



Engaging Learners in Active Online Learning

From your own experiences as both a learner and a trainer, you know that audience engagement is key to a successful training. That engagement may be one of your greatest strengths and favorite parts of facilitating in a face-to-face classroom. However, when moving trainings online, converting interactive discussions and activities to a virtual format can seem like an insurmountable obstacle, often leaving even the most experienced and dynamic trainers feeling stuck delivering one-way lectures in online learning environments.

Audience engagement is key to a successful training.

By bringing together your existing facilitation skills, your creativity, and a bit of thoughtful planning, you can repurpose many of your favorite face-to-face training strategies to deliver engaging, interactive, hands-on learning in the virtual classroom. This Technical Assistance Bulletin offers some guiding principles, activity adaptations, and practical tips to help you actively engage your learners in real-time online learning.

Guiding principles

1 Work backwards from your learning objectives.

Focus on what you want your learners to do as a result of your training, and then plan activities that will help them practice those behaviors and skills. For example, if your goal is for learners to respond more effectively in challenging situations (e.g., interrupting harassment, responding to a disclosure, etc.), roleplays will allow them to practice and get feedback. If you want learners to identify problematic behaviors or situations where they need to take action (e.g., red/yellow/green light behaviors, mandated reporting, etc.), consider case studies or sorting activities that ask them to categorize sample scenarios. Dare to dream big with your activities and then think about how the online tools can make them possible, rather than letting the tools dictate the activities. Plan activities that are meaningful and relevant to your goals, and then design your content to provide the knowledge and skills learners will need to succeed in those activities (Dimeo, 2017).

2 Tailor to your audience.

As with any training, adapting your online learning activities to be relevant, accessible, and

developmentally appropriate for your particular audience is important. You'll also want to consider the size of the group, as some online tools may work better for larger or smaller audiences. In addition, it is helpful to know how acclimated the audience is to online learning. If your audience regularly uses a particular platform, which tools have they used before? Are there other online technologies and tools they know and use? Your point of contact for the training may be able to provide insights about previous experiences and challenges related to online learning in the group. This insight can help you plan either more ambitious or more conservative activity adaptations.

3 Know your platform.

There are many different platforms designed for online learning, such as Zoom, WebEx, GoToMeeting, and AdobeConnect. In some cases you might use more simplified video conferencing like Google Meet or Skype, which have fewer interactive tools. Whether you are hosting or presenting as a guest, get to know the specific tools the platform provides. How easy are the controls to find, use, and explain to learners? Are there tools that are more likely to cause internet issues? The same results can often be achieved in multiple ways with the available tools in online learning. Getting acquainted with all of the options and their controls can help you pick the best tool for the job. Once you've planned your activities, do a run-through to practice all of the controls and transitions so you can manage the platform with confidence during the training.

4 Give yourself time.

Online learning experts estimate that adapting face-to-face training content for online delivery can take approximately 4-10 hours for every one hour of training (Clay, 2012). In some urgent circumstances you may just need to get online training up and running as rapidly as possible to meet community needs. However, when possible, it may be helpful to talk with supervisors and community partners about realistic timelines for developing training that is truly effective and engaging for online learners. Within the training itself, you may need to budget more or less

Aim to engage learners every three to five minutes with an opportunity to actively interact with you and each other by sharing their perspectives or applying what they've learned.

time for activities than you would in a face-to-face classroom, depending on the ways you've adapted them and the technology you're using.

5 Use the buddy system if you can.

Even if you are equally comfortable with facilitating training and providing technical support in your online platform, filling both of these roles simultaneously can be surprisingly difficult (Clay, 2020a; Smith & Baptista, 2018). A best practice is to have a co-host or co-facilitator whenever possible. When technical problems arise, one host can keep the training on track while the other works on troubleshooting. A co-host can also monitor the chat to make sure questions and comments aren't missed, and launch polls and breakout rooms so that you can focus on facilitating (Baptista, 2020). In addition, co-facilitators can take turns presenting content, giving learners the opportunity to hear different voices and perspectives (Mrvova, 2020).

6 Engage continuously, from start to finish.

Start with interaction as soon as learners join the session. Use an interactive icebreaker to set the tone and the expectation that learners will be active learners throughout your training. And then keep it going! Aim to engage learners every three to five minutes with an opportunity to actively interact with you and each other by sharing their perspectives or applying what they've learned (Clay, 2020a; Wiley, 2020). The key to holding your learners' interest is variety, so mix up the tools you use for engagement throughout the training. Creating an agenda of your activities can help you plan ahead for smooth



Be sure to verbally describe what is happening on screen for those who can't see it, and offer alternative ways for people to participate.

transitions, ensure you have all the needed materials ready to go, and keep the session on time and on track.

7 Give learners clear instructions.

Budget in some time at the beginning of the session to introduce your learners to the controls you will ask them to use (Baptista, 2020). Design icebreakers to give learners opportunities to practice using the tools. Throughout the training, add icons to your slides to signal when and how you want learners to participate (Clay, 2012). For example, include a word bubble image on the slide when you want them to type in the chat, and a raised hand image when you want them to use status icons. Put instructions for activities on the slides, including questions you want them to respond to, so they can confidently follow along (Clay, 2012).

8 Offer multiple formats for information and engagement.

Online learning is a highly visual medium, so visually stimulating content and activities benefit most learners. The Technical Assistance Bulletin *Designing Effective Slides for Online Learning* provides additional

ideas and recommendations. However, it's important to be mindful that some learners, including those using screen readers or participating by phone, won't have access to visual tools like annotations and whiteboards. Be sure to verbally describe what is happening on screen for those who can't see it, and offer alternative ways for people to participate, such as unmuting themselves and sharing out loud (University of Colorado Boulder, n.d.; University of Minnesota, n.d.).

9 Approach from a place of learning.

Online learning is an opportunity for growth for learners and trainers alike. When we engage our audience as active participants in learning, we can learn as much from them as they do from us; that applies to our skills in online learning environments (Dimeo, 2017). No one becomes a master of online learning overnight. You might start by relying on the tools in your platform that feel the most comfortable to you as a facilitator, then try adding in one new tool or strategy to gradually expand your online training toolbox. With time, practice, and a little trial and error, your confidence in designing and delivering training online is sure to grow. You might even learn to love online learning!

Activity adaptations

Most platforms for real-time online learning provide a similar set of tools: audio/video conferencing, chat, polls, status icons (sometimes called emoticons or nonverbal feedback), annotations, whiteboard, breakout rooms, screen share, and video. Below are some ideas for applying these tools to adapt face-to-face classroom activities to the online learning environment.

Classroom activity	Online adaptations
<p>Icebreakers</p> <p>Almost any tool can be used for icebreakers. Pick tools that you will ask learners to use again for later activities to familiarize them with the controls. Post an icebreaker that learners can do as soon as they join the session so they can start engaging while waiting for others to log in.</p>	<p>Chat - Post an icebreaker question on a slide and invite learners to type their responses in the chat. This helps people feel more connected by seeing each other's names and personalized responses, and can kick-off an active chat.</p> <p>Polls - Launch a poll for learners to answer. This can be especially useful for getting to know your audience and their needs with questions about their prior level of experience with the training topic, their reasons for attending the training, etc.</p> <p>Status Icons - Post an icebreaker question on a slide and ask learners to use the status icons to "raise their hand," show "thumbs up/down," etc. to show their response.</p> <p>Gestures - For a smaller group where everyone is on video and can be seen at the same time, have people respond to an icebreaker question by literally raising their hand, showing thumbs up/down, etc., just as they would in a face-to-face classroom.</p> <p>Annotations - For a smaller group, post an icebreaker question on a slide and invite people to use annotation tools to draw, stamp, or type their response directly on it. For example, you could put a question and an image of a rating scale on the slide and have people mark where they would place themselves on it (Clay, 2020b).</p> <p>Whiteboard - For a smaller group, post an icebreaker question in the chat and invite people to use their mouse or touchscreen to draw a response somewhere on the whiteboard (University of Minnesota, n.d.). For example, you could ask everyone to draw an emoji that expresses how they're feeling, either in general or about the training topic.</p>
<p>Show of Hands</p> <p>In addition to simple yes/no questions, this can be used for a "Sit Down If" (or "Lower Your Hand If") activity, where you start by asking everyone to stand (or raise their hand), then read a list of questions or statements, and have people sit (or lower their hand) when you get to a question/statement that does not apply to them.</p>	<p>Status Icons - Pose a question to the group and ask them to use the status icons to raise/lower their hands as it applies to them.</p> <p>Gestures - For a smaller group where everyone is on video and can be seen at the same time, you can ask people to literally raise/lower their hands, just as they would in a face-to-face classroom.</p>

Classroom activity

Polls/Surveys/Voting

These can be used to get quick audience feedback, check understanding, show a diversity of opinions, etc. Ask genuine questions that will meaningfully engage your learners. Remember to verbally summarize responses and tie them into the training.

Large Group Discussion

Both online and face-to-face, large group discussions are often the cornerstone of interactive training. Following other activities, such as polls, small group work, etc. with a large group discussion to emphasize key points is often helpful.

Small Group Discussion

Dividing learners into small groups or pairs can allow for richer, deeper discussion of an issue and give quieter learners more opportunity to participate. Small groups can also be useful for hands-on learning activities and peer collaboration.

Online adaptations

Polls - Launch a poll for learners to answer. In most platforms, responses will be anonymous and results can be shared as overall percentages.

Status Icons - Pose a question verbally (and possibly also on a slide) and ask learners to raise hands, show thumbs up/down, use green checkmarks and red Xs, etc. to respond. Learners can usually see each other's answers. This can go faster and feel more casual than polls, which can be useful for quickly checking the pulse of the group (Clay, 2020b).

Gestures - For a smaller group where everyone is on video and can be seen at the same time, have people literally raise/lower their hands, give thumbs up/down, etc. just as they would in a face-to-face classroom. This can also be useful for quickly checking the pulse of the group.

Annotations - For a smaller group, post a question on a slide and invite people to draw, stamp, or type their response directly on it. For example, you could adapt a "Four Corners" exercise by dividing a slide into four sections labeled strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Then read a series of statements and ask learners to stamp the corner of the slide that shows their level of agreement. Similarly, annotations can also be used to re-create "Sticky Dot Voting" activities by putting multiple options on a slide and inviting people to draw a mark or shape next to their top three choices.

Audio/Video - For a smaller group, unmute everyone so they can respond freely, as they would in a face-to-face classroom. For a larger group, ask learners to use status icons to raise their hands if they would like to share out loud, and unmute people individually so they can respond. For any size group, you may choose to use annotations on a slide or the whiteboard to document learners' ideas during a group brainstorm or discussion.

Chat - Ask a question and invite learners to type responses in the chat. Read some or all of the answers out loud. You might invite individual learners to unmute and say more about their responses

Chat - If your platform allows you to create multiple chat pods, you can create and label a chat pod for each small group and assign learners to a pod. Give them a prompt and time to respond in their assigned chat pod, then read and discuss each group's responses.

Breakout Rooms - Use breakout rooms to divide learners into small groups or pairs. Ask a representative from each group to share their discussion with the large group using the chat or by unmuting them. For hands-on group activities, you could ask each group to use the whiteboard or a shared document (like a Google Doc) to document their work and show it to the large group using screen share.

Large Group Discussion - If tools for dividing into small groups are not available or feasible, consider adapting activities to be completed individually and then discussed as a large group.

Classroom activity

Online adaptations

Case Studies

Case studies let learners apply their knowledge to solve realistic problems. It's best to provide a brief description of the scenario both verbally and in writing, either on a slide or in a handout, so learners can refer back to it while they consider solutions.

Chat - Present a case study and ask learners to share in the chat what concerns they identify, what steps they would take, etc. You might invite some learners to unmute and elaborate on their responses out loud.

Poll - Share a case study and use a poll to ask yes/no or multiple-choice questions about it. For example: "Would this scenario be a mandated report of child abuse?" or "Which strategy would you most likely use to interrupt this situation as a bystander: direct, distract, delegate, or delay?" You can then ask learners to elaborate on their answers in the chat or by unmuting.

Breakout Rooms - For more in-depth case studies and problem solving, divide learners into breakout rooms. Provide learners with a handout that includes all of the case studies and discussion prompts, and assign each group a different case study to consider. Then ask each group to share key points from their discussion with the large group, either in the chat or by unmuting.

Roleplays

Roleplays are an ideal strategy for practicing communication skills, such as bystander intervention, active listening, and responding to disclosures. Learners can act out the roleplays themselves, and/or trainers can demonstrate a roleplay while learners comment and provide feedback.

Audio/Video + Chat - Provide a handout with roleplay scenarios and ask for volunteers to take turns acting them out. In some cases, you might arrange this in advance with pre-selected volunteers. Unmute volunteers so they can do the roleplay, and invite other learners to comment in the chat about skills used, other possible responses, etc. Debrief the roleplay with the large group, drawing from comments made in the chat.

Breakout Rooms - Provide a handout with roleplay scenarios and divide learners into breakout rooms. Assign specific roleplays to each group and ask them to take turns in different roles (e.g., speaker, responder, observer). Debrief the roleplay experience and lessons learned with the large group.

Pre-recorded Video + Chat - Recruit a colleague or two to help you pre-record roleplays as short videos or audio tracks. As learners watch/listen, ask them to use the chat to identify skills used, other possible responses, etc.

Boardwork/Flipcharting

Drawing or writing on a board or flipchart while presenting or facilitating discussion can help to illustrate key points and explain complex ideas one part at a time. Remember to verbally describe any drawings or other visuals for learners who can't see them.

Pen & Paper - If learners can see your video clearly enough, you can use markers to draw and write on a large sheet of paper and place it near the camera for learners to see. If you have a second device available (e.g., phone or tablet) and plan to do a lot of writing/drawing, you could log in and use the second device's camera as a dedicated video feed of your paper.

Annotations - Create a slide as a placeholder and use the annotation tools to write, draw, and mark it up. It is helpful (but not necessary) to use a touchscreen device for this, if available.

Whiteboard - Use the platform's whiteboard feature to write and draw as you would in a face-to-face classroom. It is helpful (but not necessary) to use a touchscreen device for this, if available.

Flipchart Walkabout

In face-to-face training, this type of activity asks learners to move around the physical classroom and respond to prompts by writing on flipcharts.

Chat + Google Slides - Create a Google Slide or Google Doc for each flipchart heading or question prompt. In the chat box, provide the links to each of the Google Slides or Docs, and ask learners to visit each one and record their answers. Once learners have had time to respond, use screen share to display each of the Google Slides or Docs and discuss responses as a large group.

Classroom activity	Online adaptations
<p>Flipchart Walkabout (continued)</p> <p>It can be an effective tool for group brainstorming about multiple, related themes at the same time.</p>	<p>Multiple Chats - If your platform allows you to create multiple chat pods, create and label a chat pod for each flipchart heading or question prompt. Give learners time to respond, then read and discuss the responses in each pod.</p> <p>Annotations - For smaller groups and a smaller number of prompts, create a slide that is divided into sections, with one section for each flipchart heading or question prompt. Invite learners to use the annotation tools to write and/or type their responses onto the slide under each section. Read all responses out loud and discuss as a large group.</p> <p>Breakout Rooms - Provide a handout with all of the flipchart headings or question prompts. Create a breakout room for each flipchart heading and assign learners to breakout rooms. Ask them to designate a group member to record responses to share with the large group by using the chat or raising their hands and unmuting.</p>
<p>Sorting Activities</p> <p>Sorting activities let learners practice applying useful labels or categories to sample scenarios, such as identifying red/yellow/green light behaviors or situations that require a mandated report of child abuse.</p>	<p>Poll - Create a poll with the category options (e.g., Welcome, Unwelcome, Not Sure). Read a short scenario and ask people to use the poll to indicate which category it belongs to. Share and discuss the results of the poll.</p> <p>Status Icons - Create a slide that shows which status icons will represent which categories (e.g., thumbs up = welcome, thumbs down = unwelcome, etc.). Read a short scenario and ask people to use the status icons to indicate which category it belongs to. You might ask people to elaborate on their answers in the chat or by unmuting.</p> <p>Gestures - For a smaller group where everyone is on video and can be seen at the same time, read a short scenario and ask people to hold up their thumbs (or make a face, nod or shake their head, etc.) to show which category it belongs to. You might ask people to elaborate on their answers in the chat or by unmuting.</p> <p>Annotations - Use a slide to create a matching exercise with labels on one side and examples on the other side, and ask for a volunteer to draw lines to match them (Clay, 2012).</p>
<p>Posters</p> <p>Poster-making activities give learners an opportunity to synthesize training content and present it back to their peers in a visual format.</p>	<p>Pen & Paper - Prior to training, ask learners to have a sheet of paper and something to write/draw with available during training. Provide instructions for the activity and ask learners to design posters individually on their paper. Invite volunteers to hold up and present their posters to the large group.</p> <p>Breakout Rooms - Divide learners into groups using breakout rooms. Provide instructions for the activity and ask each group to designate one artist and one reporter who will present their poster to the large group. Give groups time to develop their poster, using pen and paper, the whiteboard, or a Google Doc. Ask each group to present their poster to the large group by holding it up to the camera (paper) or using screen share (whiteboard or Google Doc).</p>
<p>Games</p> <p>Popular games like Jeopardy, Pictionary, and Charades can be adapted for online learning using the tools in your platform.</p>	<p>Annotations - Create your own game board on a slide and use annotations to keep score while you play. For example, you could create a Jeopardy game with squares for each category and point value, then use d annotations to cross off squares as learners play the game.</p>

Classroom activity

Games (continued)

You can also bring online games into your virtual training by sharing your screen during the session.

