Organizing Your Presentation
- A Guide for Speakers -

Information and Tips for a Successful & Engaging Presentation
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Thank you for being a speaker at **Cultivate’20 Virtual**! We are excited to be transitioning to this new online conference format and offering the green industry important information, best practices, and tools to help make our industry’s businesses stronger than ever. You play an important role in delivering on this mission and we are grateful to be partnering with you.

Many of you are already an expert speaker for both live and virtual audiences. Nonetheless, to achieve a speaker’s top priority in ensuring your audience is engaged, entertained, and informed in a 100% virtual delivery environment, this is more important than ever. Different strategies may be needed to build audience rapport.

Many may believe you can simply take your in-person presentation and present it as-is online. As you may already know, experts suggest modifications are needed to ensure your virtual audience has the best experience possible.

Whether it is a pre-recorded session, a live keynote address or educational talk, or a panel discussion, the experience in an online virtual environment is different. This guide is written to provide helpful tips to ensure your presentation, regardless of its virtual format, is as engaging as possible, the communication objectives are met, and that you and your audience have a **great experience**.
As we transition from an in-person event to an online virtual program, there are three key differences to consider as you prepare:

**Technology**

There are a variety of technology options to help you deliver an engaging virtual presentation. Additionally, the quality of technology or connectivity it paramount to delivering a quality program. In this guide we will address some technology considerations and requirements.

**Compromised Personal Connection**

Presenting to a virtual audience can make a speaker’s job more challenging. It is harder to gauge audience interest when you cannot see facial expressions or body language, both important cues used to adjust a presentation in the moment. In this guide we will provide tips to help you overcome this challenge and help your presentation experience feel more connected and personal.

**Divided Audience Attention**

A virtual audience faces distractions or interruptions that may prevent them from fully focusing and engaging on what presenters are saying. Multi-tasking during presentations causes attendees to miss important information that could compromise their understanding of your presentation. In this guide we will suggest strategies for keeping your listener focused on the information and message you are sharing.
Virtual Event Formats

*Cultivate’20 Virtual* will use a combination of virtual event formats. We will share considerations for each of these formats throughout this guide.

**Live Event** – our live education events will be delivered via Zoom. If you are presenting during a live event, AmericanHort will have staff to help you manage the chat room, questions, and technology.

**Pre-Recorded Program** – is made available on demand giving the audience the flexibility of watching or listening at their convenience. If needed, pre-recorded programs can be edited to brand the event, put superscripts on screen, etc. There will be more than 20 sessions offered on demand during *Cultivate’20 Virtual*. The AmericanHort team will work with those of you whose session is being offered via recording. See the [audio and video tips](#) in this guide to help you prepare for you recording.

**Hybrid Program** – is where the program is offered at a scheduled time and the main presentation is pre-recorded with a live question and answer session with the presenter taking place at the end of the pre-recorded portion.

**Moderated Panel Discussion** – this may be either pre-recorded or live, but like an in-person panel format, there is a moderator who leads the discussion and traffics the questions to the panel members for their response and comment.

**Note:** If you are participating by providing a [Pre-Recorded Program](#) to be made available on demand, AmericanHort will schedule a time to record your session and will assist you with the process of recording your presentation.
The information age, increase in social media, and rapid news notifications have narrowed our attention span. Expert reports suggest if a topic is of interest and the presenter is good, **the listener can focus on the presentation for 7 to 10 minutes at most.**

Since your session is going to be longer than 10 minutes, it is important that you use various techniques to maintain your audience’s interest throughout your talk. You will want to get to your point quickly, keep your pace brisk, and avoid going into long lecture mode to keep your audience attentive.

Some experts recommend **giving participants something to do every 3 minutes**, such as responding to a chat, poll, quiz, or using annotation or feedback tools, all items we discuss in more detail in this guide.

Not all these engagement methods will be appropriate for your speaking style or your subject matter, so use what feels most natural for you and what you think will work best for your audience. The AmericanHort education team is available to help you in any way.
Plan Your Content

As you prepare for your talk, be sure you know what you are to focus on in your presentation. If there are speakers on a similar topic going before and after you, consider coordinating in advance, so you are not presenting the same content or contradict each other. Be brief, succinct, and plan interactive engagement.

Length of Presentation

For Cultivate’20 Virtual we have scheduled shorter education sessions in a series of related topics to optimize the audience’s experience. This format allows for breaks and Q&A interaction to keep the audience engaged. As a speaker, you need to be focused on your message.

