

# **Guidelines on**

## **How to do online meetings**

### **(with Adobe Connect and similar tools)**

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The online world has become more and more important in our private and professional lives. Its beauty lies in the simplicity to share and gain information and to communicate with each other easily. Being online in any kind of forum (from WhatsApp to Facebook, from email to video conferencing), every one of us already experienced that online communication can be very different from conversations in the offline world. The following guidelines are designed to facilitate professional online meetings.

#### Content:

1. Preparation
2. Doing the meeting
3. Post-Meeting
4. Some points on how to develop and apply an emotionally engaging online communication culture

#### 1. Preparation

- When to schedule a meeting depends on different aspects. For a consortium meeting that is supposed to create binding decisions or evaluate milestones, preparation might be necessary. Therefore it is helpful to schedule the meeting well ahead.
- The flexibility of the tool of online meetings, however, also allows for short-term scheduling.
- It could be recommendable to send around a doodle. Make sure that someone is responsible for doing so and reminding participants to fill in dates.
- Set an agenda and, ideally, share it in advance e.g. by a link to a Google doc to allow participants to add further topics.
- When the agenda is finalized and the date is clear, invite participants by email. The email should include:
  - Date, time and login-time of the meeting.
  - Information on how to join the online meeting room (possibly, a quick step-by-step guide)
  - Crucial information and supporting documentation.
- It is useful to assign the following roles before the meeting:
  - Facilitator/moderator: Designs and facilitates meeting; keeps time in sight.
  - Note taker: Takes notes and takeaways.
  - Technical support: In case of troubleshooting.
- If you take the role of the facilitator, get well acquainted with the platform technology and its features.

In the week before the first online meeting:

- As facilitator, connect with each participant individually and help them to get acquainted with the virtual environment. This also allows for trouble shooting before the actual meeting. This takes around 20-30 minutes per session to test the microphone, camera and the chat function. Participants learn about the basic applications like the emotiboard, how to upload a PowerPoint and what to do in case of technical problems.
- Participants should use the same device for the testing as for the meeting.
- Offer the first 15 minutes at the start of first online meeting as optional trouble shooting time. The meeting is prolonged accordingly.

## 2. Doing the meeting

- Send a reminder/"see you later" mail on the day of the meeting.
- As moderator/facilitator: Log on at least 30 minutes earlier in order to tidy up and prepare the online meeting room:
  - "Clean up" in case there are still materials, settings or chats from the last meeting
  - Write a short welcome message and the agenda in the notepad
  - Check microphone and camera rights for participants
  - Upload and test PowerPoint slides or other materials if necessary
  - Add a countdown until the beginning of the session in order to create an immediate welcoming and responsive atmosphere.
  - Choose different settings according to the agenda and make sure to have the necessary materials at hand.
- Address participants individually when they enter the room. This makes them feel welcomed and seen. By the way, you are testing the audio-visual connection.
- Start on time.
- Welcome participants into the meeting room in order to let everyone know who is in the virtual meeting: Is everyone seen (shared screen)? Who is still missing?
- Officially start the meeting. In case of recording, tell everyone that the recording starts now.
- Explain the agenda and ask if further topics should be added.
- As moderator make use of the mute button, in order to reduce background noise. Meeting software mostly offers a button to virtually "raise the hand".
- As facilitator: Keep a forward pace. Finish agenda points by using questions like "Do we have enough information to move on, or do you need more time?" or "Does anyone else want to add an idea or suggestion".
- Recap at the end of the meeting.
- Officially terminate the meeting by thanking the participants.

## 3. Post-meeting

- Send a "Thank You" email with the minutes of the meeting asking for feedback very quickly (ideally same day).
- In case of recorded meetings, share the recording links in the minutes.
- Evaluate yourself and the meeting while drinking a relaxing coffee and nibbling on a cookie.

## 4. Some points on how to develop and apply an emotionally engaging online communication culture

- Generally and for everyone: Choose a quiet location with stable internet connection.

- Strongly recommend individual participation or in case of multiple people sharing one screen, make it a big screen.
- Using names when addressing a person helps to feel personally connected.
- Value the input and time of your meeting participants. Thus, keep it relevant and facilitate bilateral communication if a specific topic is relevant to a few only.
- Keep presentations short (max. 10-12 minutes). You can easily navigate the negotiation on the length of presentations with the speaker by asking first how much time is actually needed and if it can also be done in x minutes. Announce the actual length during the meeting shortly before the presentation – reminding the speaker and informing the audience about what to expect. Set a timer.
- Use appreciative communication.
- Online communication works more slowly. Be aware of the delays, never lose patience.
- If the meeting is longer than 1 hour include a bathroom/coffee break (set the timer) as the attention span in online meetings is much shorter.
- Be engaging by e.g. setting a poll or by starting with an ice breaker.
- Do have fun!