Worksheets

Consider emailing worksheets in advance so learners have time to download and/or print them. Most platforms also allow you to make documents available for download during the session. Test your worksheets to make sure they can be filled out electronically (e.g., a fillable PDF, Word file, or Google Doc) for learners who can't print a paper copy.

Video

For most online trainings it is best to keep videos short (under 5 minutes) to prevent learners from multi-tasking. Before showing a video, it is helpful to provide some context and direction so learners know what to watch for and how they will apply it in a discussion or activity after viewing.

Online adaptations

Whiteboard - Use the whiteboard for a quick and easy version of a Pictionary game. Use the private chat to send individual learners the word or concept they need to draw on the whiteboard, and have other learners type their guesses into the public chat or use status icons to raise their hand to guess.

Gestures - For smaller groups where everyone is on video, invite volunteers to take turns playing Charades on camera. You could use the private chat to send individual learners the word or concept to act out, and then have other learners type their guesses into the public chat or use status icons to raise their hand to guess. For younger audiences, this could be a way to have learners take turns acting out and identifying different feeling words, for example.

Screen Share - Sites like jeopardylabs.com, superteachertools.us, flippity.net, and kahoot.com offer customizable, interactive online games for low or no cost. Use their templates to create your own learning game, then launch the game and share your screen so learners can play along.

Chat - Provide the worksheet for learners to complete individually, then invite them to share their answers using the chat. You might ask some learners to unmute and elaborate on their responses.

Poll - For worksheets with closed-ended questions (like questionnaires or quizzes), provide the worksheet for learners to complete individually. Once they've had time to answer, launch a poll with questions from the worksheet and ask learners to indicate their responses in the poll.

Annotations - Provide the worksheet for learners to complete individually or in small groups using breakout rooms. Once they've had time to complete it, display a blank copy of the worksheet (using screen share or by pasting an image of the worksheet onto a presentation slide). Ask learners to share their answers using the chat or by unmuting, and use annotation tools to mark up the worksheet as you facilitate discussion. Or invite volunteers to use the annotation tools to mark their answers on the screen.

Breakout Rooms - Divide learners into breakout rooms to complete the worksheet in small groups. Ask a representative from each group to share trends or themes from their discussion with the large group in the chat or by unmuting.

Play Video in Platform - Most platforms will allow you to share a video from your computer during the session. Quality and reliability can vary, so test the specific video in your platform ahead of time. It is best to keep videos short (under 5 minutes), and ask learners to close unnecessary windows and applications for better results.

Send Video Link in Chat - If you are showing a video that is available online and playing it through the online learning platform is not feasible, you can paste the link to the video into the chat, ask learners to go view it in their own browser, and then return to the training session for group discussion.

Classroom activity	Online adaptations
<p>Q&A</p> <p>It is generally considered a best practice to encourage and respond to learners' questions as they arise throughout the training, rather than holding all questions until the end.</p>	<p>Chat - At the beginning of the training, invite learners to enter their questions in the chat at any time. Keep an eye out for questions (a co-host can help with this), and respond to them verbally as they come in. You can give learners the option to send you questions in a private chat message if they prefer to be anonymous.</p> <p>Status Icons - At the beginning of the training, invite learners to use status icons to raise their hand at any time if they have a question. Keep an eye out for raised hands during the training. Call on learners and unmute them so they can ask their question out loud.</p> <p>Gestures - For a smaller group where everyone is on video and can be seen at the same time, invite learners to physically raise their hand if they have a question, as they would in a face-to-face classroom. This can be especially helpful with children because it's a familiar (and low-tech) routine. Remember to keep an eye out for raised hands. Call on learners and unmute them so they can ask their question out loud.</p>

Practical tips for online learning

Learning to manage the tools in online learning platforms can be a bit like learning to ride a bike; there's a lot to balance and coordinate, and at first it might feel like it could all crash at any moment! The suggestions below can help you use your platform's tools more confidently, effectively, accessibly, and smoothly. Like riding a bike, once you get the hang of it, you can relax, have fun, and focus on getting where you want to go.



Audio/Video Conferencing

Audio/video conferencing is the backbone of real-time online learning, and an important part of engaging your learners. You can use your audio and video to increase your "virtual presence," or the sense that you are personally interacting with your audience (Clay, 2020c). Here are some tips for making the most of audio/video conferencing in online trainings:

- **Turn on your video.** While it's common to feel uncomfortable being on camera at first, learners feel more connected when they can see you. Test your video ahead of time to make sure there isn't light behind you casting shadow across your face, or something in the background that will look like it's growing out of your head (Clay, 2020a).
- **Talk to the camera.** Like a TV news anchor, put the camera at your eye level and look into the lens as you talk to give the impression of eye contact. Taping or propping up your notes behind your camera lets you glance at them while still looking towards the lens. Use non-verbal communication like nodding your head and smiling to show that you are listening and engaged when your learners are speaking or contributing in the chat (Clay, 2020b; Smith, n.d.).
- **Set the tone with your voice.** Like a radio announcer, you want to keep your audience interested and engaged through your tone of voice. Try to speak clearly, slowly, and at a good volume so your audience can follow along. Avoid reading from a script, if possible, so you sound more relaxed and conversational (Baptista, 2019).

- **Invite learners to turn on their video.** This can depend on the size of your audience, their relationships to one another, the platform you're using, and the type of training you have planned. Even if learners' videos aren't on all the time, it is especially helpful for individual learners to turn on their cameras when they are screen sharing to show their work or presenting information to the group.

Chat



The chat is one of the most valuable tools in real-time online learning. It's an opportunity for learners to contribute their thoughts, experiences, and questions in an open-ended format, and a space where learners can interact directly with one another and with you throughout the training. While many trainers worry that learners will be distracted by side conversations in the chat, those conversations often provide the most meaningful connections and learning exchange (Clay, 2012). Here are some tips for making the most of the chat in your online trainings:

The chat is one of the most valuable tools in real-time online learning, a space where learners can interact directly with each other and you.

- **Make both public and private chat messages available to learners.** Most platforms provide the ability to send both public chat messages that everyone can see and private chat messages to specific individuals.
- **Encourage learners to engage with the chat in the beginning of your training.** Ask them to respond to a meaningful question in the chat, which both ensures that they know how to use it and helps them feel more connected to other learners in the session (Baptista, 2019).
- **Positively reinforce learners' contributions to the chat.** Just as you would in a face-to-face class, thank people for their comments and questions, validate their ideas and experience, invite them to elaborate, and build on what they have to say throughout the session. Acknowledging learners by name as you do this can boost a sense of recognition and connection. The more you embrace and engage with learners' contributions in the chat, the likelier they are to keep participating.
- **Respond to relevant questions and comments in the chat in real-time, rather than waiting to respond at the end.** This helps to make the training relevant and responsive to learners' interests and input. Just like in a face-to-face class, if a question or comment is relevant to the topic at hand, address it in the moment. If not, put a pin in it and come back to it later (Clay, 2012).
- **Read comments and questions from the chat out loud when you are referencing or responding to them.** This increases accessibility and clarity, allowing everyone to follow along (Stanford Online Accessibility Program [SOAP], 2020). When a lot of people are responding in the chat to a question you've posed, it may make sense to read out the first few comments and then pick out key themes from the rest to fuel the discussion (Clay, 2020c).
- **Use the private chat to address technology-related issues during an online training.** If an individual learner expresses in the chat that the technology is not working for them, a co-host can follow-up with them in a private chat message to troubleshoot without distracting other learners.

- **Share links to additional resources in the chat.** Prepare a Word document in advance listing titles and links of any relevant websites, videos, or other online resources you recommend for further learning. You (or your co-host) can then copy and paste them into the chat box at appropriate times throughout the training. Send the list of resources and links to learners after the session for increased accessibility (University of Colorado Boulder, n.d.).
- **Provide other ways to engage.** The chat box may not be visible to all learners, and can become overwhelming for some when it gets busy. It's best to have it as an option without requiring learners to use it, and mix in other opportunities for engagement like unmuting and sharing thoughts out loud (University of Minnesota, n.d.).

Polls



With some creativity and pre-planning, polls can be a useful way to assess prior knowledge and experience, check understanding, encourage self-reflection, get feedback, demonstrate a diversity of opinions, and initiate a discussion. In most platforms, poll results are displayed anonymously in overall percentages which can be helpful for encouraging participation when learners might otherwise be too shy to volunteer their position on a topic or risk giving an incorrect answer. Here are some tips for making the most of polls in your online trainings:

- **Design questions that will meaningfully engage and energize your learners.** Avoid using polls just for the sake of breaking up a long lecture. Ask genuine and thought-provoking questions, and tie the results back into your training (Clay, 2020a).
- **Set up any poll questions in advance.** Creating a poll can take time, and you don't want to take that time out of your session. If you find yourself wanting to survey your audience in the midst of a session and you don't have a poll set up for it, you can ask the question verbally and ask learners to use status icons, gestures, or the chat instead.
- **Give learners enough time to find, consider, and respond to the poll.** (University of Colorado Boulder, n.d.).
- **Remember to display the results for everyone to see.** This allows you to visually demonstrate a variety of perspectives and generate further discussion (Center for Teaching Excellence [CTE], n.d.; Mrvova, 2020).
- **Summarize the results verbally.** Summarize the results verbally for anyone who may not be able to view them on screen, and point out significant or surprising trends in the responses.

