Virtual Engagement Series: Not Just Another Zoom Meeting: Making Virtual Engagement Engaging

Resource Listing & Handout

The following 5 tips are specifically for what to do during a video call to combat that fatigue.

1. Acknowledge It

The fatigue is real! Acknowledge the reality for your students or participants and give them some grace. If you are hosting the session, let your participants shut off their camera once in a while or during specific parts of the call. That might mean shutting off their camera during a presentation or showing them how to notify you that they have to "step away." (Many platforms even have a function that allows you to indicate that you are not at the computer.) People can still pay attention without having cameras on. For longer sessions, build in breaks for stretches and levity.

2. Hide or Cover Your Image

Watching yourself on screen can be exhausting all on its own. It already can feel like a whole panel of folks are staring you down and that's unnerving [1]. Adding your own eyes to that panel is an extra stare that you don't need. Covering or hiding your own image can help relieve the stress of watching yourself perform on screen during the whole session and removing the set of eyes that is likely watching you the most intently.

On some platforms, like Zoom, there is a function that allows you to hide your image from yourself but not for the rest of the people on the call. For platforms that don't have that function, try using a sticky note or something similar to just cover up the little square with you on it. Don't worry, you're still there and can check your hair at any time.

3. Put Some Distance Between Yourself and Your Camera/Screen

We all have a subconscious set of proximity boundaries [2] around us that define our comfort with different people. Typically, the closest zone— around 3 feet or less in front of us—is reserved for our closest family and friends. So even though our proximity isn't physical, we may still be feeling some anxiety by the proximity of so many faces. Putting some distance may help relax that stressor. So, push that screen a little farther away from you and you might start to feel some relief.

4. Shut Everything Else Off

Close your email, silence your phone, close down the other myriad of projects you're working on. Focus, breathe, and stay in the moment of your call. If it feels right, ask your students/participants to do the same. Taking a break from everything else even during a call can help reduce the weight of the always-on environment.

5. Plan to End Early

This one can be tough. There's so much to say and do! But you can help combat fatigue by giving yourself and your participants time between sessions by planning to end before your

scheduled time. Even 10 minutes can make a big difference. Just think of how we'd all be reducing the collective Zoom fatigue if everyone had some space planned in.
Hopefully, these 5 tips can help get you through your classes and meetings. If you've found any other helpful strategies, please share them!
Credit: elearningindustry.com

Tips for Successful Virtual Meetings
Set some ground rules

- Expect team members to be on video (with cameras on) whenever possible! While some members will have situations that require them to be on via audio-only, there is a huge benefit to being able to see faces and body language!
- Minimize report-outs – Focus on meaningful and generative discussions rather than reading of reports that can be provided in written format
- Set expectations for use of the chat function – Chats can be as distracting as side conversations during in-person meetings! Use chat judiciously!
- Set expectations for how and when meeting materials will be distributed (see below for more!)
- Take care to ensure everyone is heard! Check in with those who are quiet. Pause to ensure participants have time to unmute themselves and speak before moving on! Use visual signals (or Zoom's "raise hand" feature to ensure participants have a chance to speak.
- Ask participants not to multi-task! It's easy to be distracted by emails, social media or other things while on a video call. Expect your participants to be focused on your work during the call.
- Incorporate breaks! As with in-person meetings, people need breaks! Two hours is generally the maximum time to meet without a 5- to 10-minute break. If your board typically meets for all-day or weekend in-person meetings, break those into multiple virtual sessions of no more than 4 hours, with breaks at least every two hours.

Meeting Materials are Important – for everyone!

- Distribute meeting materials in advance – Allow time for delivery of materials so that participants can review ahead of time.
- Understand that some participants will be using one device for conferencing and reviewing materials. Distributing in advance allows for printing (if desired) or sufficient review ahead of time.
- Plan to project materials onscreen for those who can't pull up electronic materials while on video – But only share the screen when necessary! This allows people to see each others' faces better during discussions.
- When some of your participants are in-person and others are remote, avoid sharing hard-copy reports that haven't been shared electronically in advance. Some participants will not be able to pull up emailed documents real-time.

Allow time for technology training

- Don't assume everyone knows how to use video technology in general or your specific video technology!

- Schedule a “warm-up” time to help those who want to hop on the call early to get instruction
- Remind people to mute when not speaking – and SHOW THEM HOW!
- Start with a quick tech check – Be sure everyone can see and be seen, hear and be heard – a quick thumbs-up check is sufficient!

Onboarding new team members without opportunities for face-to-face meetings makes onboarding new board members or new volunteers even more challenging.

- Don’t skip introductions – Build in “icebreaker” and “get-to-know” times during meetings
- Ask audio-only participants to identify themselves when speaking
- Have video participants “rename” themselves to identify accurately who is participating: name, position, pronouns (while we are single-gender organizations, this is still necessary for inclusivity, particularly with our staff)

Build connection

- Make time for social interaction – In-person meetings allow for social interactions that help build bonds between team members. Allow time at the beginning and end for discussions
- Use polls for engaging participants – Simple polls such as “how would you rate the past week” or “if you were to describe the past week in one word, what would it be?” can allow people to relax and warm up to communicating!
- Here are some resources for team-building activities: https://biz30.timedoctor.com/virtual-team-building/ miro.com – remote work team building

Use meeting recording capabilities where appropriate

- Can be great for people who miss the meeting or who want to recall what was said
- Be cautious about retaining recorded discussions that your legal team would prefer not be available for posterity, including executive sessions!

Incorporate other technologies

- Use shared online whiteboards – these are built into some technologies (Microsoft Teams) or available as separate products. See this article for suggested online whiteboards!

Evaluate!

- Ask your participants what you can do to make meetings more engaging!