Preparing for and Facilitating
USW Zoom Sessions:
Twelve Tips for Steelworker Facilitators

Preparation

1. Practice hosting: Zoom is relatively easy to use, but a live video conference with an audience is not the time to explore its features. Make video appointments with co-workers and friends to get used to Zoom. If you have not used Zoom before, download Zoom prior to the day of the class and familiarise yourself with any features you may need to use on the day, e.g., mute/unmute microphone, stop/start video, screenshare, etc.

2. Practice speaking: as much as possible, speak to the camera and not the screen or your desk. During live sessions, our tendency is to look at people on the screen or read facilitator notes. Looking directly at the camera makes the audience feels like you're talking directly to them.

3. Zoom backgrounds: choose a USW Zoom background from https://www.usw.ca/news/media-centre/usw-logo-style-guide/download-usw-zoom-backgrounds. If you livestream without a background, think about what participants will see. For instance, if you are set up at home and working from your kitchen table, your camera angle might include dirty pots on your stove and greasy dishes around the kitchen sink.

4. Proper lighting: have good lighting on your face so you can be seen clearly. Avoid backlight from bright windows. This will underexpose you, so the audience sees your face as a dark shadow. Avoid bright lights directly in front of your face. This will overexpose you, so your audience sees your face as a glowing sphere. Experiment with moving light sources, such as lamps, around until you can see face appropriately lit on the screen.

5. Webcam position: whether your web camera is built in to your computer or external, be sure it is in a stable position and focused at eye level, if possible. For laptops with built-in web cameras, a simple trick is to place the laptop on a pile of books to get the laptop to the correct height.

6. Prepare materials in advance: if you are sharing content during the session, make sure you have the files and/or links ready to go before the session begins.

Facilitating the session

7. Dress appropriately: it is easy to give in to the temptation to wear sweatpants and an old t-shirt because you are working from home. However, participants expect you to have a professional appearance. Dress for your session the way you would for an in-person workshop.

8. Arrive on time, as you would to any other in-person session. This means starting at least ten minutes before the beginning of the session to set up, get comfortable, arrange your materials, etc. This will enable you to "arrive on time" by starting the session at the appointed time.

9. Muting/unmuting microphone: to help keep background noise to a minimum, make sure you mute your microphone when you are not speaking. If you do not mute your microphone, be mindful of background noise. Avoid activities that could create additional noise, such as shuffling papers, background music, pets barking and meowing, etc.

10. Switch to gallery view: switching to gallery view allows you to see everyone in your session. This will increase your sense of facilitating a whole learning community.

11. Use chat and chat rooms appropriately: Chat room conversations between individuals are not encouraged. Only post chat messages to 'Everyone' that are relevant to the material and discussion. It is best to encourage microphone conversations instead of long conversations using chat functions.

12. Avoid multi-tasking: while facilitating a session, do not reply to emails/texts and, especially, do not surf the internet. When you begin the session, encourage participants to also avoid multitasking.

Finally, a general note on self-care as a Steelworker facilitator:

Until the pandemic, education design, facilitator training and facilitation was based on the assumption of in-person participation. A virtual class of facilitators with participants is very new to us. Online facilitation is like learning a new language. And, as with any new endeavor, self-care is an important aspect of learning. With this in mind, be kind to yourself.

When you execute the technical aspects of Zoom, such as muting/ unmuting, navigating from breakout rooms back to plenary, switching to "share screen" etc., accept that your mistakes will guide you to technical fluency. While facilitating, providing clear instructions, understanding participant comments, asking clarifying questions and promoting participant interaction all occur in a slower rhythm. This is not your fault.

As a Steelworker facilitator, you are learning a second language – as are we all.

Adapted from:

https://www.acap.edu.au/assets/Student-Communications/Zoom-reminders-and-etiquette-for-students-Final.pdf

https://www.rochester.edu/advancement/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/zoom-suggested-etiquette.pdf

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