

Tips for *Virtual* Speakers

This Tech Tip is a version of “TIPS FOR SPEAKERS, PRESENTERS AND TRAINERS,” originally developed by former Toni Rosenbaum, Program Manager (retired), Cornell Local Roads Program. It is edited specifically for those giving virtual training.

INSTRUCTIONAL TIPS

Clothing

Dress appropriately to the audience, and season. You may be virtual, but you should dress as you would for a session you would be giving face-to-face. If your audience is highway officials who dress in boots and jeans, don't wear a three-piece suit. Respect your audience.

Be yourself

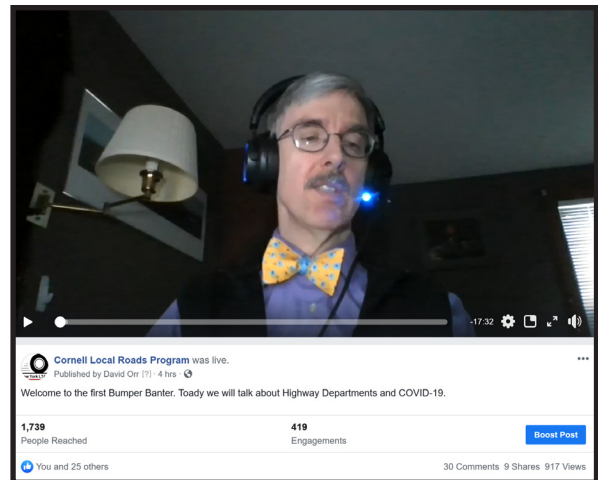
You are the expert in the subject. Remember that and be confident. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Just be yourself and you will be fine.

Introductions

Introduce yourself before speaking, even if someone else has already done so. Use a personal story or anecdote to build trust with the audience and engage with them early using questions or polls. This can be especially important in the virtual world as you cannot see the attendees in most cases.

How to begin

Begin strong. One way to begin strong and focus participants is to introduce your main points. Speak directly to the audience, beginning your lecture with the key points. Mention two or three learning objectives. Use an example or two with a good picture or simple bullet points.



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Learning objectives

Adults will be motivated by concrete examples of how an idea or suggestion will succeed for them. State your learning objectives clearly and obviously using action words. Learning objectives must be identifiable and measurable. Examples include:

- » After this training, you will be able to **choose**
- » I'm going to give you practical tips to enable you to **arrange** ...
- » There are three ways you can **select** ...

How to end

Summarize your main points. You can do this with one brief slide or a series of questions. This can be a good way to measure learning outcomes. Your last slide should show your name, organization, phone number, and email. Leave it visible as you ask for comments and questions.

Evaluation

One of the most important ways to become a better presenter is to evaluate yourself. Ask your host about their evaluation procedures. Get constructive comments to make your next presentation better.

Rehearse

Always rehearse your presentation. Time yourself to be sure your material is adequate for the allotted time. Prepare to be flexible. You may have less time for your presentation if earlier presenters run over schedule. It is better to be done slightly early than run over.

Ask someone to listen to you in an online setting and critique your performance, especially if you have not done an online session before. Practice helps instill confidence and alleviate speaking anxiety.

Questions

Questions are a way to keep the audience involved and are a sure sign they are paying attention. Create polls, online question and answer tools, or other means to get audience interaction. Let the audience know during the introduction when (and how) they should ask questions.

Humor

Humor can be used to great effect. However, the effect can be negative as well as positive. Any humor should be in good taste and appropriate. Do not make a joke at the expense of others.

Planning

Thorough preparation should include planning, developing an outline, research and identification of resources, and practice. Make a checklist to include the following:

- Prepare any handouts or visual aid needs in advance (at least two weeks if possible).
- Ask for a draft program. It may be worth your time to listen to other sessions.
- Check the time and log in early to make sure your computer tools are ready to go.
- Select a title that describes your topic, not merely identifies it. For example, "Job Site Safety Techniques for Training Your Employees" rather than "Safety Workshop."

AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS

For a face-to-face session, the best visual aid you have is YOU. In a virtual world, the **visual aids** are the primary item the audience sees. Add pictures and other visual aids to enhance a presentation, not replace your expertise. Make the audience remember the message, not the media. Virtual presentations use a software package such as Power Point along with online tools such as Zoom or Webex. Learn the tools you will be using!

There are several common items that you may want to have available when giving your presentation.

- Headphones with a microphone *Improves sound quality and helps the audience hear.*
- Webcam *Allows you to be seen on screen.*

There are lots of additional visual aids that can be used to help enhance your presentation. Some of the more common options are:

- Embedded video *Assume no sound unless you check with the host ahead of time.*
- Whiteboard *Many online tools have a whiteboard feature, but they work best with a touch-screen.*
- Handouts *A prepared set of notes can be more useful than just the slides. Send out ahead of time or have a link on screen.*
- References *Include links in the handouts or highlight onscreen.*

When deciding which visual aid to use, remember to:

Keep it legible – No one will complain if the font size is too large.

Keep it simple – On a slide, just show the important items that can be read quickly. If there is too much detail, the audience will spend too much time trying to read and not enough listening. Could an illustration, picture, or graph show the same information?

Keep it short – Less text and fewer lines will have more impact. If it is important enough to put on a slide, you probably should read it to the audience.

SLIDE RULES

- Choose a dark background with light-colored text. Keep the contrast high.
- Use slides to remind you and your audience of your presentation points.
- Have no more than 6 bullet items. (Less is better)
- Use no more than 6 words in each bullet item. (Less is better)
- Use no more than 2 different fonts on one page.
- As a general rule of thumb for virtual presentations, each slide will take about 45 seconds. If the presentation is 30 minutes long, you should have about 40 slides.
- Lean back in your chair and look at the slides on your computer. If you can read it comfortably, people will be able to read it. If not, make the font larger.
- Use 40-44 point font size for titles.
- Use a 36-point font size for text. (Never use any text smaller than 28 point)
- If you must put something wordy on the screen, be sure to read it carefully and deliberately. Enunciate!
- Set up the computer screen so you are looking at it while presenting. This way you face the audience on your webcam. Check to make sure your face is well lit and centered on-screen. For instance, some eyeglass coatings can cause reflections that obscure your eyes.
- Reproducing directly from a book results in inadequate visuals that cannot be seen clearly.
- Use graphics sparingly. Mix photos with clip art.
- Use sound cues sparingly. Assume no sound is available in most cases.
- Use a single background or presentation theme.
- Use simple transitions between and within slides.