

How to make a zoom conference social

Our kickoff workshop almost felt like an in-person conference with lively discussions, lots of social interactions and a communal atmosphere. Here are some tips from our experience on how to make zoom events a great social experience.

1. Limit the number of hours
 - At our event we had 20-minute talks, followed by a 10-minute response and a 10-minute Q&A from the general audience
 - The total number of hours was limited to 5 per day
2. Recreate a personal interaction mode
 - Encourage people to turn on their cameras
 - Say hello (yes say it and do not use an icon) at the start and CLAP for each talk
 - I don't have data on this, but it might be better not to record talks to maintain a social atmosphere
3. Invite people with overlapping research interests and encourage novel ties
 - We invited some people who already knew each other and paired them up in teams with someone who works on a distinct but related topic
 - We organized sessions thematically with several research questions attached to them
 - The format was similar to position papers that are followed by replies (e.g., in [BBS](#) or [Theoretical Linguistics](#))
 - Respondents could either challenge the speaker, b) further the discussion in novel directions and/or c) address a session's research questions (but always in a FRIENDLY manner)
 - We organized an informal warmup before the conference, where people could get to know each other and talk in tandems (speaker-respondent teams)
4. Offer opportunities for discussion
 - Participants were encouraged to type their entire question into the chat
 - We then transferred all questions to a public google document ([slack](#) is another option)
 - People could follow up on the discussion either in the chat or during coffee breaks
5. Create social events with shared experiences
 - During breaks we encouraged people to join the platform [wonder.me](#), where one can interact both in bigger groups and one-on-one
 - We had a social evening dinner with games and send around a cocktail recipe for everyone (booze always helps)
6. Provide opportunities for junior researchers
 - We asked the [COGEL](#) (Committee on Gender Equity in Linguistics) committee of the LSA to do a Pop Up Mentoring event at our workshop, pairing senior and junior researchers by interest
 - Prioritize questions from junior researchers

It's possible to make an online event as enjoyable as a normal conference but it does require a team effort. I was lucky to get lots of help and creative ideas from my team members Stavroula Alexandropolou, Radim Lacina, Marisha Herb and Henrik Discher.