There's a misconception that an online workshop is the same as a face-to-face workshop. It's not. Virtual conversations are hard work. The screen is a barrier that makes active listening more challenging. Internet quality and the boundary of the screen itself mean you lose many non-verbal prompts. That said, online platforms also offer workshop participants some advantages.

Here are our tips to help you prepare for a virtual assessment workshop.

Get the basics right.

- **Do a dry run** – If you've never used the Zoom platform before, download the app the day before, get online and test it out. See how you look and sound, and the mannerisms you use when talking.
  - [Download the Zoom app to your computer](#)
  - [How to join a Zoom meeting](#)
  - [Join a test meeting to explore Zoom for yourself](#)
- **Choose a professional background** – Check out what's in your background. It needs to be clean, tidy, and business-like, with good lighting. If in doubt, use one of the neutral backgrounds offered by the platform. A cluttered and messy background is a distraction, and also may give the impression this is also how you approach your professional life.
- **Put your camera just above your eye line** – Everyone looks better filmed slightly from above rather than from below.
- **Organise quiet time** – If you have children, dogs, or tradespeople at your end, make sure you have someone else at home to deal with them and maintain a quiet space for your workshop. Allocate more than the required time, you don't want to be 'rushing' before the workshop.
- **Use your laptop indoors** – Don't sit outside. The connection may be erratic, patchy and your facilitator will be distracted by the sound of the wind and passers-by.
- **Dress for your workshop** – Choose clothes appropriately and what you would expect to wear at work if you were in the office. Minimise visual distractions like dangly earrings or prominent logos.
- **Dial-in early** – Even if you're used to the format, don't assume you can dial in one minute before your workshop. Broadband can be patchy, and laptops may need to reboot. Get in 15 minutes early to check your connection, video, and sound. And also allow you some calm time before the workshop actually starts.
- **Turn your phone off** – If that's not possible, address this upfront: "My apologies, I may have to leave my phone on as I'm waiting for an urgent call from my son/ daughter".
- **Minimise visual distractions** – If you have a second screen, shut down your email program so you won't look when a new email floats in or a text comes through on your phone. Remember: pay attention to your facilitator, as unnecessary distractions will interrupt your 'flow' or clarity and response to workshop activities.

Adjust for online conversation.

- **Be careful with your body language** – Sit up straight, avoid fidgeting, and keep your gestures to a minimum. Normal gestures often go outside the screen and, if you move your hands too close to the camera, they will appear huge! Practice before the workshop so you can see what works.
- **Keep acknowledgment non-verbal** – Face to face we often acknowledge understanding or agreement by saying "yes" or "true" as others are talking. Online, that will simply interrupt your facilitator. Instead, nod or smile to show your reaction.
- **Watch for your turn to talk** – This happens a lot on video calls. Online time delays make it much harder to gauge when your facilitator expects you to respond. If you think they've finished, wait another few seconds before responding. Try not to leap in early and talk over your facilitator.
- **Don't be afraid of silence** – Pace yourself, be comfortable with pauses, which also are useful when making strong contributions during the workshop activities.
- **Practice active listening** – It's easy to be distracted online and misinterpret what your facilitator is saying. A big advantage of an online workshop is you can write down potential thoughts and ideas to contribute during the workshop. You will be able to share these with the facilitator and other workshop participants.
- **Don't eat or drink** – No one wants to hear you eating or drinking on a video session. It's just a distraction, and just as likely to end up spilling onto your keyboard. Keep a glass of water handy and out of sight just in case but slurping a large coffee or eating food whilst participating in the workshop may not give the best possible first impression.

Technical challenges

- **Poor internet** – If your connection in your area is poor, warn your facilitator upfront, and be prepared to turn off your video to support a stronger audio connection. Don't soldier on with screen freezes, flickering and poor audio.
- **Have at least one backup** – Load the Zoom platform onto your phone and tablet in case your laptop dies so you can quickly get back into the meeting.

Finally, remember, virtual workshops are new for everyone, so don't worry if the process seems a bit clunky or awkward. Just like any other workshop, relax, and try to enjoy the process. And who knows? If your dog happens to make an impromptu guest appearance it may be a welcome ice breaker!

Good luck!

Maturious Team