Better videoconferencing

Interactive videoconferencing involves a live two-way video and audio telecommunication link between two or more distant sites. Videoconferencing supports ‘real-time’ learning and teaching interactions between educators and students. All participants, including the facilitator, need to take responsibility for creating and maintaining a supportive learning environment and group communication process. Establishing a few simple ground rules to encourage active learning, interaction and group participation can help to ensure your videoconferencing experiences are enjoyable, educational and effective.

Beginning the session

- The facilitator should arrange to have all sites called at least 5 mins prior to start of conference. This helps to ensure everyone is connected before the actual starting time.
- The camera angle should be adjusted so that the far site can see near site participants as closely as possible.
- Let the other side know that you are ‘there’ when you are connected.
- Participants to be present 5 -10 minutes ahead of the scheduled start as late arrival is more distracting than in a traditional classroom.
- Start the session on time.
- Materials associated with the session should be sent to participants ahead of time, allowing them to bring copies if they wish.
- Participants should introduce themselves at the outset, either individually, or site by site if there are many people present.
- The facilitator should publicise at the start of the videoconference when breaks will occur. This reminds participants of the times they are able to leave the room.

During the session

- The facilitator should guide a discussion at the start of the session on the expected protocols and ground rules so that everyone is clear on what is expected.
- Ask if participants have received distributed materials (if applicable).
- Speak clearly at a normal volume and wait until another has finished speaking before responding. This will avoid break-up of the audio signal.
- Decide on a protocol for taking it in turns to speak or dealing with questions. This will minimize disruption to the flow of the videoconference.
- Identify whether there are any first-time participants. The facilitator should be prepared to give a basic talk-through regarding use of the equipment.
- Various learning activities will require specific roles of participants, i.e. chair person in a debate or spokesperson for a team. Decide in advance who these will be and the scope of their role.
- Notice where the camera is and avoid standing in front of it when you are addressing your home site. You will block the view for remote sites.

Ending the session

- Allow some time for final questions or discussion.
- Establish follow-up activities or preparations required for next session.
- Clarify availability of additional resources where applicable.
- Thank participants for their valued involvement.
Personal etiquette recommendations

- Request that participants mute their microphones when not contributing.
- Avoid covering the microphones with books, papers or clothing or shuffling items near the microphones.
- Aim for seating arrangements which allow all participants to appear on camera.
- Try to maintain eye contact with participants at all sites rather than just the home site. Look into the lens rather than focusing on the monitor whilst you are speaking.
- Avoid wearing patterned and very brightly coloured clothing which places extra demands on the video signal-compression system.
- ‘Noisy’ jewellery items, such as bangles, can disrupt the audio signal.
- Rapid movements on camera will result in image distortion. You can test the limits of your system ahead of the videoconference using ‘self-view’ facility on the remote control unit.
- Participants’ actions will be visible constantly – which could be distracting to others (eating, yawning, searching bags etc).
- If using a desktop videoconferencing unit, remember that your image may be quite large for participants viewing at the far end.

Notes adapted from:


