

Social Presence in Online Learning Environments

With the rapid transition from face-to-face instruction to online videoconferencing, instructors are looking for ways to make **interpersonal connections with participants to stimulate the learning environment**.

Some participants may feel **challenged and isolated** by online learning, which may limit their experience, and performance. Humanizing the online learning environment with **social presence heightens participants' identity and stimulates knowledge building**.

Social presence recognizes participants' as unique individuals in online environments, and it increases their degree of participation and satisfaction.

Establishing and Generating Social Presence

In establishing **social presence**, an emphasis should be placed on making the environment **comfortable for instructor and participants**.

Humanize the learning environment by including stories, humor, photos, and asking questions to **collectively acquire and share knowledge**.

- Encourage use of **microphone, video, and chat**
- Use **organic spontaneity** responding to the group and individuals
- Exercise **cultural sensitivity** to preferred communication styles

Culturally diverse participants transitioning to educational/organizational settings **may need mentoring and time to find their voice**.

Collaborations allow participants in transition time to **develop self-confidence** in their **preferred communication** style and **build trust**.

Framework for Collaborations

To promote a business-like environment, **consider developing teams for the length of the program**.

Groups can be assembled to ensure **diverse backgrounds, talents and experience** are distributed among teams.

- Apply an **Agile approach** to activity collaborations
- Suggest participants **come to the process from a humble place**
- **Encourage participants to visualize their success** in projects

Promote **team building**, with all participants on an **equal level** collaborating on **problem solving in dynamic exchanges**.

Encourage groups to name a **facilitator** and **note taker/presenter**, track teams in collaborative observations, **manage activity time length and size of groups**.

Navigation & Etiquette

Technical orientation in the online environment helps establish participants' understanding and **comfort with the technology**.

Suggestions to improve session's technical stability include:

- Use a hardline cable to join sessions
- Check for **Zoom updates on a weekly basis**
- Provide contact information to **technical support**

Establish your **guidelines for communication etiquette** in sessions and collaborations to promote participants' comfort.

Promote a **professional learning environment** ensuring participants give their peers **respect** and practice **listening, sharing, and giving feedback**.

Polling for Engagement & Knowledge Checks

Polling **allows participants' input** on topics of interest, gathering background experience, opinions and **verifying knowledge of content**.

Questions based on the content can be **composed prior to scheduled meetings or while in progress**.

- **Give the poll** to gain input
- **Show the results**
- **Reflect** on the results

Instructor and participants can **clarify concepts, approaches and methods**.

Polling also provides **quantitative numbers** showing those actively engaged in the process and those who choose not to participate.