

Tips and Tricks For Classroom Virtual Field Trips



Learn the videoconferencing system

It is important to feel comfortable with the videoconferencing system, so take time to experiment and practice with the videoconferencing system before you conference until it becomes second nature to operate. If you have student volunteers that are interested in learning the system, solicit their help. The goal is for the system to appear as transparent as possible so you and the students can focus on learning.

What to do during a videoconference

- Begin on time. In a small group, introduce all participants.
- Encourage students to ask questions.
- In a multi-point conference keep your microphone muted when no one at that site is speaking.
- Use camera presets to change the camera position easily to student speaking.

Microphone use

The microphone can magnify sounds that are normal for a meeting. Be aware of the microphone placement and be careful not to put papers or other objects on them. Avoid rustling papers or tapping on the microphone or table. Charm bracelets, bangle bracelets, and long necklaces can be noisy. Eating might not be appropriate. Listen for other environmental noise such as fans, open windows, pens clicking, and papers shuffling that might disturb your audio quality.

Maintain appropriate on-camera positioning

You can use the remote control unit to preset different views of your students. Using group shots of 2-3 will help the students feel more comfortable on screen than an individual shot. Follow the elbows and wrists rule: when you stretch out your arms, the edge of the screen falls between your elbows and wrists. Ten percent of the picture area should be left above the heads. Try to fill the screen as much as possible with people rather than the table, chairs, walls, floor, or ceiling. Especially avoid having the ceiling lights on the screen. Use close-ups shots judiciously. It is important that participants see you or another speaker's facial expressions, but remember that the camera is very sensitive to movement and will exaggerate blinking eyes, moving hands, or shifting in chairs. The compressed video system cannot transmit rapid movements without some loss of picture quality, so move in a fluid, non-distracting way. Move and gesture normally, but avoid swaying, rocking or pacing. If you like to walk around, go ahead, but make sure you know the parameters of the camera range. You can tape off your spot so you know exactly how far you can go.

Speak in a strong, clear voice

As you begin the videoconference, ask the other site(s) if they can hear and see you. Have them introduce themselves to be sure you can hear them. Because of the one second audio delay, use a brief pause between speakers to assure the full audio signal has been transmitted. Two people cannot speak at the same time, and you should avoid interrupting other speakers. Also use a pause to allow time for others to answer or make comments. Use your normal voice, but note that it does help to speak more slowly, especially with a strong accent. Take advantage of the system to communicate naturally, using tone inflection and body language. As with any meeting, try to limit side conversations.

Be yourself! Speak naturally and think of the participants at the other sites as being across the table from you.