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Ontario's Distance Education & Training Network
Le réseau d'éducation et de formation à distance de l'Ontario

VIDEOCONFERENCE COMMUNICATION TIPS

Good oral communication is important in classroom teaching, but especially critical to the success of your videoconference class. The TV screen constitutes the majority of the classroom for students at remote sites and the need for keeping attention focused there is paramount. The following points should be noted:

Small chunks of information work best.

Attention tends to drop after only three to five minutes of lecturing, even when students and teachers are in the same room! Accompany new information with examples, applications, and, if possible, the opportunity for a change of pace, such as student comments, questions, or discussion.

TIP: A guideline of three or four new ideas per half hour is a reasonable target.

Clarity in speaking is critical.

This refers both to the clarity in the production of sound (good enunciation and technical transmission) and clarity in sentence structure and meaning. Make a deliberate effort to speak in complete sentences. (Many people often don't.) Where technical terms or unfamiliar words or names are important, either spell them out orally and visually if possible, or refer students to a previously distributed list of new words to be sure the message is clear.

Clarity in the structure of the message is also important.

Use plenty of introductions, summaries, and transitional statements throughout your class. Highlight the most important parts with emphasis and repetition. Use verbal guideposts along the way such as, "There are four major characteristics... the first is..." or "That finishes our discussion of... we'll start the next topic now."

TIP: A visual representation of key points, or a content outline, is always helpful. Students will be more apt to follow the progression of the material and stay tuned in.

Variety helps sustain attention.

Questions posed for particular students, or the group as a whole, change the sound and structure of the class. Silence is a definite change of pace and can effectively redirect everyone's attention. Humour is an excellent means of adding variety as well as keeping the emotional environment light and productive.

TIP: Switching from lecture to question-answer to small group activities can help to keep students alert.

Use your voice effectively.

Enthusiasm in your voice is the key to a more engaged audience. And there is no need to shout, as the microphones will easily pick up your normal speaking voice. Maintain a moderate speaking pace but vary the tone and pitch for emphasis and variety.

Visuals help focus attention and add variety.

Add visuals at every reasonable opportunity. Shifting from a camera view of you or students to a prepared slide or other visual (a white board or flip char, for example) provides an effective change of pace. It should also provide appropriate elaboration or illustration of the material being discussed.

TIP: Set up camera presets before the videoconference to quickly change the view from you to the whiteboard or other display.

Some more tips...

- Speaking loudly is not necessarily the same as projecting clearly.
- Breathing deeply increases one's voice level and improves tone.
- Pause after posing a question to an individual or the group. This will clarify whose turn it is to speak.
- Communicate with remote participants by location and/or name.
- Be enthusiastic. If the subject or teaching process bores you, you can be sure the participants are bored as well. Enthusiasm and passion for the subject matter are contagious.

