



Guidance for speakers at virtual events

Introduction

Since the pandemic we are all using online technologies more frequently for teaching and learning. Virtual events are a great way to deliver education, making it often more accessible for delegates and speakers alike. However, online teaching uses a different skill set to the traditional lecture/workshop. The following 'top tips', provided by members of the College's Education Resources Committee and experience speakers, are designed to optimise your preparation and impact.

Your audience

Brief your audience. This will probably be done by the chair, but if not ensure that you brief your delegates on exactly how you want to work with them - will there be polls, how would you like them to get involved with your talk?

Use the first 1 or 2 minutes at the start of your conference to allow time for delegates to prepare their mind, workspace and aspirations.

Put your audience first. This means thinking about what it is they want to learn and not just what you want to teach.

You can invite delegates to send you messages on what they want to get out of the session at the beginning using chat functions.

This is also a great ice-breaker to ensure that delegates understand the need for active learning.

Be interactive. Keeping your audience engaged is vitally important. Here are some ideas on how to do this.

- Use the Q&A/chat functions to store up questions for periods of Q&A planned in your sessions
- Present as a panel of speakers with conversation between participants, rather than just as a single talking head.
- Ask delegates to perform an activity that they can do independently (e.g. take 60 seconds to write down 5 things to improve a webinar, and then go on to present your ideas).
- You can ask questions of your delegates and use polling tools to ask questions, but be careful as these often take time to set up and deliver. Be careful not to over-use these functions and think carefully about what value each question or poll adds to your session.

Content

If you choose to use slides then remember that they will not present in the same way as on a big screen.

Remember that delegates will often have the chat and the picture in picture functions on their screen as well as your slides. Leave lots of empty space on the right of your slides so that this is not obscured.

The general principle of keeping the number of words per slide as low as possible remains. If your audience is reading, they are not listening. Try not to read out your slides to the audience under any circumstance.

Avoid slides that are only to be shown for a small period of time. In general have fewer slides than normal.

If you want delegates to perform an activity, have a slide that explains exactly what you want them to do (remember that they cannot ask a friend or double check what you want them to do). Have a questions slide for your Q&A sessions.

Click [here](#) to view our guide for speakers at RCEM conferences.

Embrace your inner chat-show host.

Panel discussions and interviews work well on screen.

Think about great chat-show hosts and how they work with their guests/experts to bring out key points in a style that keeps your attention (vs. a stand-alone lecture).

Consider using an interview technique with one or more panellists to create a conversational approach which is usually more engaging.

If you do take this approach, then please practice it in advance and do not leave entirely to the day.

Have a 'road map' for your sessions with key learning points to be achieved at set timings through the session.

Paradoxically, the key to appearing spontaneous and relaxed is to prepare and plan well for sessions using this technique.



Technology and timing

Short is sweet. You should aim to deliver short periods of presentation interspersed with activities such as question and answer sessions.

We know that in a traditional lecture participants struggle to maintain focus for more than 20 mins. In an online environment, which has a more passive feel to it, you should halve this. Aim to speak as a sole presenter for 10 mins or less and then plan an activity.

Timing is vital. You must keep to time. The only way to do this is to practice, practice, practice. Don't eat into the interactive question time by speaking for too long.

Tell people how your session timings are going to work at the beginning. This will allow your audience to understand how to interact with the session.

Technical issues

Ensure your Wifi is working and has a good signal. 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
- Share screen

Our virtual platform has a Q&A and chat function. This is fantastic to use as repository of live questions during your session that you can then refer to periodically to break up the flow and improve engagement.

However, it is virtually impossible to present and monitor this function. Every session should have a colleague assigned to the Q&A/chat functionality so think about inviting a chair and a moderator for each event session.

In each session there will also be a member of the RCEM events team and the AV technician to provide support.





Presenting

Look great. You are still presenting and therefore it's important that your stage, and you look as good as you possibly can.

- Place the camera at eye level.
- Check the lighting such that your face is lit (a white sheet on the desktop also helps this). Shine a light at your face to illuminate from the other side, and above your screen. Do not sit with a window or light source behind you as this causes silhouetting.
- Check your background. Think about your stage and how it comes across. Avoid cheesy, silly or comic backgrounds.
- Avoid interruptions and distractions. Lock up the pets, get someone to entertain the kids and ensure that if anyone in the background is appropriately dressed and behaving themselves.
- Have a focus point to talk to. Ideally put a photo of someone close to the camera and talk to their portrait. This keeps your flow and reminds you that there are people out there.
- Make an effort with your appearance. Dress appropriately, shave, etc.

Sound great. You don't need that much to make a big difference.

- Use an external microphone and not the one on your laptop (the difference is huge).
- Keep a steady distance from the microphone
- Check how you sound with the chair before the session starts

Final thoughts

That's all for now. We hope you found this introduction to getting the best out of an online webinar/tutorial useful.