



## How to make the best of virtual conferences? | UPDA Event 28 Jan 2021

### Advice for presenters

#### Technology-related

- Get comfortable with Zoom functions.
  - Understand how the chat function will be used; can you see the chat while you are presenting?
  - Can you indicate your preference for how to use the chat function?
- Be sure you have the latest version of Zoom so you can access all functions.
- If you exit full screen mode, you can see more faces while talking (a line of faces at the top).
- Expect the unexpected! No matter how much you practice, there may be technology-related challenges. Expect to be surprised by something and be flexible.
- Not all conferences use Zoom – download whatever you need in advance and be prepared.

#### Formats

- We have seen a range of formats from entirely live – entirely pre-recorded.
  - One interesting example: pre-recorded 15-minute talks, with 3 minute “pitches” and in-depth discussion for live event.
- Considering including the take-home message on each slide for viewers who get distracted.

#### Interactions with others

- Be prepared to be unable to read body language. This may make it more difficult to interpret questions too.
- Your surroundings should be well-lit.
- Test your sound beforehand.
- Some recommend avoiding a virtual background because a clean professional surrounding is more personal.
- If you read a script, it sounds like you are reading a script and the audience pays less attention! The goal is not to include every detail, but to be engaging.
- On your last slide, list your preferred contact – email, Twitter handle, other social media, etc.

## Poster-specific

- Give viewers a nice summary (maybe this is audio, or at the top of your poster) so they can decide if they want to learn more. This is more effective than launching straight into the details.
  - The rules are different from paper posters (font sizes, etc.). Consider how your poster will look on a screen (maybe a 16:9 ratio is more appropriate).
  - This is an opportunity to be creative! Use other media: video/audio interviews, drawings, hand gestures, whiteboards, slides, photographs, a mix of methods. Any method that keeps your audience engaged and communicates your point clearly is worth trying.
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## Advice for attendees

- Virtual formats make it easy to move in and out of sessions. Plan your schedule in advance! Review the proceedings and plan which events you want to see (time, link, etc.). Some conferences make this very easy to plan.
  - Do not pretend you will attend every single session. Plan the sessions you will attend and give them your full attention and allow yourself breaks in between.
  - Asking questions in the chat, writing speakers an email, or just jotting down questions that you will never ask are all techniques to stay engaged.
- Discuss the conference with PI or mentor to understand the expectations. Are you “away at a conference” or are you trying to continue to work during this virtual conference?
- Sending your questions via email or direct message (in Zoom) allows for longer, more in-depth answers and is less distracting to the next speaker.
- Attend the small breakout rooms! They make be awkward, but it much more personal and easier to make connections and network.
  - Attend networking sessions with specific goals – who do want to meet and/or what do you want to learn.
- Try reaching out to people before the conference if you really want to meet them – can you arrange a 1:1 zoom meeting, or arrange to attend the same breakout session?
- Treat this like a “real” conference:
  - Minimize distractions
  - Plan breaks – go for a walk, get outside.
  - You can add mindless activities like folding laundry, washing dishes to make sure you are not in your chair all day.
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