

Tips for online facilitation planning and delivery

Please add more.

This is part of [Togetherness Tools](#).

Take it and run free.

If the word 'Zoom' is used, remember other platforms exist.

A mixture of socially-engaged artists, artist development peeps and teachers/lecturers are adding to this.

And YOU! So bear in mind some tips are informal and some are more formal than others.

These tips work both ways, so use them to disrupt online activity if you are an unhappy participant.

Take what you want. Discard what you don't.

Some of these can probably be piped back into the real world.

You can add a), b), c) to augment each point below or add new points.

Not in any order:

1) Allow 5-15 mins of no talking/looking at each other at the start by sharing audio, putting on some relaxing music and putting a message up telling people to relax, get a cuppa, we'll start shortly etc etc. That means people (hosts included) aren't in that awkward "hello hello hello, hello?" silence hinterland.

2) Make use of breakout groups and give people many, many prompts, props and tools so they aren't put on the spot/stuck for something to say.

3) Don't do enormous check-ins - 10-20 seconds per person is good if you absolutely have to (hello, name, other small info [could be location, mood, pronouns, height - whatever]).

4) Longer ice-breakers are best in smaller groups - in my experience ice-breakers are v. necessary.

5) Building up from silence, to small talk in pairs, to bigger talk in 4's, to the nitty gritty in larger groups has worked well so far.

6) Provide the full script of activity for people to follow in a doc (and PDF) in case they lose internet / want to do stuff at a different pace

7) Stipulate that the video conferencing 'chat' should be solely for things pertaining to the conversation - EG questions or clarifications. Use the 'private message' function to inundate each other with links and suggestions rather than the scatter-gun "paste anything here" approach.

8) Make sure that there is regular (10 mins in the hour) rest time, and active time away from the video conferencing screen, too.

9) Pastoral care and just being in a space with other people is as important as the activity you are doing so might take up half the time (lengthy landing/leaving periods with the activity sandwiched in between).

10) If you can, have separate hosts and 'clickers'. They can swap, but one person introducing the activity/holding the audience/speaking and one person in charge of breakout groups/sharing screen/tech stuff works well. Two hosts who can vibe off each other and fill airspace if the other runs out of steam is amazing too. Halves the exhaustion.

11) Be reasonable and realistic about what online can do. It's no real life and it can't be I don't think. It also sucks a lot of energy out of people. I think 80% as good as real life is a best-case scenario.

12) Everything should be opt-in: eg speaking in front of everyone, turning on your video are optional and muting yourself, popping out to make a cuppa at any point are all fine.

13) As the host you should invite everyone to contribute but they have the right to say "skip me and go to the next person please" or just "skip" or "no thanks".

14) A secondary mode of communication (phone number/email) is good so people can let you know if their internet has dropped out or they are having difficulties. This doesn't necessarily mean you can fix their problem, but it's better than the Zoom door banding them on the arse on the way out.

15) Sending people away to do the same task in their own environs works well. This could be over an evening (eg brief video conferencing intro, set a task go away, host keeps the video conferencing channel open for support/questions/general chat, people return to share the task outcomes). I've not tested it but I will by setting a task over a period of days or a week - so there's concurrent activity bookended by video conferencing intro and outdo.

16) Other forms of homework and prep can be great but again are totally opt-in. This means that if not everyone has done tasks, it doesn't de-rail the plans - so these eventualities need considering.

17) Online stuff is really annoying for almost everyone and totally no-go for some. This needs factoring in - eg by having alternatives (slower activities people do in their own time, using other communication channels [phone, post]).

18) If you are doing online stuff you should be able to support some people to top-up their electricity meters/buy some data to cover the period online etc etc.

19) Recurrent, cumulative activities (eg preparing and cooking food with a meal at the end) bind online activity together well and punctuate the day/session with relaxation and variety. Same as point 17 - people need £ for food and gas/electric.

