don't overdo it. Some viewers may be located in low bandwidth areas and unable to access high definition video or images.
- If you are integrating interactive moments like live polls, think about and streamline the transitions in and out of these activations.

It's Time to Present

Whether your session is pre-recorded or live, these ideas will help you to keep the session lively.

Your Environment

- Have another person in the room with you to create energy and provide reactions especially if it is a live presentation.
- Ensure you are in a space with an uncluttered, non-distracting background. Make sure there is no window or major light source behind you as this will make you into a silhouette and hard to see your face.
- If you use a virtual background, it's best to have a green screen behind you to keep the image crisp. Background images should be at a resolution of 1920 x 280.
- Find a quiet space that is as sound proof as possible to minimize competing noise. Pay attention to mechanical sounds like air conditioners or ventilation that might interfere with the sound quality.
- Check that items on and around your desk, like coffee cups and pictures, are appropriate.
- It is good practice to turn off instant messaging and other notifications while presenting.
- Keep a beverage within easy reach.

Appearance

- Dress for your virtual presentation the way you would for an in-person meeting.
- Clothes should be chosen carefully avoiding patterns and distracting logos. Avoid white, green, red and all black. Warm or saturated colours work best.
- Keep jewellery simple (or not at all) and make sure it does not rattle against your microphone.

Presentation Skills:

- Get a good start with a strong first impression! People decide whether they will watch a session within the first few minutes before they either click away or mentally check out.
- Our ears are hardwired to take in the rhythm of the spoken word. Written text has a completely different rhythm and doesn't suit the way we hear and listen. Try to speak naturally rather than read your presentation to keep the audience's attention.
- Explain the format of the session up front ie. questions taken at the end or during the session, time for discussion or breakouts, audience will be muted or on video.
- Interact with your audience if the session is live – act like the audience is in the same room. Ask them to do things with you, mention their names when answering questions or comments.
- If asking a question, take a pause to give your audience the space to formulate what they want to say and unmute their audio.

- However, not too long a silence or people will think they lost the connection!
- There is often a technical lag when going to polls or other add-ins and there could be a lag in another speaker's response. Recognize this, don't panic and allow for the lag to happen.
- Be aware of your body language, how you are being perceived and what it is conveying to your audience. This is more important in a virtual presentation than with a live audience as you don't have the visual cues to adapt your body language.
- Pay attention to hand movements that they don't shake the camera especially if your camera is located on your laptop.
- Consider speaking standing up. This allows you to be more animated than if you were speaking from a seated position.
- Don't be afraid to use props to get your point across. It can enhance the engagement factor.
- Respect the presentation time limits by setting a stopwatch on your phone or other device.
- Above all, be authentic and be yourself and...
- Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

Rehearsals

- Speaker rehearsals are very important and should not be skipped. During a rehearsal, the following elements are checked to ensure a smooth and professional presentation:
 - System requirements and computer compatibility
 - Presenter's lighting, audio, camera height, background
 - Internet bandwidth
- During your rehearsal you should be in the location and with the setup that you will use for your final presentation.

Camera Skills

- Focus on looking at your webcam or in the computer's camera. This gives you the appearance of talking directly to the audience and making eye contact.
- Adjust the camera height so that your eyes are in the top third of the screen.
- During your talk, you can keep your slides, script or notes in front of you on your desktop screen. This will allow you to minimize the live video screen so it is not too distracting.
- Place the minimized live video screen just below your computer camera or external camera attached to your computer. This will make it appear that you are looking directly at the audience and not elsewhere on your screen.
- Shut down all other applications, screens etc. so you are only concentrating on the live video and your presentation.
- When co-presenting, try to have everyone maintain the same distance from their camera so there is visual consistency.

Additional

- If you pre-record your session, you have the opportunity to review your presentation style and make improvements before presenting it to a live audience.
- Log in to the virtual platform on presentation day at least 30 minutes prior to going live to re-test sound and video quality and make any necessary adjustments.

Technical Techniques

To minimize the unpredictability of technology, put in place these strategies:

Computer Set-up

- Test your equipment in advance and use the scheduled rehearsal time to trouble shoot any technical issues.
- Turn off all notifications on your computer to ensure they do not distract or are seen by the audience.
- Always use the same computer for your presentation as you used to test during the rehearsal.

Internet Considerations

- Use a hardwire, ethernet cable connection from your computer to your router or modem. This is the preferred connection as using WiFi can be unstable.
- Ensure other applications that use bandwidth are not running on your network ie. Netflix, Spotify, Twitch. Close any unnecessary applications. This helps with bandwidth speed and reduces interruptions.
- To minimize possible internet disruptions, encourage other members of your household to turn off devices that connect to the internet during your live presentation.
- If you have a company VPN that you connect to, you must disconnect from it when using the virtual platform (during rehearsals and live show days).

If you need to use a WiFi connection:

- Set any devices that share the same WiFi connection to airplane mode or turn them off.
- Try to remain close to the wireless router and consider installing a signal booster in areas of low signal strength.

Getting the Sound and Light Right

Lighting and audio are the 2 key elements that can make your video presentation look and sound professional. This can be achieved with simple tools you may already have.

Lighting

- If possible use a ring light or selfie light and a high-quality webcam.
- Or choose a location where there is lighting that illuminates $\frac{3}{4}$ of your face to give it shape and modelling.

- Lighting that is LED based is preferable as it does not get hot and become uncomfortable to use.

Get the Sound Right

- For best quality audio use headphones with an attached, boom microphone like a conference call headset. The microphone is closer to your mouth and helps to cancel out any ambient noise.
- A wired headset, like hardwired internet, is more stable and less likely to cut out on you.

Additional Tips

- Reboot your computer a few hours before the event to avoid any automated updates that could launch during your presentation.
- Make sure your mouse and headphones are fully charged and any other equipment that you might be using.

What If... Ideas for Troubleshooting

Expect something to go wrong and plan for it. Stay calm and implement your plan. Here are some plan B scenarios to consider:

- Your internet goes down. Plan B: Link to your smartphone as a hotspot or invest in a secondary internet connection beforehand.
- There is construction or unexpected noise during your presentation. Plan B: Invest in noise cancelling headphones or have a secondary, appropriate space where you can move to.
- Your pet demands your attention. Plan B: Make sure your door is closed before your presentation and family members will mind the pet while you present. Or, work the pet into your presentation, use it as a teaching or humorous moment.
- Test, test test - all your equipment, your software, your URL links, your videos several times before the event.
- Pre-record the presentation as a back-up in the event that the live stream fails. Provide the pre-recorded back-up in advance to the event organizer.

Additional Resources

[Inclusive and Accessible Virtual Presentations](#) – a guide that provides tips to make presentations more accessible and inclusive.

[How to Make Virtual Meetings Feel More Real](#)

Test your internet speed (minimum 10mpbs upload/download recommended)—<http://www.speedtest.net>)

[This video shows a set up for your computer, lighting and green screen](#)

Teleprompters

There are free teleprompter apps available in the app stores. See video above to see one in action.

[Article on Teleprompter apps](#)

[Article on Virtual Breakout Room Best Practices](#)