Use a variety of engagement strategies so your audience remains interested throughout your presentation. Work with your AmericanHort education team member to determine the optimal presentation length and topic for your allotted time.
Presentation Slides

Your presentation slides are one of your primarily tools for keeping people engaged in your talk. **Keep your slides simple.**

- Limit the amount of text per slide
- Use a large font size
- Use bullet points to organize your thoughts
- Do not read your slides verbatim
- Use high-quality images instead of text wherever they can communicate your point
- Include an introduction slide to introduce your presentation points and a conclusion slide that reiterates your points
- Set PowerPoint slide ratio to 16:9
- Use the Cultivate slide template
- Avoid reverse (white) text on colored or textured backgrounds

**Note:** AmericanHort will provide you branded title slides. Please use these slides at the start of your presentation.

As a speaker in **Cultivate’20 Virtual**, you understand that you are a professional representative of AmericanHort and you agree to refrain from selling products or services, saying derogatory comments, using profanity, or displaying preference to certain individuals or groups.

Your presentation is not to violate any proprietary or personal rights of others, including copyright, trademark, and privacy rights. You are responsible for your presentation being factually accurate and containing nothing defamatory or otherwise unlawful. You must have full usage rights of any photography or other imagery if you did not create the image or photo.
Engagement Strategies

There are many ways you can interact with your audience and keep them focused and engaged during your virtual presentation. Here are some suggestions:

Additional Reading Materials
Providing supplemental reading material may help your audience get more detailed information about your topic. If you are covering a lot of terminology, rather than define each term in your talk, you might create a terminology document and provide a link to a URL with this document in your session chat box.

*Note: Zoom does not allow us to upload pdf files.*

Provide Worksheets
Create worksheets that go along with your talk. Use the fill in the blank approach so the listener fills in the blanks as they hear you talk. This also provides them valuable notes on your presentation that they are likely to keep. To do this, you will need to provide a link to a URL with this document(s) in your session chat box as Zoom does not allow us to upload pdf files. You can provide a URL to a .pdf or other document format for your audience to access during or after your talk.

The Survey Says
Using polls or survey questions are a great way to gain insight about your audience and confirm they are still paying attention to your talk. Zoom has a polling function build in and are easy to set up in advance. **If you plan to use a poll during your talk at Cultivate’20 Virtual, please provide your poll questions to your AmericanHort education team contact so these polls can be set up in advance and tested to make sure they function properly.**
Chat with your Audience
You can connect with and get to know your audience by asking some questions in the chat box at the start of and during your talk. You may want to have an assistant monitor the chat box during your talk, so you remain focused on presenting. AmericanHort will assist you with this. Chat rooms generally work the same regardless of the program used. You or your chat room moderator can pose a question and the audience responds in the chat room. If you have not used a chat room before, or not used the platform you are speaking from, be sure oriented on how the Zoom chat room works.

Icebreaker questions to get to know your audience:
- What are you hoping to learn today?
- Where are you from?
- How long have you worked in the industry?
- What interested you in this field, profession, industry?

Annotation
Another method to engage your audience is to annotate on your screen while you are speaking. Think of this like using a pointer or laser to point out certain works to emphasize an important point.
Watch your Audience
If your audience isn’t too large and you are using Zoom meeting, you might ask your audience to participate with their video turned on. There are several benefits to doing this. First, like an in-person audience this allows you to see facial expressions and watch to see if your audience is nodding their heads in agreement or understanding or showing expression of confusion. Another benefit is you can ask the audience to respond by raising their hand, putting their thumbs up, or down, or to write a brief, one word response on a sheet of paper and hold it up to the screen. This is an approach best used with smaller groups or for networking gatherings.

Note - the above is most applicable to the industry interaction roundtable discussion sessions taking place during Cultivate’20 Virtual. Education sessions will have the audience camera and microphone muted.

Breakout Sessions
For a longer presentation where you want to give your audience an opportunity to discuss the topic more in depth, you might break out into small groups for discussion. This will only work if your session is held in Zoom meeting. Work with the AmericanHort education team to determine which Zoom platform you are using for your session.

If working in Zoom meeting, you determine how many people you want in a group and how long the breakout discussion should last. Four or five participants per group is recommended. For larger breakout groups you will want a strong facilitator in each group. Depending on the length of your session, breakouts could last from 5 minutes to 20 or 30 minutes. You will want to prepare questions for the groups to discuss and many programs allow you to share that question in the breakout room, helping keep the group’s discussion on track.
Audio/Video
Using audio and/or video is a great way to give yourself as a speaker a brief break and create a shift for your audience to keep them engaged in your presentation. Use audio and/or video to reinforce what you have been talking about.

