Guidance for participants at virtual events

Introduction

Use this guide to optimise your learning at digital events, but don't worry too much about how you look, sound or feel, or whether you have the best technical set up. We're just delighted you're joining us.

The increase in virtual learning is an opportunity to attend events that cost and travel may otherwise have prevented. However, carving out time and space for this learning brings its own challenges. The following 'top tips' can both help you to get the most from virtual events and allow presenters to understand their audience.

RCEM has previously prepared guidance for speakers at conferences which focuses on delivering the best possible presentation. This guide is aimed at those who are attending but not speaking at events.

Preparation

The lack of steps involved in traditional settings such as having to book a train, hotel and navigating your way to the venue can lead to a false sense of security and result in under planning. The preparation will be less onerous but are still beneficial. A few minutes thought and prep can help you get the most from the event.

Arrive on time and test your connection. Ideally be in place and ready to go with 5 mins to spare as you would for any other meeting. Maybe make a brew.

Organise your learning environment

In order to get the best out of the event it's important that you optimise your environment so that you are able to learn. Learning will be most effective if you can focus all your attention on the event, but with remote learning we know that this is more difficult.

If you are at work people may try and disturb you, if at home then family commitments, deliveries, pets and more may be around. All these distractions may vie for your attention and whilst it's best to try and minimise them please don't worry about them. A random child/ dog/postman appearing in the background will not be a disaster and is absolutely fine (it may even produce a moment of amusement).

Disturbances are almost inevitable with remote learning and RCEM would much rather have you there with the occasional interruption than not there at all.

If you are fortunate enough to be able to access the content from your place of work think about disturbances. What do you want to be interrupted for? Do you need to block out your diary? Or the old fashioned 'do not disturb' sign on your door? Many people will not have their own office space, but think about asking for dedicated space from your department leads for the period of the event. Why not ask to borrow the boss's office for the day?

We believe that remote learning is a positive bonus in allowing access to those with other commitments that might ordinarily prevent them from attending.

Setting up your device(s)

Your learning environment will be focused on the digital device you will be using. Although you can use mobile devices, a laptop or desktop PC will work much better.

• Look at how your screen is organised such that you can see people and their slides

• You may find that different elements (video, slides, chat functions) overlap. On some systems you can prevent this by opening the browser window as full screen

• Close programs that you are not using and shut all those extra tabs on your browser.

• A dual screen system can help avoid overlapping windows on some platforms (though this requires you to have two screens)

Technical issues

You are dependent on your WiFi signal and internet speed, beyond upgrading your service there are a few things you can do which might help

- If you lose signal, then turn off your camera to reduce bandwidth
- Ask people who share your connection to limit bandwidth heavy activities such as streaming video
- Pause syncing with the cloud and updating software for the duration of the session
- Mobile hot-spotting: A strong signal (4G+) via a hotspot may provide an alternative stable connection. But check your mobile data plan as it will use a lots of data and some networks charge extra for tethering.
- Sound interference/echo when unmuted may be helped by plugging in headphones with a microphone

Ensure that you have used the platform before and that you know the basic functions of how to:

- Open and close video
- Open and close audio
- Use the chat or Q&A functions

Mute your microphone if you are not addressing the event. Even if you are not speaking things like typing and taking a sip of water can distract other learners more than you might imagine. We'll say it again. PLEASE learn how to mute your microphone. Please.

How to engage

Some virtual events involve a presenter delivering content to you, some are very interactive and involve the learner participating throughout, many are a mix of both. Your capacity to participate may be limited by things beyond your control, this is fine.

During some interactive elements and in group discussions the facilitator may ask you to turn on your camera, if you feel uncomfortable doing this then please do not feel obliged, but be reassured that we are entirely accepting of mess, breastfeeding, a toddler using you as a climbing frame or whatever else might be going on in the background.

Keeping your camera on also helps other delegates as it helps improve rapport and the community experience. It also helps speakers too as no-one like to speak to a wall of blank boxes and names. Faces are more interactive and engaging.

If the session asks for interactivity, then please do join in if you can. Remember it's tough for the speaker to deliver a session that needs interaction if no-one takes part so please do join in and get involved.

Feedback

We are all learning how to best attend and deliver these events. Feedback is vital to help us improve, but please be kind to the organising/hosting team. Look for email contacts in your booking form to help with technical issues and watch the Twitter feeds for general comment and advice. In these crazy COVID times we are all on a learning curve so do feedback on all aspects of the event in a helpful and constructive fashion through the feedback mechanism provided.

Final thing

Did we mention about muting your microphone?