Better videoconferencing

Interactive videoconferencing involves a live two-way video and audio telecommunication link between two or more distant sites. Videoconferencing supports 'real-time' learning and teaching interactions between educators and students. All participants, including the facilitator, need to take responsibility for creating and maintaining a supportive learning environment and group communication process. Establishing a few simple ground rules to encourage active learning, interaction and group participation can help to ensure your videoconferencing experiences are enjoyable, educational and effective.

Beginning the session

- The facilitator should arrange to have all sites called at least 5 mins prior to start of conference. This helps to ensure everyone is connected before the actual starting time.

- The camera angle should be adjusted so that the far site can see near site participants as closely as possible.

- Let the other side know that you are 'there' when you are connected.

- Participants to be present 5 -10 minutes ahead of the scheduled start as late arrival is more distracting than in a traditional classroom.

- Start the session on time.

- Materials associated with the session should be sent to participants ahead of time, allowing them to bring copies if they wish.

- Participants should introduce themselves at the outset, either individually, or site by site if there are many people present

- The facilitator should publicise at the start of the videoconference when breaks will occur. This reminds participants of the times they are able to leave the room.

During the session

- The facilitator should guide a discussion at the start of the session on the expected protocols and ground rules so that everyone is clear on what is expected.

- Ask if participants have received distributed materials (if applicable).

- Speak clearly at a normal volume and wait until another has finished speaking before responding. This will avoid break-up of the audio signal.

- Decide on a protocol for taking it in turns to speak or dealing with questions. This will minimize disruption to the flow of the videoconference.

- Identify whether there are any first-time participants. The facilitator should be prepared to give a basic talk-through regarding use of the equipment.

- Various learning activities will require specific roles of participants, i.e. chair person in a debate or spokesperson for a team. Decide in advance who these will be and the scope of their role.

- Notice where the camera is and avoid standing in front of it when you are addressing your home site. You will block the view for remote sites.

Ending the session

- Allow some time for final questions or discussion.

- Establish follow-up activities or preparations required for next session.

- Clarify availability of additional resources where applicable.

- Thank participants for their valued involvement.

Better videoconferencing help sheet

Personal etiquette recommendations

- Request that participants mute their microphones when not contributing

- Avoid covering the microphones with books, papers or clothing or shuffling items near the microphones.

- Aim for seating arrangements which allow all participants to appear on camera

- Try to maintain eye contact with participants at all sites rather than just the home site. Look into the *lens* rather than focusing on the monitor whilst you are speaking.

- Avoid wearing patterned and very brightly coloured clothing which places extra demands on the video signal-compression system.

- 'Noisy' jewellery items, such as bangles, can disrupt the audio signal.

- Rapid movements on camera will result in image distortion. You can test the limits of your system ahead of the videoconference using 'self-view' facility on the remote control unit.

- Participants' actions will be visible constantly – which could be distracting to others (eating, yawning, searching bags etc).

- If using a desktop videoconferencing unit, remember that your image may be quite large for participants viewing at the far end.

Notes adapted from:

Andrews, T. & Teaching & Educational Development Institute, T. U. O. Q. (2002) Using Videoconferencing for Teaching and Learning. *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Series.* The University of Queensland.

Birden H, Page S. Teaching by videoconference: a commentary on best practice for rural education in health professions. *Rural and Remote Health* 5 (online), 2005: 356. Available from: http://rrh.deakin.edu.au. Date accessed 16 March, 2006

Gill, D., Parker, C. & Richardson, J. (2005) Twelve tips for teaching using videoconferencing. *Medical Teacher,* 27**,** 573 - 577.

Spitz, Suzanne, (2004). Presenting successfully via videoconferencing, WA Country Health Service: Available: http://www.mmhr.org.au/uploaddocs/VIDEOCONFERENCE_PRESENTATION_TIPS.PDF Date accessed: 16 March, 2006

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