The length of your video should be appropriate to the total time you are presenting keeping in mind shorter clips of 2-3 minutes are often best given today’s average attention span.

A Quick Guide to Building Engagement During a Virtual Presentation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY</th>
<th>RECOMMENDED BY VIRTUAL PRESENTATION FORMAT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Materials*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
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<td>Chat Room Questions</td>
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<td>Audience Video On</td>
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<td>Breakout Sessions*</td>
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<td>Poll or Survey</td>
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<td>Annotation</td>
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*Note: Cultivate’20 Virtual will be using Zoom Webinar for most education sessions and Zoom Meeting for roundtable discussion groups. Items with an (*) are not available in Zoom Webinar. Please work with the AmericanHort education team to confirm the available functionality for your session.
Technology Requirements

Here are the Minimum System Requirements:

- 1024 x 768 screen resolution minimum
- 1.4 Mbps internet connection minimum
- Allow Flash
- Disable Pop Up Blockers
- Disconnect from a VPN (if possible)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating System</th>
<th>Processor</th>
<th>RAM</th>
<th>Internet Browser</th>
<th>Hardware</th>
<th>Media Playback</th>
<th>Internet Connection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Windows 10</td>
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<td>1GB</td>
<td>Internet Explorer 8+</td>
<td>Audio: Sound Card with Speakers</td>
<td>HTML5 streaming enabled browser</td>
<td>Dedicated high speed connection of 900kbps+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Windows 8.1 + Pro</td>
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<td>All recent versions of Google Chrome</td>
<td>Video: Screen with 1024x768_ resolution support</td>
<td>Apple iOS http streaming enabled browser</td>
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<td>Safari 5.0+</td>
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<td>Android 4.4+</td>
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<td>iPhone/iPad – Safari/iOS 5.1+</td>
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**Devices**
Laptop, computer (Mac or PC) or tablets (Android or iOS) are supported.

**Internet Browser**
This is a virtual, browser based experience. If you are using an older, or unsupported Operating System, Internet Browser, or version of Flash, you may experience decreased performance. We recommend Chrome or Firefox as the most stable and consistent browsers for accessing the virtual environment.

**Firewall**
An automatic system test is available that will check connectivity of the domains listed in the detailed System Technical Requirements (below).

**System Test**
https://virtualdestinations.6connex.com/event/TheWayToDoVirtual/system-check

**Webinar System Test**
https://event.webcasts.com/viewer/faq.jsp?mType=v&closebtn=no&techview=yes

Please note: The system check covers standard platform functionality. It does not cover requirements for any 3rd party services that may be integrated into the experience. Verify the domains listed below in the Technical Requirements are not blocked by your personal or corporate network.
Bandwidth
Sufficient bandwidth at each office location is necessary. Estimate total bandwidth required by multiplying the numbers of computers connecting to an event by the above bit rate estimate. If network bandwidth is a concern, we recommend accessing the environment in groups, thereby reducing the total number of individual streams to an office.

Internet Connectivity
A strong, wired broadband connection with a speed of at least 1.4 Mbps. You may view the virtual experience on a slower connection, however, some users may experience load times that are longer than normal with larger content items, such as High Definition video streams.

We recommend:
• A strong Wi-Fi connection or hardwired internet connection is recommended
• Disconnect from VPN or corporate networks.
• Close any unnecessary applications.
• Refrain from browsing the internet, streaming media, and downloading large files during this time.

Work From Home Employees
Connect to the internet using a network cable rather than using a wireless network. If a corporate VPN is used, confirm that the above network traffic is not directed over the VPN. If it is, have users turn off the VPN while attending the event.
Test the Technology
Practice your presentation and use of engagement techniques well in advance to make sure you know how they work. Then test it again. If the equipment or engagement tool does not work, your presentation does not work. Have a backup plan ready in case equipment fails during your presentation. Used properly these tools can really set you apart as a top-notch speaker. However, if you experience a technical hiccup each time you use one of these tools, not only will you be frustrated, your audience may tune out. The AmericanHort education team will work with you to schedule practice and/or recording sessions to help you test the technology.

Test your audio to be sure your sound quality is good. It is often best to use a microphone rather than rely on the microphone built into your laptop, particularly if you are presenting some distance from your computer.

If you are using any audio or video in your presentation, test that in the platform from which you will be presenting to ensure it works and there are no glitches and to be sure your internet speed allows you to play audio or video without buffering.

Another way to test your technology and provide yourself an opportunity to practice is to record your presentation, even if you are delivering in a live format. This recording could prove a helpful backup should you experience a technical glitch the day of your presentation.