20) Remember the tools we have been given (Zoom, Googledocs, Miro etc) may not be the best just because they are ubiquitous. We shouldn't just be translating real life to the online realm - we need to adapt to make it better and we need to push the boundaries of this new medium/paradigm. I think of this like veggie and vegan food - why replicate sausages, tofurkey, fake meat - when there could be whole new foodstuffs getting scoffed that we don't have names for yet?

21) Not everything has to be live. There's loads of pre-recorded content you can appropriate/use/record in advance yourself to lighten the load of leading activity.

22) A mixture of passive (eg listening/watching) and active tasks (eg doing) keeps a good vibe going and doesn't sap the attention-o-meter. Variety is the spice of life.

23) More recently I've realised that people have been attending things on Zoom and thinking "I can't wait for this to be over so I can enjoy the rest of my day/evening/life". I've tried to flip this to be more like: "we might not like it, but for the time being this *is* my life, to some extent". So why not act like it? If you've got a Zoom event in the evening, make it the evening's entertainment. Expand to make it *the* entertainment for the night. Space it out so it isn't rushed, have a good 'landing' period for people to arrive. Pace the activity, don't rush it. Have lengthy breaks. Remember to laugh and socialise. It can be fun and perhaps should be fun.

24) Zoom is a form of time-travel. You can be absolutely bricking it beforehand, wishing you didn't have to deliver yet another virtual event. You pray for the internet to die. You hope for a power outage. Neither materialise. Your energy levels and ability to smile hover around zero. Before you know what you are doing you have opened the Zoom hotline

and are pretending to be the consummate host: the chatty, most charming version of yourself. Your nerves dissipate when you look at the clock and remember that when you next stop to think in 1/2/3/7 (delete as appropriate) hours you will have chalked some more time off the interminable Covid-Britain countdown and it will be soon time to go to bed.

25) Everything needs explaining a lot and in many forms. Be prepared to stream-of-conscious a 'what we are doing' monologue. Demonstrate everything you are asking people to do. Describe everything. You will get next to nothing back but this doesn't mean everyone hates you.

26) Have plan A, B, C prepared, down to Z if you need. Hopefully you won't need them all but it's better to be overprepared. Time is elastic in the Zoom void.

27) Share your discomfort and nervousness if you feel this and are leading activity because it's a great leveller.

28) The name tag on your Zoom square is great for remembering who each other is - we often don't have this in real life! Also handy for adding pronouns and who you represent.

29) I understand people completely opting out of the Zoomspace but in future we're going to have to at least incorporate this stuff to some extent - the positives it opens up are waaaaay more beneficial (geographically, accessibility) than the downsides (fatigue, awkwardness) especially if you don't do it boringly.

30) In this land of unpredictability and instability constraints are your friend. Lean on them. Within a structure anything can happen.

31) Remember: Zoom/Teams/Jitsi isn't real. You aren't really looking at each other. You are looking at virtual representations of each other. There is plenty of room to hide. Remove yourself from the 2D plane. Close your laptop. Turn off your camera. Physically walk off screen. Take a breather. It's easier than finding a quiet corridor to scream in or a nice blank wall to stare at during a break in a real-life workshop.

32) Sight and sound are obvious online. Remember smell, touch, taste and the sixth sense may be neglected and you may wish to give these a nudge.

33) [Soundtracks](#), music, showreels etc can make silence tolerable.

34) It's probably possible to play with virtual backgrounds more. Can 20 people on the screen take 20 segments of an image and re-arrange themselves so the image looks whole on at least one person's layout? Like [this](#) kind of thing.

35) TV programmes like Taskmaster are great sources of icebreaker material. Popular culture is your friend and helper. -YES!

36) If you want people to use pencils, pens, paper, printed material, scissors - be prepared to post these out in the actual post to people who don't have these things in advance. Remember the post is delayed, but the post *always* gets through.

37) Set up an anonymous FAQ - every question is worth asking- encourage whole group to answer questions for each other if they can.

38) Allow some 'easy win's' - not all tasks have to be big and significant / obvious.

39) Make sure that everything people don't get through in the session can be taken away and continued at their leisure

40) Although Docs might not be for everyone, it's super shareable, and being able to view other people's docs/slides can be useful. Perhaps each person contributes one thing they have achieved that week to a shared document.

