

Eight tips for using Zoom more effectively

As video conferencing becomes more commonplace, many theological schools and resourcing organizations have become familiar with the Zoom meeting and webinar platform. This has certainly been the case for the staff of the In Trust Center. We have held multiple seminars, spring board meetings, webinars, and facilitated conversations with large groups. While working remotely, we have also had weekly staff meetings and many videoconferences with colleagues across the United States and Canada.

Through our experience, we have learned some tips and tricks to share with our members about how to conduct Zoom meetings with groups large and small while experiencing the fewest number of hiccups. The tips shared here are not an exhaustive list for all videoconferencing platforms, but rather wise practices we have picked up in our extensive use of Zoom.

- 1. Prepare.** Whether you are hosting a meeting or participating in someone else's meeting, the best way to improve your Zoom skills is by practicing.
- 2. Test with a colleague.** User experience should always be at the top of your list of considerations. When you are hosting a Zoom meeting, do a few test runs with a colleague to run through the entire process, including planning, facilitating, and leading. Identify all potential problems with the technology. Do you know how to enable screen-sharing? If you are making a presentation, can you switch from presenter to presenter? Test audio and video beforehand and make adjustments as necessary. On the day of the event, log in early and be ready to help users with any kind of login problems or other tech issues.
- 3. Consider your environment** if you are working remotely. When we participate in virtual meetings from home, we are inviting colleagues and strangers into our personal space. If possible, find a place where you have privacy and quiet.

Good lighting is important so your face is clearly visible and you do not look like you are broadcasting from a cave. Optimal lighting comes from in front of you or from the side.

Your background should be simple, not distracting. If your background is less than ideal, or you simply do not like the idea of inviting your Zoom colleagues into your kitchen or living room, consider buying a simple screen to serve as a backdrop, or set up a privacy screen. You may also want to try Zoom's virtual background feature, but test your virtual background with a friend or colleague before using one with the wider public.

4. Watch what you wear. If you want to be taken seriously while on a work-related Zoom call, it's best to dress as you would at work.

Choose colors and patterns carefully. If you're sitting in front of a beige or white wall, consider wearing a contrasting top so you don't blend in. On the other hand, certain prints and patterns can be surprisingly distracting.

5. Communicate with attendees. Before the meeting, share your agenda and offer tips that will help attendees navigate the Zoom meeting you are hosting. Consider sharing a cheat sheet that includes links to websites you may want them to open and information about Zoom functions (including how to mute oneself, chat, ask questions, take part in polls, raise a hand, and share a screen). Let everyone know whom to contact for troubleshooting. At the top of the meeting, lay out expectations and address any concerns about how the meeting will be run. Be sure that everyone's voices are heard and responded to — especially in larger groups.

6. Work with a team. For larger events, or more interactive ones, and for meetings where there are several presenters, designate someone to be in charge of the behind-the-scenes work such as screen sharing, muting participants at appropriate times, and answering chats and Q&As. This will let the presenters focus on presenting.

7. Have a backup plan. In the event of technology problems — and they inevitably will happen, as we have discovered firsthand — a contingency plan can save the day. If you are the host and you lose your power, your internet connection, or your Wi-Fi, is there an alternative location you can use? Be sure that you have the phone numbers of your speakers, along with their presentation materials, so if they get cut off, you can take over. Give presenters alternate login information and ask them to print hard copies of their notes and PowerPoint slides in case they need to dial in by phone. In that case, you as the host can advance their slides while they continue with the presentation.

8. Keep it interactive. Depending on the length of your meeting and the number of attendees, it can be hard to keep an audience engaged. Can you start with an icebreaker such as a poll to gauge feedback on a particular topic? Encourage people to raise their hands, use the chat, and ask questions in order to keep them involved and interested.



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