Technology Super Tip!
For live presentations, it is recommended to have a minimum bandwidth of 4 Mbps, and an internet speed of 1.4 Mbps. Use www.speedtest.net to test your internet speed.

If there is any chance your Wi-Fi is spotty, or if there is bad weather outside, a direct line into your internet connection is best. If using Wi-Fi locate yourself as close to your router as possible.
Pre-Recording your Presentation

Whether using a high quality or professional video camera, your laptop or computer, or even your smartphone, here are some tips for recording your session with video. Many of these tips are also helpful when giving a live virtual presentation, like being in a quiet place, turning off email and notifications, using a microphone, etc.

Audio

Quality audio is important for a good viewer experience, so focus on quality audio above all else. If possible, find a simple microphone, or use the mic from your headphones. You want to be in a quiet place, free of people, traffic, fans, and other white noise. If recording outside a studio, let others in your home or office know that you are filming to minimize distractions and noise.

Lighting

Whether a live presentation or a recording, have good lighting, using natural light from windows or the sun if possible. Make sure both sides of your face are lit, potentially from two different light sources at different angles. Face the primary light source, like a lamp or a window. Sitting in front of a window or bright light source can create shadows and silhouettes.

Framing

Position yourself in the center of the frame, far enough from the camera to see your upper torso and any natural hand motions while you speak. Make sure your head is not cut off at the top of the frame. Look directly into the camera. Having the camera at eye level is ideal so you speak directly to the audience and not up or down at them. If it is helpful, move the video preview of yourself as close to the camera as possible to avoid glancing away or being sideways when speaking.
**Stabilization**
When presenting or recording, either use a tripod rest your laptop, phone, or camera on a solid surface to avoid shaky footage.

**Filming from a Smartphone**
When using a smart phone, turn your phone horizontally to film so it is like your computer or TV screen. Find a tripod or solid place to rest your phone rather than you or someone else holding it. Turn on airplane mode to prevent pop-ups while filming.

**Before Recording**
Like preparing to present in a live session, you want to test your sound, video, and lighting before recording. Turn off phones, notifications, and other distracting noises. Practice what you would like to say a few times to keep it clear and concise. Follow the suggestions on what to wear such as solid colors, so you come across well on camera.

**Location**
You want to sit in front of a plain wall with a simple background. Place yourself a distance from the camera that you can be seen from the chest or torso up. You want to fill most of your frame and not be too far away from the camera.

**Recording**
One advantage of pre-recordings sessions is you can edit pieces together. Allow yourself to pause while talking, particularly between thoughts. If you trip over your words, take a breath, and start again. These pauses are much easier to edit later. You do not need to film to film everything in one take.

[Click Here to download a copy of AmericanHort’s Video Filming Tips & Tricks]
Promoting Your Conference Participation and Presentation

You are welcome and encouraged to promote your participation in *Cultivate’20 Virtual*. There are several ways you might do this if you so choose. Suggestions include:

- Add a message to your email signature line or use the provided logo.
- If you have a blog or newsletter, mention your upcoming talk.
- Add the **Proud Speaker** or event logo to your website.
- Post about your upcoming talk on your social media platforms – include the title of your talk and tag the event. Post about it again the day of your event and include a photo of your setup or notes.

Check out the **Speaker Marketing Tool Kit** for downloadable and customizable assets to promote your session at *Cultivate’20 Virtual*.

- event logo
- speaker signature logo
- social media post templates
- PPT presentation template

**Click Here**

**Use #Cultivate20Virtual and tag AmericanHort when you post on social media about your session.**

@AmericanHort  @youramericanhort  @American_Hort  @AmericanHort
Participating in a Hybrid Program

In a Hybrid Program, the main presentation is typically recorded in advance and then shown at a scheduled date and time. The recorded program is then followed up by live Q&A. Depending on the audience size, the Q&A may be conducted in a webinar with you are live on screen, or it may be conducted through an online chat room.

You will record your session prior to **Cultivate'20 Virtual** so it can be edited. A live portion, such as the Q&A, will take place when the event is live. Work with the AmericanHort team to determine whether you want to wear the same attire for the recording and live session. You will want to be in the same environment with the same background and lighting so that is an easy and seamless transition for the viewer from the recorded to live program.