Status Icons



Status icons (sometimes called emojis, emoticons, reactions, or nonverbal feedback) serve as a substitute for the eye contact you would have in a face-to-face classroom (Clay, 2020b). They are useful for a quick check-in to see what people are feeling or thinking and can be adapted for a variety of other learning activities. Unlike polls, which are answered anonymously, learners' status icons are typically visible to the presenters and to other learners. This can be a useful tool for further discussion. Here are some tips for making the most of status icons in your online trainings:

- **Adapt activities and instructions for the status icons in your platform.** The number and types of status icons vary among different platforms. Some include green checkmarks and red X's that can be useful for quick "yes/no" or "correct/incorrect" responses. Some have smiley face emojis that can be used to indicate different emotional reactions. Design your activities to make use of the icons you have available, and remember you may need to update them if you switch to another platform.
- **Remember to clear everyone's status icons** (or lower everyone's hands) at the end of each question or activity, especially if you are planning to use this again in response to a different question later on.
- **Verbally acknowledge and summarize learners' statuses.** This lets learners know that you see them, and increases accessibility and clarity for everyone.



Annotations

Annotation tools include pointers, highlighters, shapes, stamps, and more. Most platforms let you annotate slides or anything else you screen share, and you can share the annotation tools with learners so that they can mark up your content as well. Here are some tips for making the most of annotations in your online trainings:

- **Review the tools and let learners try them out at the beginning of the session.** Annotation tools are likely to be less familiar to many learners. Provide clear instructions and an opportunity to practice so learners are comfortable using them for activities.
- **Practice clearing, saving, and taking screenshots of annotations.** Platforms handle annotations differently when you advance to the next slide or stop screen sharing. If you want to save annotations for future reference, you may need to take a screenshot before clearing them and moving on. Play around with annotation tools in your platform so you can plan for these transitions.
- **Verbally describe what is happening on screen.** Annotations are not accessible to screen readers, and will not be seen by people who are dialed in only by phone. When you are annotating, remember to describe what you are doing (University of Minnesota, n.d.). When you ask learners to annotate, summarize what's happening and provide an alternative way for learners to participate, such as unmuting and sharing out loud.

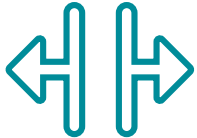
Whiteboard



Most platforms have whiteboards, which are blank screens on which you and your learners can draw, stamp, and add text. If there's an activity in your face-to-face curriculum where you would usually write on flipchart paper, the whiteboard may be an appropriate alternative. They can be useful for capturing ideas during brainstorming. You could ask a learner to serve as scribe to record the group's thoughts during a discussion, or play this role yourself. Here are some tips for making the most of annotations in your online trainings:

- **Choose between whiteboard or annotations.** Keep in mind that annotations can also be used like a whiteboard in most platforms. Annotating on a presentation slide allows you to display a graphic, post instructions, etc. and have learners write and draw directly on your slide, rather than starting from a blank screen. Decide which tool will be a better fit based on your specific activity and your platform.
- **Consider using a second device.** If you plan to do a lot of drawing, you might want to log in to the platform from two devices: a computer for presenting, and a tablet or smartphone for drawing on a touchscreen.

- **Verbally describe what is happening on the whiteboard.** Like annotations, the whiteboard cannot be read by a screen reader and will not be visible to learners who are only dialed in by phone (Coombs, 2010; University of Minnesota, n.d.).
- **Take a screenshot of the whiteboard to save it.** If you want to be able to share or refer back to what was written or drawn on the whiteboard, you will probably need to save it before ending the session (University of Minnesota, n.d.). Some platforms (including Zoom) provide a button to easily and quickly save whiteboard images to your computer.



