11 TIPS for Virtual Learning in COVID-19

We know COVID-19 is changing many aspects of your day-to-day operations, including the transition of many face-to-face group teaching (e.g. academic half days, journal clubs, case discussions) to the virtual environment.

As a learner, we know you have questions. Rest assured that program leaders are taking steps to minimize the negative impacts resulting from the changes. To this end, we've developed this resource, which offers tips for virtual learning success, including communicating and interacting online, as well as technical considerations for using virtual meeting platforms.

1. Be patient with yourself (and others):

Expect that there will be a period of adjustment for your facilitator and your colleagues. There may be technical difficulties with the virtual meeting platform, and there may be awkwardness as people get comfortable with the technology and with communicating online.

2. Familiarize yourself with the virtual meeting platform

prior to the first session. If you need to download or install the tool, do this before the session starts as it often takes more time than anticipated. Take a few moments to explore the platform and its capabilities (e.g.; chat, raise your hand, how to mute the mic, etc.) so that you're able to fully participate during the session.

3. Be mindful that this is your learning space

Choose a space that has a comfortable seat and good lighting, and if required try wearing earbuds or headphones to cancel out background noise.

4. Maintain professionalism

While it's perfectly fine to dress comfortably, be aware of what others can see in terms of your appearance and your décor (when your webcam is on).

5. Avoid unnecessary stress and log in to the session a few minutes early

This helps to avoid the delays that sometimes occur when everyone tries to login at high volume times (e.g. on the hour). Once logged in, make sure that you can hear, and that your mic and webcam are working (if required).

6. Limit background noise

Minimize or eliminate noise such as typing or eating by muting yourself when joining a meeting (after the initial "hello"). Unmute when you wish to speak.

7. Say hello and identify yourself when you join the session

Encourage learners to ask questions in the chat and pause often to answer, making sure to address individuals by name (this helps with engagement, community and a sense of presence). If you can't answer all questions during the session, follow-up with answers later.

8. Be present

Give the session your full attention by resisting the temptation to multitask. If possible, silence your cell phone, close other browsers and applications, and turn off email and other notifications so you can concentrate on the session.

9. Participate

Introduce yourself, ask questions, answer questions and share your experiences. It can sometimes be difficult to (politely) break into the discussion, so take advantage of virtual meeting features, such as "chat" and "raise your hand", to signal your desire to speak up.

10. Practice effective online communication

Use the chat tool in a professional manner and don't say anything online that you wouldn't face-to-face. Be careful not to send messages meant for an individual to the entire group. If you're not using your webcam, the group will not be able to read your nonverbal cues; in the virtual environment, it's acceptable to use emoticons like smiley faces to soften the tone of your words.

11. Do the pre- and post-session work

Read the pre-reading material beforehand so that you're prepared to discuss during the session. You may also be asked to do some work following the session. While this may not feel the same as some of the interactions you're normally used to, it should help consolidate your learning.

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