Communicating virtually can be a challenge, whether you are giving a virtual presentation, participating in an online class, or interviewing over zoom. Here are some of GRADTalk’s top virtual communication tips for all of your online communication needs.

**Design Considerations**

When designing online content be sure to keep your audience as engaged as possible. Online presentations often require additional interactive elements in order to keep your audience focused and interacting with your material.

Consider:
- Including interactive elements from the beginning of your presentation. Getting your audience engaged at the beginning can help draw them in and keep them interested.
- Adding “re-engagement points” such as question and answer sessions, polls, or discussions interspersed throughout your talk as touchstones for your audience to re-engage with your content.
- Break up sections by including more time for questions between each section of content you are presenting.

**Make the most out of the technology that you have**

Spend some time thinking about the different functionalities you have over zoom, skype, or whichever virtual platform you are using. Different formats or functionalities can help you communicate to different audiences. Examples include:

- **Polls**
  - great for getting answers from your entire audience quickly and succinctly

- **Breakout Rooms**
  - great for small group discussions, breaking up long presentations, and getting your audience engaged

- **Screen sharing capabilities**
- **Chat box and Q&A**
- **Raise Hand, Yes, No**, and other reaction buttons
  - great for checking engagement of your audience or answering questions non-verbally

Always make sure to enable these functions ahead of time!

**Set yourself up for success**

Everyone has different preferences during presentations, so feel free to customize your virtual presentation to fit your needs. For example, if you want to see your audience, reorganize your zoom screen so that their video is closest to your camera, which will make it seem like you are making direct eye contact.

Don’t be shy about communicating to your audience! You can ask them to turn cameras on or off, mute or unmute themselves to support your talk. You can also choose to hide your video so you don’t see yourself, but make sure to leave your camera on so your audience can see you!

Consider presenting the way you feel most confident. If you would feel more confident standing to give your talk in person, consider standing to deliver your talk over zoom.
Technical Considerations

• Always test your internet connection, sound quality, and headphone/microphone setup before hand
• Find a well-lit, comfortable, neutral, and quiet place to set up your computer
  o Your background doesn’t have to be a blank wall, it can have some personality (think plants, photos, art) but make sure it doesn’t take the attention away from you
  o You can also use a virtual background if you aren’t happy with your real-life background. Virtual backgrounds can also help obscure other people in the background or help with privacy concerns.
  o Raise your computer so that you are eye level with your camera, this helps it appear that you are making direct eye contact with your audience, viewer, or interviewer
• Make sure you have all zoom links, passwords and host codes you need ahead of time! Be sure to ask about the details of the virtual setting (for example: if you are giving a presentation, will you be able to advance the slides yourself? Will you be a host, panelist, or participant?)

Commonly asked questions:

- Do I need to stare directly into my camera?
  o No: as long as you look at the upper half of your screen, it should look like you are making eye contact with your viewer
- What do I do if I have a tendency to be distracted by my own video while communicating over zoom?
  o You can switch between gallery and speaker view to make your own video smaller. You can also position your video directly under your camera so that even if you are staring at yourself, it looks like you are making eye contact.

Make it easy for your audience

It can be hard for audiences to follow along virtually, especially with unstable internet connections. Use language that helps highlight your main points, such as:

- I plan to; I argue...
- Here I show...
- To illustrate my point...
- In other words...
- Before moving on...
- To sum up...
- Importantly...
- In essence...
- Overall...
- The main point is...

Be sure to modulate your tone and convey enthusiasm for your message! Changes in tone help signal importance to your audience.

Delivery

- Practice the way you are going to present.
  o If you are presenting over zoom, practice on an empty zoom call, or better yet get some friends to practice with you.
  o Try recording yourself presenting or answering interview questions to see how you come across
  o Act the way you would act if your communication was in person:
    o If you would stand to give your presentation in person, stand to give it over zoom
    o If you would gesticulate in person, gesticulate over zoom
- Sometimes the virtual format can make you seem less enthusiastic than you really are, so it can be better to be slightly over-enthusiastic as opposed to under-enthusiastic
  o Make sure you are changing your tone and using gestures (that can be seen by the camera) to support your message and keep your audience engaged
- As with any communication, practice is key! Book a GRADTalk appointment for more practice and advice