Breakout Rooms

Breakout rooms allow learners to work in small groups for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration. While the logistics of facilitating them may initially seem overwhelming, with planning and practice breakout rooms can be a valuable tool for engaging learners online. Here are some tips for making the most of breakout rooms in your online trainings:

- **Get comfortable with the controls.** Breakout groups can be a bit complicated to manage. Practice in your platform to get comfortable launching, ending, and checking in with breakout rooms (Clay, 2020a).
- **Have a buddy.** A co-host or co-facilitator is especially valuable when using breakout rooms, to help check in on groups and keep everything running smoothly (Clay, 2020a).
- **Rename rooms to signal each group's topic or task.** Renaming rooms, if allowed by your online learning platform, can be helpful for assigning different tasks to different groups. For example, assign a different case study, roleplay, or prompt to each group, and name the breakout room accordingly to help keep everyone organized (CTE, n.d.).
- **Provide clear instructions before sending learners into breakout rooms.** Be sure to tell learners what you want them to do in their small groups, and how they will share their key takeaways with the large group afterwards. It may be helpful to provide written instructions as a downloadable document so that learners can refer back. As their first task, ask each group to select a representative who will take notes and share back their group's discussion with the larger audience (Clay, 2020a).
- **Specify the tools you want learners to use in breakout rooms.** In some platforms (like AdobeConnect), learners have access to whiteboards that they can bring back to the main room to show the large audience. In other platforms (like Zoom), learners may be limited to audio, video, and screen sharing. If your audience is somewhat tech savvy, you could provide each group with a Google Doc to work on and ask them to screen share it with the large group when they return to the main room.
- **Use the main room as back-up space for a small group.** There may be some learners who are unable to join breakout rooms because of the way they logged into the session. You can invite those learners to form a group and use the main room for their discussion (University of Minnesota, n.d.).
- **Check-in with each breakout room to address any technical difficulties and make sure learners are on track.** Depending on the length of the breakout session, you may want to check in periodically to offer

Breakout rooms allow learners to work in small groups for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

feedback, ask questions, and redirect if needed - just as you would during small group work during a face-to-face training. You can also send written messages to all of the rooms at once, which is helpful for time checks (Clay, 2020a).

Screen Share



Most platforms let you share your whole computer desktop or a specific software application. In some platforms (like Zoom), screen share is the only way to display presentation slides. In other platforms (like WebEx and AdobeConnect), it is preferable to upload presentation slides directly to the platform, but you may still use screen share to show another document, a website, or an application. You can also allow learners to share their screens to show their work to the group. Here are some tips for making the most of screen share in your online trainings:

- **Close any unnecessary applications and windows on your computer.** This helps to conserve bandwidth, and also prevents learners from seeing messages, websites, or other things on your screen that you didn't intend for them to see.
- **Open anything you plan to screen share before the session starts.** This saves time during the training and makes it easier to find the file or screen you want to share (Robson, 2020).
- **Remember to verbally describe anything happening on the screen.** This increases accessibility for people who can't see the screen and helps to focus learners' attention on the relevant information.

Video



Many platforms (including Zoom) provide a way to share videos with learners within the online training space. Here are some tips for making the most of videos in your online trainings:

Keep videos short to prevent people from losing focus and multitasking.

- **Learn about video settings and controls in your particular platform.** Do a test run of your specific video in the platform ahead of time to check the playback quality. As a back-up plan, you might be able to send learners a link to the video online, have them watch it in their own browser, and then have everyone regroup for discussion.
- **Keep videos short (no more than five minutes) for real-time online trainings.** This helps prevent people from losing focus and multitasking at their computer while the video plays. If you want to use a longer video, consider showing one short clip at a time and facilitating discussion or an activity between each one to keep people engaged.
- **Give learners an assignment before showing the video.** Let learners know what to look for while they watch and how you will ask them to share or use their observations afterwards. For example, "We're going to watch a two-minute scene that takes place in a bar. Pay attention to the reactions of the bystanders."

Then we'll talk about who could have intervened, and the reasons why they did or didn't." This can encourage learners to stay focused during the video and help them remember the important points.

- **Advise learners to close unnecessary applications and make sure nothing else is streaming on their computers while the video plays.** This may help to conserve bandwidth and allow the video to play more smoothly.

Online learning will never be quite the same as a face-to-face training experience. However, with planning, practice, and creativity it is possible to provide learners with a similar sense of community and opportunities for active, hands-on learning in a virtual environment. The skills, expertise, and passion you bring to the face-to-face classroom will follow and serve you well in your online trainings. Train with confidence that in any setting, your work makes a world of difference in the lives of your learners and their communities.

Thank you

A special thank you to Annie Gebhardt, MPH, who authored this resource. Annie Gebhardt has been active in the movement to end sexual and domestic violence for 20 years as a student activist, victim advocate, community educator, and self-defense instructor. She previously served as a Training Specialist at the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) and as Training and Technical Assistance Director at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR). Annie is passionate about creating, facilitating, and evaluating learning opportunities that meaningfully impact participants and improve their future practice.

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