

Advice on presenting online

2020 has been a year filled with unprecedented conditions, and that includes everything being moved to an online format from teaching, workshops and conferences! We know that presenting online can be a daunting thought, and we don't necessarily know how that differs from in-person presentations.

We asked a few students and staff members who have presented at/attended a virtual conference for their feedback and advice.

Feedback on presenting

Q	What software did you use to prepare your presentation and voice-over? Why?
A	"I used PowerPoint to record, and the instruction can be found here: https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/record-a-slide-show-with-narration-and-slide-timings-0b9502c6-5f6c-40ae-b1e7-e47d8741161c . It works pretty well, but sometimes there will be glitches if there's too much animation going on on the slides. So make sure to watch the recording and ensure everything is going smoothly." NOTE: "Present in "Read" mode, apparently it worked better than "Slideshow"."
	"Many other people also used Zoom to record. It works very well, and will have a window with the presenter on the video too (vs. powerpoint doesn't)."
	"I ended up using Screen-cast-o-matic because I could edit it afterwards and then use HandBrake to compress it."
Q	How long did it take you to prepare your talk and was it longer than it takes you to prepare an in-person presentation? If so, why?
A	"It took longer to prepare because I had to pre-record. I have about 6 hours of unusable footage for a 20 min presentation. For some reason, my tongue slips more easily when I'm recording. I also had to remind myself that having mistakes would be a normal part of any presentation, so I just need to correct any major errors and move on. "

<p>Q</p>	<p>Are there any factors to consider when making an online presentation that do not apply to an in-person presentation? (e.g. image sizes, bandwidth, colour schemes, etc).</p>
<p>A</p>	<p>“One thing I noticed with the [...] conference was that in Hopin (the platform they used), the shared screen was really small, so a lot of the text that would have been fine on a big screen got lost. Remember that the quality is already poor on an online platform, so keep text as big as possible.”</p> <p>“Rather speak more and have less text”</p> <hr/> <p>Be aware of your background when presenting (background noise, camera angle if you are filming yourself):</p> <p>Do a Mic check before you start recording to check the quality of the sound.</p> <p>Use earphones and speak directly into the microphone of the earphones (not too close). Please try not to move as the microphone can pick up background noise.</p> <p>Disable all computer updates/notifications or background sounds also mute your cellphone when you’re recording.</p>
<p>Q</p>	<p>What are the main obstacles to an online presentation that you wouldn’t necessarily have in an in-person presentation and how do you recommend overcoming them?</p>
<p>A</p>	<p>“I think the biggest obstacle is not being able to see the audience. You can’t judge their reactions - are they following you? Did your joke make them laugh? Have you put them to sleep? If you can, I would suggest having a [...] meeting [...] with family/friends before the time and practice presenting to them with their cameras off.”</p> <hr/> <p>“[...] Always watch the talk before you submit; there might be glitches in the recording even if you thought the recording went well.”</p> <hr/> <p>“Come up with some backup plan would help with the situation, for example, what if your slides are frozen but people can still hear you, you can come up with some ways to explain the content without showing the slides.”</p>

“When watching the recording of your own talk, make sure the audience knows which part of the slide you’re talking about.”

“Make sure you vocally **lead an audience through your slide** "On the right hand side of this graph, you'll see a blue bar, the x-axis shows this, the blue bar highlights this point". This is something we take for granted as we lean on pointers, our hands, [...]. That doesn't really work in a virtual setting. I found webinars much easier to follow when speakers did this. It helped me stay engaged.”

“When watching the recording of your own talk, also pay attention to whether people can hear you pressing the next-slide arrow on your keyboard. Don't punch the keys when giving the talk, because most laptops have their microphone close to the keyboard, and the sound they pick up when typing can be very loud and disruptive to the talk.”

“Everyone hates their own voices when listening to the recording, don't feel discouraged!”

“The question and answer session is quite short and if the questions are being typed, it takes more time to get through them”

Feedback on attending

Q	What are the elements that made a presentation stand out in the online format?
A	“The enthusiasm of the speaker for their topic. We spend so much time on our screens these days that it helps if the speaker shows enthusiasm for their topic in their voice.
	“ Clear images. ”
	“Being able to see the person talking was also better, it helped me to concentrate on what they were saying. When you can't see the person your mind starts to wander more quickly.”
Q	Is there anything that didn't work and that you recommend be avoided?
A	“Keep the text on any graphics large . Busy slides also don't work because you can't see any details. Keep them simple. ”
	“Too much text”
	“Make sure you check your presentation has been loaded to the platform, and that you know how to share it before your time slot starts and how to turn your microphone on.”
	“ Use slides rather than animations , narrating where to look on a slide rather than using the [...] pointer. I find that hard to follow as someone who has poor vision.”
Q	What tips would you give to students for presenting virtually vs. in person?

<p>A</p>	<p>“I suppose the easiest is to pretend you're telling your grandmother (or someone you feel comfortable with) about your research over the phone, but imagine they can see your slides. Please do not check your phone while you are presenting. Keep it on silent. Smile, even if your camera is off - people can hear it in your voice. Engage in the chat with the other speakers in your session. This will encourage questions on your topic, and may lead to further discussions and even collaborations. Take the time to listen to other sessions as well, they may give you some ideas to improve your presentation skills.”</p>
	<p>“Look at the camera if you are going to be on screen”</p>
<p>Q</p>	<p>What can people attending a virtual conference expect?</p>
<p>A</p>	<p>“Attending conferences are exhausting, regardless of in-person or virtually. But the exhaustion is easier to deal with in a virtual conference because you can watch talks comfortably on the couch, in bed, on the porch, etc. and you can get a snack or drink whenever you want.”</p>
	<p>“Networking virtually, however, is more exhausting than in-person networking in my opinion. [...]. Since we can't come to network with people in-person, it's always a good idea to send a direct message or email to people you want to connect to.”</p>
	<p>“One of the advantages of an online conference is that you can watch the presentations several times and when it suits you”</p>

We would like to thank the following people for their feedback. Give them a follow!

- Patricia Groenewald; UCT Archaeology via Unisa and Durham University; Twitter: @Pat_Groenewald
- Min Ya; Harvard University; Twitter: @0_minyaaa; talk at Botany2020 EvoDevo session <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edgqnxnBIDA>
- Aviwe Matiwane; Department of Botany, Rhodes University; Twitter: @UdeMischa
- Dr Kelsey Glennon; School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand; Twitter: @drkglenno

- Dr Graeme Lloyd; School of Earth and Environment, University of Leeds; Twitter: @GraemeTLloyd