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Using Web Conferencing to Promote Learning in Online Courses: Resources, Tools, and Methods. The Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education 23rd International Conference Proceedings and Presentation

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Best Practices to Promote Learning through Web Conferencing: Resources Tools and Teaching Methods

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1. Prepare content ahead of time

- Prepare content ahead of time including uploading all content items beforehand and launch them.
- Plan for more than just showing presentation slides. Plan for interactions – use polls, plan for “sharing of screens”.
- If presentations are used – allow them to “guide” the information – avoid reading the slides to participants.
- Plan to keep slide transitions and animations at a minimum in Web conference sessions.

2. Plan a practice session

- Plan a practice session using the Web conferencing system tools and run through the prepared content. This will be a great help to ensure the presenter/educator has enough information planned, including opportunities for interaction and feedback.
- Offer a separate practice session with learners. Any tech issues could be addressed before the session actually begins.

3. Have an assistant on hand

- If possible, have an assistant on hand to deal with any tech issues students might have and/or to help facilitate the session (allows presenter to focus on the delivery of information).
- Having an assistant on hand is especially important during the first couple of Web conference sessions or at least until the facilitator becomes familiar with the tools available.

4. Before the first meeting -- tips to follow

- Plan for accessibility needs. Prior to the first session, ask the participants if they have assistive needs so that a plan can be in place to accommodate those needs. Even if requests are not received, have an alternative plan ready.
- Record the session, so participants who were unable to participate in the live session can view it later.
- Be sure to let the participants know the session will be recorded and they too can access the recording and review it as needed.
- Prepare the participants and explain the most important student interaction features such as Hand raising, Feedback and Text Chat at the beginning of the session.
- Plan to share a whiteboard or slide at the beginning of the session that contains a phone number for technical support that may be available to attendees, if possible.
- Have a plan for dealing with problems and options students might have in case of problems that prevent them from participating in the live session. If possible, provide phone number to call if they are having technical difficulties.
- Consider asking participants to mute their microphones, if needed.
- Provide audio help or guidelines to trouble shoot audio problems (i.e., test audio) before the session begins.
- The host or presenter of the session should plan to log in 15-20 minutes early.
- Greet attendees/students as they join the session. This may include greeting them, pass the mic to them, and do a simple communications check.

5. During the session -- tips to follow

- Plan to engage students by making certain that student feedback or student interactions are required every few minutes (through chat, raising hands, questions and answers, participate in polls, or something similar).
- Be prepared for some delay in audio and visual transitions
- Be prepared to pass the mic to students or other presenter during the session. Planning to pass the mic over to other attendees encourages student participation and helps to keep participants focused on information shared during the session.
- Plan for schedule breaks during the session. This is especially true if the session is scheduled to last more than 30-45 minutes. It is a good practice to schedule a 5-10 minute break about mid-way through the session, if possible.
- Maintain the presentation area and/or the screen shots shared with participants. Be sure to close content items when completed – helps to reduce clutter from the participant’s view.