Login in advance of your designated Q&A start time so that you are prepared when the session transfers from recording to “live” discussion for a seamless transition. Many viewers may not even realize the first portion was pre-recorded.
Participating in a Virtual Panel Discussion

- Participate in a **dry run** of the program to ensure your audio and video are working properly, particularly with the platform that is being used for the event.
- Have **earbuds or a microphone** ready in case there is audio feedback.
- **Sit close** to your camera and microphone.
- Make sure you have **adequate lighting**.
- **Look directly in the camera** so it is like you are looking directly at an in-person audience.
- Know how to **mute and unmute yourself**. Put yourself on mute when others are speaking and unmute when it is your turn to speak or when you want to add a comment.
- **Be mindful of your background** and remove any distracting elements.
- **Learn the platform capabilities** (i.e. the chat box in case you’d like to participate in conversation).
- Plan to **login in advance** to make sure everything is functioning properly.
- Make sure the moderator and event organizers have your **cell phone number** in case there are any glitches and they need to reach you.
- The panel moderator will have questions **prepared in advance** and will ask the audience to pose questions for the panelists in the online chat or Q&A box.
- To guide the flow of the conversation and help from panelists all responding at once, the **moderator will direct questions** to the panel members.
- AmericanHort will have someone monitoring the chat box and to pull out questions.
- The moderator should **instruct the audience at the start** of the session on how and when you plan to address questions to set expectations for the session structure.
- Be prepared for **final thoughts** on the topic being discussed, as this is a common way to end a panel discussion.
The Day of Your Presentation

It is the big day! Even the most expert of speakers will want to be sure to get plenty of rest the night before a virtual presentation. Read through your notes and presentation, make sure you know when you are using an engagement tool, and know how that tool works.

Participate from somewhere you will not be interrupted. If presenting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone, turn off your email and any other programs that send you notifications so that do not interrupt you and distract your audience.

For live virtual presentations, panel discussions, or hybrid events where you will participate in Q&A discussion, plan to log in at least 15 minutes in advance.

Position yourself in front of a plain wall with lighting coming from the front of you.

Technology Super Tip!

If you are presenting live, set up another computer, tablet, or device and login as an attendee so that you can see what your audience is experiencing.

This will alert you if there are any technical glitches taking place so you can address and rectify them more quickly. But make sure to hit mute so the audio won’t be picked up on stream!
What to Wear

Here are some considerations on what to wear so you look best on a virtual screen:

- Wear pastel colors rather than bright colors as the softer colors broadcast better.
- Avoid striped, checked, or patterned clothing.
- Wear a conservative outfit that does not draw attention away from your face.
- Make sure your clothes contrast with your background colors.
- This is an opportunity to wear logo’d attire and promote your company or organization.
- Use a solid-color background. Remove objects from the background that may distract your audience, such as pictures, posters, and so on.

Ways to connect with your virtual audience:

- Get your face on video so everyone can see you.
- Look straight into the camera so you look like you are across the table from your audience.
- Stand up while presenting – you will come across more confident and project better.
- Use the word “YOU” as if you are speaking to one person.
- Use variability in your voice to keep your audience tuned in.
- Call attendees out by name, even if they are muted.
- Have someone in the room with you to look at so you feel like you have an audience.

For more casual networking gatherings, you might:

- Have fun – tell a joke, ask everyone to show what they are drinking, or wear a fun hat – this helps break the ice and get your viewers engaged in listening to you.
- Welcome kids and pets – many people may be participating from home, so let them know it is ok if their screen get photo bombed by a kid, co-worker, or pet.
Post-Event Practices

After your presentation is over you are welcome to follow up on your own with participants in your session by sending them an e-mail recap, your slides, or your presentation outline, as well as the name of any books or resources you mentioned during your talk.

If you are looking to expand your network, check out the virtual networking lounge where you can interact with event attendees and participate in any of the virtual conference social networking opportunities.

After your event is a great time to post about your presentation in social media. You might take a screen shot of your audience gallery if their video is on during your talk. You might take photos of your set up before you get started to share in social media to provide a behind the scenes look and opportunity for your audience to get to know you better.

Conclusion

We hope the information in this guide helps you give an engaging, educational, and entertaining presentation. Thank you for taking the time to make the shift in presentation preparation to make the Cultivate’20 Virtual conference a great experience for everyone. If you still have questions, please reach out to the AmericanHort education team for assistance.
Appendix

Here are some additional resources for Zoom.

Click on these links to use these resources.

🌟 ZOOM Tutorial Videos
ZOOM Download Center - includes browser extensions for Chrome and Firefox; mobile apps for Apple and Android platforms; and plugins for Outlook, and more.
  ZOOM download for Windows
  How to install Zoom on a Mac
This guide is provided to help you transition from delivering a presentation at an in-person live event to an online virtual format. The AmericanHort education team and staff are available to assist you with this transition.

Sources:
https://learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/2252/three-key-differences-between-in-person-and-virtual-teaching
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