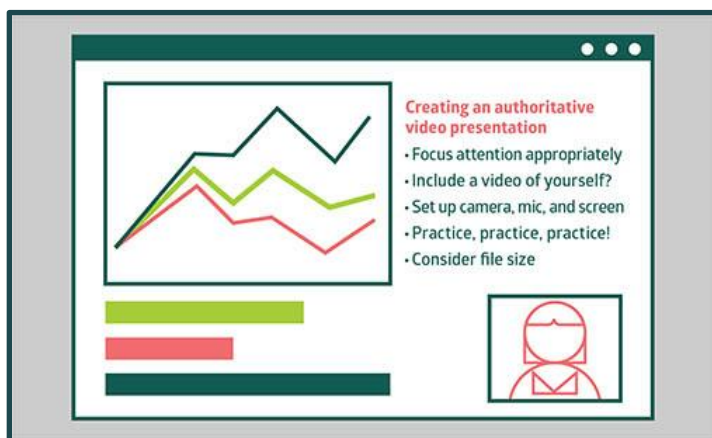

Tips and cautions for presenting at virtual conferences and meetings

Part 1: Creating engaging and authoritative video presentations

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Virtual conferences and meetings are not a new phenomenon, and some of us were already familiar with sharing and discussing our research this way before the COVID-19 pandemic forced cancellations or postponements of in-person events or shifts to virtual events. Still, a great many of us have recently had to take crash courses in learning

how to use various video conferencing platforms and tools in order to prepare and give presentations at virtual events.

At virtual events, all sessions are provided online, with presenters either livestreaming their presentations or providing pre-recorded presentations that are available to registered attendees on demand via a secure event website. At semi-virtual events, sessions can include traditional in-person presentations or livestreamed presentations given to attendees at the conference venue as well as pre-recorded presentations available online.

In this first featured article of a two-part series on presenting at virtual conferences and meetings, we offer some tips and cautions for presenting via pre-recorded video presentations.

The second featured article, which will be circulated via an upcoming newsletter, will focus on tips and cautions for livestreaming your presentation at a designated time. The tips shared are also applicable to faculty members who are now livestreaming classes and lectures.

Part 1: Video presentations

While video presentations are unlikely to replace the traditional format of conference presentations given in person or via the other relatively new medium of streaming presentations live, they do offer many unique opportunities to conference organizers, presenters, and the academic community as a whole. For example, having some or all participants provide a video presentation instead of traveling to a set venue has the obvious benefits of reducing the costs and environmental impact associated with such travel as well as promoting greater diversity and inclusion by enabling researchers and academics from across the globe to share their work more widely.

In addition, some event organizers are asking presenters to pre-record their presentations rather than livestream them to minimize technical problems during a live event, and some are making the video presentations available online in perpetuity, such as those presented at the [1st IASC Virtual Conference](#) held in 2018. Webinars now often include recorded video presentations, with presenters answering questions from webinar participants live online after the recordings are played.

What exactly is a video presentation?

The answer to this question is obvious for the most part, but some event organizers impose stricter guidelines on the recordings to be made than others. You may be asked to meet certain technical criteria such as using a particular video file format (e.g., MP4), aspect ratio (e.g., 16:9), resolution (e.g., \leq 720p HD), bit rate (e.g., \leq 1 mbps), and file size (e.g., \leq 100 MB), as well as non-technical criteria such as duration of the presentation (e.g., \leq 15 min), showing a video of you giving your presentation overlaid on your slides, and showing no corporate logos used except on the first and last slides.

Event organizers will provide instructions for recording presentations using some commonly available tools, and there are also many videos and instruction sheets online to guide you.

Once you've carefully checked the guidelines for the event to make sure you make a suitable recording, you can concentrate on writing and then recording your video

presentation. Below, we present some key considerations, tips, and cautions for doing this, organized under the following areas:

- **Creating an engaging and authoritative video presentation**
- **Recording your video presentation**
- **Observing etiquette during your video presentation**

Creating an engaging and authoritative video presentation?

Many of the tips and cautions for creating video presentations are the same as those for conventional in-person presentations—you can read about how to create effective presentations in general in our previous featured articles, [“Giving effective presentations: 5 ways to present your points with power, not just PowerPoint”](#) and [“7 practical tips for giving an effective conference presentation”](#). In addition, the following points apply specifically to creating video presentations that will be engaging for your audience and show your authority (credibility) in the field.

Consider how to focus attention

To emphasize certain information in a slide or help the audience follow your line of thinking across multiple points in a single slide, direct the audience’s attention to specific content using your computer’s cursor or a pointing tool provided in certain applications (just as you would with a laser pointer during a physical presentation).

Alternatively, for some slides, you might want to “reveal” different parts of the slide in a logical order, to fit exactly with the points you say as you say them. This stops the audience from looking at information presented on the entire slide without focusing on key details that you say only. You can reveal different parts of a slide and control what the audience sees and hears as you progress through the slide. For example, you may be able to use an animation function (e.g., the “Appear” function in PowerPoint).



As when using a laser pointer in a physical presentation, be careful not to “overuse” your cursor once you have directed your audience’s attention to the right place in the slide; for example, avoid circling the cursor in a distracting way and instead move it off the slide until you need to use it again.

Consider whether to include a video of you presenting



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In your video presentation, you may want to record only your voice as you present your slides or you may want to include a small window overlaid on your slides that shows a video of you talking. If you are not sure whether to include yourself speaking, try recording a couple of slides that include your image to see how well it works. Many applications, such as [PowerPoint](#) and [Zoom](#), allow you to record yourself while showing slides on your screen.

Consider the complexity and layout of the information in slides when deciding whether to also include a video of you presenting, and consider if any limits on file size will be affected by including a recording of you too.



If you decide to show yourself presenting somewhere on the slides, avoid making just a “talking head” video that shows only your face for lengthy segments of the presentation. Instead, show your slides as usual and overlay a window of you presenting in one corner of your slides. Remember when creating your slides to leave an area free of content to show you presenting—you don’t want to obscure any important information on the slide.

Recording your video presentation

As with anything that relies on technology, you must account for possible technical problems.

Set up your camera properly

If you plan to include a video of you presenting your slides, make sure your face sits squarely within view. You’ll typically want to include the top of your shoulders and keep your eyes centered within the frame. Make sure that the lighting is appropriate and the background is clear of distractions. Look in the general direction of the camera, which is best mounted on top of your screen or in front of your screen (on which you will be viewing and changing your slides as you present them).



Some recording applications allow you to choose a virtual background, but be careful that you choose one that is suitable for the venue (i.e., choose one that maintains your authority as an academic presenter and is not distracting in itself). Also, remember that if you tend to move your position often as you present, then your outline against the virtual background will become fuzzy, which may be distracting. So, if possible, use a real background, which will be minimally in view if you are set squarely in the frame. An empty neutral

colored wall is a safe choice, but in reality your background may well include pieces of furniture and some objects like a bookshelf, artwork, and a clock—just try to make the real background tidy and non-distracting.

Set up your microphone properly

Whether you are using, for example, an external microphone or a built-in microphone for a camera or earphones, quickly check the volume and quality of the sound recording before you begin. Avoid speaking too close to the microphone because this can cause popping and sibilance that reduces clarity of the recorded speech.



- If there is a lot of ambient noise (traffic, sirens, etc. like where we are in central Tokyo), be conscious of needing to either (1) pause and resume your recording when the disturbance has passed and then edit the disturbance out or (2) re-record the affected segment and splice it in later. If you re-record, then try to replicate the exact environment in which you did the first recording, so that the inserted audio clip is of similar quality to the original recording.
- If you are using a microphone built into your earphone set that hangs below your mouth, make sure it isn't so close that you get popping sounds (strong blasts of air) on sounds like "p" and "b" or sibilance (a hissing sound) on sounds like "f" and "s".