Would likely work with other platforms.

41) Try to make some / certain types of feedback consistent and repeatable, e.g. pre-written / pre-agreed statements with a tick box (such as Google form) that can be understood and read in advance of sharing/submitting work - setting up the goalposts (love some constraints). Maybe these could use slightly less formal language than academic assessment criteria.

42) The workshop leader/facilitator/host will have to accept responsibility for generating a lot of the energy. However, they do not exist in a vacuum and will require others to emit strong vibes to feed off. Otherwise, the leader/facilitator/host will wither and wilt. Continuous Zooming isn't feasible on current trajectories and burn out will ensue.

43) Practice and plan so everyone doing stuff online knows their role and what is expected of them. It's OK for this to take place in front of 'the audience' because we're all human and the behind the scenes stuff can be insightful. Better than not doing it and falling on your face when the veil of professionalism slips. That said, failing in public makes it OK to fail which is heartening to people.

44) The Internet contains versions of almost all human creativity ever created. You are delivering things via the internet. These two things can go hand-in-hand. Use this resource.

45) Everything will take longer than you think. Double your estimates and have more breaks/finish early if you end up under-running.

46) About 1/3rd of people you expect will probably show up. Don't be disheartened, it needs to be as good as it can be for whoever shows up. Don't punish an audience for being small.

47) If your timetable goes skew-whiff, update it in real time on the GoogleDoc script so people can follow even if they miss the verbal announcements.

48) This is a new paradigm and you will make mistakes and this is fine. Nothing is perfect.

50) Make use of the "chat" function. This is something to be harnessed and not disregarded at a secondary feature of online delivery. It serves as a device for inclusion, not everyone has a microphone, or camera, or speaker works, or speaks your language, the list goes on... There is a tendency to focus on verbal delivery, but what if silence could be employed as a space that allows participants to think independently? Can typing unlock a voice otherwise not heard amongst the noise? This also slows down the pace of the conversation and elements can be meditated on for longer.

51) Consider the architecture of the space you would usually be working in IRL, how can the digital manifest this? Breakout rooms could be considered separate tables in one room, allowing for many conversations within the one space. Consider how informal conversations which are enabled by certain IRL spaces can be translated or adapted for the digital realm.

52) Breaking down the boundaries of individual/separate space so that you as host are not the only person being addressed. Encouraging conversation between participants by removing yourself, be that by turning off your camera, muting yourself, having a note as your photo when the camera is not on that lets people know you are there if they need but otherwise the space is theirs.

53) Dissolving the role of host. There is too much pressure on one or two people to "run the show". Unless it is in fact a show, in which case ignore this. The role of host sets up a hierarchy which perpetuates a *dictate and do* mode of being rather than *collective working*. Whilst there is value in showing and then setting people off to do, what if we do and then show, what if the doing led the way for the showing. Rather than, showing, doing, showing, doing, it could be doing, showing and from this the session develops. Learning by showing is different from learning by doing it instigates passively-active embodiment, learning by doing requires active embodiment.

54) Building on 52 and 53, the ownership of space, as indicated by those who can move around freely within and navigate the space (the host) sets the agenda. This needs to be abolished. How can the person who instigated the zoom/team/online meeting enter into the space on neutral ground? How can the participants take ownership of the space, how can they assume a more active role in determining movement through it?

55) Sometime's someone has to demonstrate by doing, but this can always be a challenge if they are a barrier. The host can write themselves out as other people get more comfortable.

56) Set up some online meeting behavioural guidelines - some obvious ones like allowing others to speak or respecting others opinions, some more practical ones like saving questions til the end, what to do if you want to ask a question while a host is presenting something, leaving non-relevant chat til later to allow some focus on whoever is speaking. Some good examples [here](#)...

57) The learning curve can be so steep that if you were riding up it on your bike you'd probably have to get off and push.

58) If everyone doesn't have access to the same tools, materials and equipment it's fine to embrace living in our heads more and use the plateau of our minds instead of a physical table top - thought exercises are a good alternative to getting hands-on.