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ISU Graduate Students,

You may feel that presenting online is less than optimal, especially if you are used to standing in front of a class, lab, or other group in order to make a presentation. However, there are advantages to presenting online. You get to do so from a place of your choosing, and your immediate environment is totally under your control. You get to design a space that you feel comfortable in, and you can use that to put yourself at ease during what might otherwise be a stressful situation. You also get to use the elements of the computer screen to your advantage to direct a viewer's attention to the things you want them to pay attention to! They won't be distracted by the fact that one of the other committee members in the room just dropped a pen, or checked their cuticles, or are in the midst of polishing their glasses -- because you dominate the view! Finally, you can rest easy knowing that none of your committee will see the little nervous tremor in your hand, because chances are your hands won't even be onscreen. So relax! You've got this! With just a little bit of foresight and a by paying attention to a few simple suggestions, you can make your virtual exam or defense a pleasurable and intellectually rewarding experience. In the spirit of helping you do just that, we share several tips collated from reputable sources to help you as you prepare. Good luck!

General Tips for presenting Online

1) Increase your visibility. Many presenters complain that they can't see their audience. But the bigger problem is that (most of the time) they can't see you. There are few things as compelling to other humans as the human face. A classic study by Richard Fantz, which revealed that infants stared twice as long at simplified human faces than shapes, indicates our fascination is hard-wired. Add to that the fact that over 90% of how we communicate is through nonverbal cues like gestures and facial expressions, and you start to get a picture of what a disadvantage being simply a faceless voice to your audience is!

2) Leverage your voice. When you remove the physical component from your presentation, your voice carries a much larger load. A monotone, unclear or hard-to-hear voice is magnified in the virtual world. As your primary communication tool, you need to make sure you are in your best possible voice. Start by recording yourself and analyzing your strengths and weaknesses, then get to work. There is plenty of advice online about how to improve various vocal issues. At the least, do some simple warm-ups before your presentation. Just like a great vocal artist, your money is where your mouth is, so don't treat it lightly.

3) Embrace the pause. Online audiences can be a very passive lot. As a result, presenters have a tendency to go into long monologues that only further discourage participation and encourage tune-out. Make friends with the pause.

4) Visually reinforce key points. You can get away with using fewer slides during an in-person presentation because it's easier to gauge your audience's comprehension by their expressions or body language. Places where you would naturally stop often get overlooked as on-line presenters mistake audience silence for understanding. To make sure you don't leave your audience in the dust of confusion, prepare a summary slide with key points covered after each section and stop to recap and take questions.

5) Simplify your slides. Have you ever decided not to watch a movie on that little airplane screen because it would be too hard to follow? The same holds true for a web presentation. Since you have no idea what size screen your audience is viewing your presentation on (or what their connection is like), design your slides to work well on a smaller screen. Small screens can multiply already busy graphics. Animations can appear jerky or out of sync with your talk track. Keep your graphics simple and crisp and limit your

animations to simple fades and transitions and you can avoid alienating any audience members. (See #s 14-20 below for more information and tips for slide design!)

6) Use purposeful movement. There is an area of the brain called the Limbic System that is highly sensitive to movement. This was probably meant to keep us safe from dinosaurs, but what this means for today's presenters is that any onscreen movement will draw your viewers' eyes. This has its pluses and minuses. Purposeful movement, i.e., changing slides or using your web tools to guide your audience's eyes to different areas on screen works in you favor. Random or chaotic movement, i.e., jerky animations, a racing mouse, or rapid transitions work against you. Wield the power of movement purposefully and wisely.

7) Keep the video engaging by inserting multimedia when appropriate. This breaks up the monotony of a standard PowerPoint or "talking head" presentation.

8) Keep the amount of text on the screen to a minimum and use more visual representation.

9) If narrating slides, introduce images and text at the same time that you present them.

10) Avoid excessive use of verbal pauses (words like "um") and too much movement. A short pause is ok. And small shifts in your stance or your orientation to the camera is fine. Avoid too much movement, as it can be distracting. Look directly into the camera and speak to your audience. Looking around or at notes can also be distracting to your audience.

Setting Up Your Camera and Space
11) Make sure that you are pictured in the middle of the screen from about the middle of your shoulders up

12) Make sure that your lighting is adequate; face your lighting (try to avoid only using a window as your only lighting).

13) Colors that work best on video include: blue, green, purple, burgundy and Earth tones. Avoid the following: Herringbone, small checks, thin strips or clothing with closely spaced geometric patterns.

More on Creating Informative, Attractive Slides:
14) Use dark print against white (or very light) background

15) Use simple backgrounds

16) Use sans serif fonts (Ariel 32 pt. is a good choice)

17) Avoid using red or green (problem for the most common form of color blindness and thus color blind viewers)

18) To avoid text-heavy slides, chunk information across several slides instead.

19) Whenever possible use shapes or other graphics to display ideas or processes rather than text.

20) Images should be large and clearly drawn. Design elements (e.g., animations) should support your points rather than distract the audience.

(#s 1-6 quoted from https://visme.co/blog/engage-audience-online-presentation/. #s 7-13 quoted from https://kb.ecampus.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/440/2013/04/Best_Practices_Mediasite.pdf. #s 14-20 quoted from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ljubomir_Jacic2/post/What_are_your_best_practices_for_making_online_presentations/attachment/5a242a0a4cde266d5877eac4/AS%3A567523264471040%401512319498075/download/IEEE-online_presentations_best_practices.pdf).

Evidence that You Can Succeed!
We also scoured the web for some inspiring stories about graduate students who successfully navigated the online defense. Give these stories a read to inspire yourself. We can't wait to hear your own successful virtual defense story!
https://today.duke.edu/2020/03/defending-her-dissertation-social-distance
https://news.stanford.edu/2020/03/19/stanford-student-presents-phd-defense-virtually/

Good Tips for any Defense
Finally, here are some general tips from the American Psychological Association about how to be successful navigating the defense itself. We love this article, because it reinforces the idea that the defense is the culminating moment in your graduate career – one which you have earned, and one in which you are the star of the show. Everyone wants to hear what you have to say. So, as the article suggests -- breathe deep and enjoy the experience!
https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2004/04/stand
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