Set up your screen properly

Your slides should fill the screen (e.g., using 'Slide Show' mode in PowerPoint) so that the audience sees no other distracting information on your screen during the recording.



- If you are using animations in PowerPoint to reveal content within the slides, you need to be in 'Slide Show' mode for the animation to work.
- During Q&A, if you want to quickly jump to specific slides in PowerPoint, hit Escape to exit 'Slide Show' mode, navigate to the slide you want on the left side of your screen, and then enter 'Slide Show' mode again to talk through the slide in detail.
- If you use more than one monitor, make sure that your slides display in 'Slide Show' mode on your main monitor for the recording.

Check and practice videorecording your presentation

Schedule some time to practice making the recording. At the beginning, try making a 1-minute video recording so that you know what you sound (and look) like. This will help you to get the right audio levels and to check the pace of your presentation. You can also familiarize yourself with pausing and restarting the recording in case you want to re-record a part of your presentation while recording.

Sharing the task of making the video recording can help to reduce the burden and stress of not only creating and presenting the presentation material well, but also handling the technical aspects of making the recording itself. If you are not familiar with how to make a video recording or you are worried about giving the presentation while handling the technical aspects, consider asking someone to help you.

Here at ThinkSCIENCE, we are very happy to advise our customers on how to record their presentations. We are experienced in recording our own conference presentations and recording teaching courses for universities to offer students and faculty on demand, so we have learned many tips and tricks for making video recordings efficiently.

Check the file size

After you've recorded your presentation, check the file size. If you find that your audio file (e.g., MP3 file) or video file (e.g., MP4 file) exceeds any limit set, try compressing the file to reduce the size. Various tools are available for compression without markedly reducing the quality of the recording.

Observing appropriate etiquette during your video presentation

Professional etiquette is just as important during a video presentation as it is during an in-person presentation. Let's look at some important considerations here.

Observe time limits

Keeping to the allotted time shows authority and professionalism, whether you are giving a traditional in-person presentation or a pre-recorded one.



If your pre-recorded presentation is to be played during a live event, then keeping to the time limit will ensure there is enough time for a live question and answer (Q&A) session afterwards. (Note that some virtual conferences hold virtual Q&A sessions where questions are asked and answered via an online messaging system.)

Handle mistakes professionally

You don't have to make a perfect recording free from all errors (and you may well not have time to do this even if you want to). If you notice making a mistake in your speech or in moving between your slides, simply apologize and move on with your presentation. Even highly experienced presenters make minor mistakes as they present—it's a natural part of communicating, so don't worry about it. Just quickly apologize (e.g., "sorry", "sorry about that", "excuse me") and keep going. You don't have to edit all minor mistakes out.

Communicate naturally

Try to maintain good posture when speaking, without leaning into the microphone. If you will show yourself presenting in your recording, view your slides on a screen directly in front of you and place your camera on top of or in front of that screen. This helps you look in the general direction of the camera, in the same way that you would look at the audience during an in-person presentation. Try to smile at the beginning and end of the presentation to engage with the audience. Also, remember to dress appropriately for the virtual event, as if you were attending in person.



- Avoid reading a full script aloud. Reading alters normal speech patterns. It can make the presenter speak too quickly and too flatly (which can bore the audience), reducing clarity and authority. Instead, to help remember important information that is not shown on the slide, write bullet points or short notes only. This will force you to speak more naturally when talking through your slides.
- If you will show yourself presenting, be careful when using some video recording applications that show your image on screen while you are recording—avoid watching your own image on the screen while recording.

Summary

Pre-recorded video presentations offer many opportunities to share your findings with others. You don't need to worry about making your video completely error-free. Instead, concentrate on communicating information clearly, accurately, and with minimal distractions.

We hope the tips and cautions presented here are helpful. You might like to check out our other [resources for presentations](#), such as our featured article about [handling difficult Q&A moments](#). And of course, if you have any questions about presenting your work, please [do let us know](#).

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