

ELTE Project Help Sheet 1

supporting the development of technology enhanced teaching and learning in Social policy and Social Work in higher education

Presenting and Speaking via Videoconferencing

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Introduction

This Help Sheet (1) has been written to support speakers develop good teaching and presentation practice in their use of video conferencing technology and is also relevant for web conferencing.

It invites such speakers to consider ways in which the use of the technology to support communication with remote audiences might impact on definitions of good practice developed in face to face contexts.

The guidance points were gathered from generic literature on videoconferencing then trialled within an international videoconferencing seminar series run by SWAP in 2005 as part of an e-learning project funded through the Joint information Systems Committee's Distributed Elearning Programme via the Higher Education Academy strand.

For most participants involved in the series the experience was new so there was an explicit recognition of the learning involved, which has informed this Sheet. A number of suggestions and observations are provided below grouped into different headings.

Before the seminar

To support a smooth and glitch free VC session there are a number of preparatory tasks that can be undertaken to facilitate this.

- ▶ Visit the location before hand and familiarise yourself with the layout of the room; identify the positions of camera(s) and the place you will be standing in relation to these.
- ▶ Discuss with the person chairing the session how the session will be managed.
- ▶ Meet and talk with your technicians to check arrangements and what your involvement with the technology is.
- ▶ If possible run a test session to check systems work and to practice camera angles etc.
- ▶ Be ready to do checks ten minutes in advance of the session start time and if you have multiple sites call in each one to check they are all present and transmitting.
- ▶ Acknowledge to the audience that this is not like a normal lecture- embrace the difference.

- ▶ Send in PowerPoint presentations before your session and any other documentation you may wish to be distributed.
- ▶ Have a shared agenda for each session so organisers, chairs and speakers at each location are aware of roles and timings, particularly if you are running sessions with multiple sites.
- ▶ With international audiences make sure you have your time differences correct to ensure you will all be in place at the same times. Seems obvious but things like summer and winter times are designed to confuse.

What the audience hears

The quality of the experience for the hearing members of the audience is influenced heavily by the quality and clarity of the sound.

- ▶ Speak clearly and try to maintain a constant volume
- ▶ Use pauses when talking to allow sufficient time for the audience to assimilate what you are saying, particularly if you are speaking to audience members for whom your language is not their first language
- ▶ Such pauses in speaking and during discussions accommodate time delays in transmission created by the remote link.
- ▶ In discussions clearly indicate when you have finished what you are saying and when you are expecting a reply.
- ▶ Show the audience members you know they are out there and speak to the audience by acknowledging them at the start and by referencing their presence in each of the countries/institutions you are speaking to during the presentations – make them feel included!
- ▶ If using PowerPoint or transparencies be clear about which slide you are talking to, by number preferably, and indicate when you are moving on to the next, whether they are on screens at local sites or showing on one of a number of screens as with Access Grid. If possible send presentations in advance with slides numbered so that copies can be distributed to audiences locally.
- ▶ In an international context be aware of cultural references in your talk that may not 'travel' that need either ditching or explanation, particularly acronyms, which are best avoided.
- ▶ More may be less when doing remote presentations or lectures – explain clearly each new section of the presentation and summarise. Pause to suggest questions or topics that the audience may like to pick up on during the discussion session.
- ▶ Consider carefully how to present quantitative data, for example using graphs with various colours that may look different when printed or shown on a different computer. The audience may be easily confused by complex tabular images. Separate out key data as you are often not able to use pointers with slides to support your explanations for remote audiences.
- ▶ When asking questions or comments speakers need to state their name and location
- ▶ Keep the sound clean and try to avoid creating background noise that can be magnified for remote audiences such as paper rustling and crackling by shuffling if standing or touching lecterns hard.
- ▶ Remind locations to turn off microphones so only the speaker can be heard. If sound triggers a screen switch this can be a big distraction for audiences.

What the audience sees

- ▶ Avoid excessive movement (to keep within normal camera range) of either body or hand gesticulation, but do not end up being stiff and wooden. This is not an easy balance!
- ▶ The issue of eye contact is tricky if you are speaking to a local and remote audience at the same time, as well as using notes. It may be more helpful to focus eye contact on your remote audience to keep them engaged. Your local audience has your physical presence to facilitate this.
- ▶ Do not use pointing devices as these will not be seen by remote audiences.
- ▶ Wear low contrast clothing (e.g. not red, white and black) and avoid checks or bold patterns.
- ▶ Stand or sit in front of an unfussy and still background (an image of university logo may be good to give the audience a sense of place, which adds to the experience for international audiences). For example a videoconference run by the University of San Diego showed a picture window with the beach behind – add to the frisson of excitement as the sense of being part of a global experience.
- ▶ Try to be the only person on camera when presenting as it can be very distracting for a remote audience to see other people in the background fidgeting, eating or worse!
- ▶ Do not change slides too quickly (the audience needs time to look at you and the slide screen).
- ▶ If you are the local speaker it may mean that the screen view in your location is of the last site to speak. It can be worth reminding all sites of this.

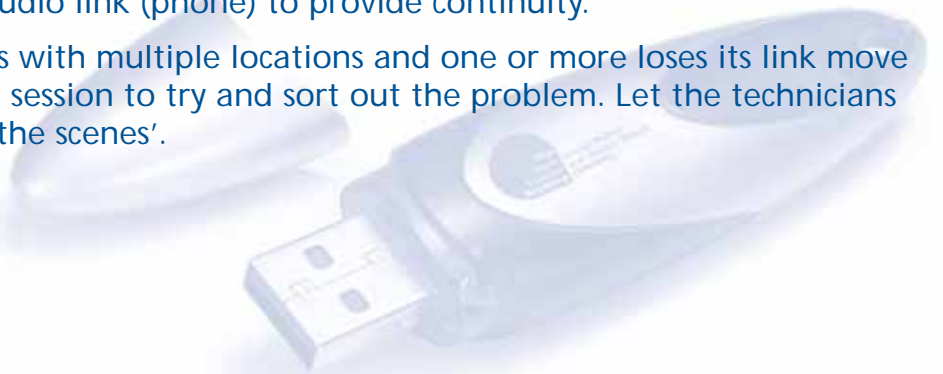
At the end of the session

- ▶ Make the ending of the transmission clear and explicit and allow time to 'say goodbye'. The chair or organiser at local level should then also end the session formally once the transmission stops.
- ▶ For the remote speaker allow yourself some time to re-adjust to your local situation again – speaking to an audience remotely can be quite an intense experience and ending the transmission can induce a temporary feeling of loss or adjustment!

If things go wrong

The technology supporting video and web conferencing is becoming increasingly stable, however problems with maintaining connections and quality of these remain commonplace.

- ▶ Have contingency plans in place in case you lose transmission to/from a remote location. If you have a local audience with a remote speaker make sure you have a filler contribution to plug a short gap and one for if the link with the speaker cannot be re-established. This might include a transcript from the speaker that you can read or a means of accessing an audio link (phone) to provide continuity.
- ▶ If you are running sessions with multiple locations and one or more loses its link move on and do not disrupt the session to try and sort out the problem. Let the technicians try to sort things 'behind the scenes'.



Reading

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This Help Sheet is part of a series being produced for Social Policy and Social Work higher education teachers and support staff as part of SWAP's E-Supported Learning and Teaching Enhancement Project. The project is running between May 2006 and July 2008.

For more details on the project visit the SWAP website

<http://www.swap.ac.uk/elearning>

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