

Are you ready for your close-up?

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Developing Teaching Confidence in an Online World

by Holly Cybulski, Elisheva Lightstone, and Taunya Tremblay, the Teaching & Learning Centre

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Zoom, Webex, BigBlueButton, Microsoft Teams... and remember Skype??? For over a year now, we have lived in a virtual space, both personally and professionally, which brings many challenges and many opportunities. When teaching online, it can feel like we're just the voice behind the curtain, like in the film *The Wizard of Oz*. Pushing buttons, adjusting camera angles, setting lighting, all while trying to deliver a presentation, can be challenging to navigate. Which begs the question, does anyone ever feel like they are the Beyonce of their virtual classroom, ready to put on a show? Perhaps a few tips may help...



Say what you mean and mean what you say

While managing so many channels simultaneously, it can be hard to stay focused and on point. Whether it is using the presenter notes in your presentation slides, or perhaps adding a few bullet points on paper, scripting your messaging ahead of time can instill confidence so when the unexpected happens, you don't lose your train of thought.



Invite collaboration

The beauty of a virtual space is it can be accessible to all participants. Some people feel best on camera and audio, while others would prefer to share their thinking in the chat box. When meeting a new team, consider inviting their input on how to navigate the methods of communication so to increase engagement and active participation from all. Put simply: when you first meet, discuss what works for you and for them!



Steer the conversation and manage expectations

Collaboration is an important step, but it is not the foundation of a virtual ed space. Always remember, you are the Captain of your ship. Be transparent with the audience regarding what works for you as a presenter. Perhaps activity in the chat is disruptive or distracting to you, and you prefer to engage with the audience during set periods of time. When designing a presentation, please give thoughtful consideration to what makes you feel like you own the stage and build from there.



Dress to impress

No, it is not expected that you dazzle the catwalk fresh out of fashion week. However, what we wear has a big impact on how we feel. Once you have chosen your attire, test it on camera. Is the collar too high or are the pants too tight to sit? What does the outfit look like in the frame of your screen? And remember, the beauty of virtual is that no one knows you're still wearing slippers. ☒



Leverage backgrounds

The best part of web conferencing tools like Zoom, Teams, BigBlueButton, and Webex is that you don't have to clean up your room or house before you teach your classes. You can even move around from room to room without anyone watching you know what you're doing (just don't make the mistake of driving while Zooming!). Have some fun with backgrounds but be mindful to remain professional and not to select a background that is distracting. Seneca also has designed many exciting backgrounds you may wish to utilize. This is a win win: not only are you looking professional, but you can also ignore that pile of laundry in the background for another day.



Practice, practice, practice

As the saying goes, "Rome wasn't built in a day." We can't expect to become online web conferencing experts in a day. So let's give ourselves a break and not expect our classes to run smoothly right away as we learn the new technology. First, select one teleconferencing platform to master. Try going through a few dry runs and anticipate the bumps that will come. Invite a colleague to connect with you so you can test out the tools, like polling. Give yourself some time to become familiar with the icons (like raise hand!), how to record meetings or classes, and how to display your presentation slides.

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STOPS WORKING

Shake it off, it happens to all of us!

In the wise words of Taylor Swift, just “shake it off!” Tech fails and interruptions happen, and feeling just plain weird is all part of the virtual space. Many subscribe to a simple motto: fake it ‘til you make it. Although you may feel out of sync, the audience likely does not know the hiccups you are experiencing. These challenges happen to us all, so embrace the chaos, and remember to channel your inner rock star! As the kids say, “you’ve got this!”



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