

Handout 4: Online Presentation Skills

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Introduction. Online presentations take many forms. The guide below walks you through common strategies to prepare. Read strategically for your own presentation context (e.g. if you're not presenting as a group, skim the opening and then read on carefully). Good luck!

Organizing Your Group. Planning your online presentation as a group will require you to both *coordinate* (organize yourselves) and *collaborate* (engage in conversations) remotely. Especially in the case of virtual collaboration, to coordinate, your group will need to be in regular communication, and to collaborate you will need to discuss your ideas in depth during multiple meetings over a platform (like Zoom) that allows for conversation (just texting isn't enough). To get started:

- **Online Platforms.** Agree upon *platforms everyone can access* for coordinating, collaborating, and sharing documents.
- **Synchronous/Asynchronous Delivery.** Check the assignment for whether you're pre-recording your presentation or delivering it synchronously, and plan accordingly.
- **Roles.** Decide on roles for members of the group, according to your skills and interests. Useful roles to assign include: a *group facilitator*, who will lead coordination, a *note-taker* who will record collaboration, and a *tech person* responsible for trouble-shooting both before and during the presentation, should difficulties arise.
- **Shared to-do lists.** *Identify and divide tasks*, and *prioritize and schedule them*. Divide tasks based on skill sets and interests. Make sure the work is equitably divided.
- **Next steps.** During each meeting, *schedule the next meeting*, and agree upon concrete next steps and deadlines for each group member.
- **Clear communication.** *Be extra mindful in your communications*: tone doesn't always come across in video or text, so be direct and friendly, give your colleagues the benefit of the doubt, and make sure everyone has a chance to speak.

Working with Visuals in Virtual Presentations. In virtual presentations, visuals are especially valuable tools to help your audience sort through complex information. You can improve your visuals by simplifying them, focusing on key takeaways.

- **Visualize your organization.** Give your audience a clear map for how you've structured your ideas, and a clear sense of the priority of information, by using consistent elements of font, size, order, and color.
- **Simplify slides.** Audiences can get overloaded in virtual presentations. Distill slides and include only the most important ideas and visuals—then use your spoken presentation to flesh out the details. This will keep people listening actively!
- **Guide audience attention.** Identify the parts of your presentation where, if you were in-person, you would use gestures to communicate (e.g., pointing to the relevant part of a graph). Use arrows, circles, or other methods of visual highlighting instead.

- **Engage beyond text.** Opt for visual representations of ideas (images, infographics, charts, etc.) over blocks of text whenever possible. Not everyone learns best by reading, so this will help you to connect with more audience members.
- **Design for all devices.** Poor internet connections might make high-quality videos and animations lag, so limit those where possible. Make sure any files you need to share are presented in a format like a PDF that looks the same on all devices.

Embodied Speaking & Delivery. When delivering a presentation online, you should engage in purposeful embodied speaking in order to captivate your audience. Determine in advance whether you'll speak from a script or a speaking outline. Remember to consider both verbal and nonverbal delivery if you're presenting on video. Whether presenting with a team or individually, with voice and body or just voice, here are some tips for consideration:

- **Vocal Variety.** Verbal enunciation, punctuation, rate, pauses, transitions, and segues become key to maintaining your audiences' attention. Bring a sense of enjoyment to your presentation and stay positive.
- **Eye Contact.** While it isn't necessary to stare directly into the camera for the entire online presentation, audiences still want some form of engagement. With or without a live audience, imagine the camera as your audience substitute.
- **Framing your Camera.** Make camera adjustments to frame your body and face effectively. Your facial expressions and physical gestures are visible in a digital speech. Also, your embodied speaking method should shift based on whether the camera is close up or further away. Play around with camera video settings in advance.
- **Background and Sound.** Consider rearranging or adjusting your background surroundings if you can or think it would support your authority and clarity. Be aware of how your device picks up sound and rehearse with your technology in advance. Extra noise can influence your credibility and the likelihood that an audience will continue listening. If possible, choose a location where you will not be disrupted during the presentation by others around you.
- **Tech Issues.** Do a full rehearsal before your presentation with all group members present. Practice your content and transitions, and think through any tech issues that might come up. If possible, do another tech rehearsal (checking the mic, video, internet connection, etc.) an hour or so before your presentation to give yourself time to resolve any day-of issues. If there is a tech issue in a live presentation, acknowledge it verbally or in the chat feature so your audience knows that you are working on it.
- **Other tips:** Turn off auto white balance which might slow down your connection; check your router and set up Quality of Service (QoS) to prioritize bandwidth on video conferencing; if finding a quiet place is difficult, there are free, web-based noise canceling apps such as [Krisp.ai](https://www.krisp.ai/).

Additional Resources. As you prepare for the online speaking context, identify opportunities for growth and potential challenges. These resources might help you address both:

- [Model Student Slides](#), an archive of actual Baruch students' PowerPoint slides, annotated to help you prepare your own visual aids

- [Model Student Speeches](#), an annotated resource using short undergraduate and graduate speeches to help you prepare your own public speaking
- [Tools for Clear Speech](#), a free and welcoming service at Baruch for non-native speakers of English interested in practicing and improving their spoken intelligibility