

Engaging your audience: onsite and online

AASPE Professional Development – August 4, 2020

What piece of advice would you give someone on instructing pesticide training online?

Technology

- Make sure your connection is good!
- Don't take away their power of the mute button so they feel they really can participate beyond the chat or Q/A box.
- Expect technical issues; have a tech person attending who can handle the few folks who are having difficulty getting on / controlling the mute button / who keep their video on by accident.
- For break times – have a background music playing – to let the participants know that they are still connected and that it's still break time.
- Assume a technical glitch will happen. Plan ahead as much as possible.
- Start planning early and ask others with experience. Learn "what NOT to do"!
- Be patient and tell folks in advance to be patient. Plan for it taking longer to get each speaker started. Be prepared for something technology wise not to work and have a person in charge. For example: the speaker's face doesn't show up with their slides, interrupt and get their camera going, the sound isn't working, get on it immediately and if need be move on rearrange....finally mute everyone.
- If attendance is mandatory – have only one of the session 'presenters' in charge of admitting participants so that an attendance roster can be kept by only them.

Presentations/Teaching

- Set some ground rules up front so the trainees know what to expect with this new online format.
- Advertise your "online office hours" and preferred communication formats will give a reassuring presence to stave off frustrations especially useful for the newbie in the online environment. For example, I can be reach from 8 am - noon and 7 pm to 9 pm, by email, course platform chat, phone, text.
- Be engaging with the audience.
- It is ok to add humor to your presentation, but never be humorous about the serious task of safe use of these products, or of reading and following the entire label.
- Figure out how to keep the audience engaged in a meaningful way.
- Have voiceover vs. silence
- Have knowledge checks/quiz questions to keep folks engaged
- Videos as well as still photos and bullet points
- There is always more to the person's story of using pesticides - allow participants to reflect and tell their stories.

- Include some real-life situations that are not on my slides – I want the student to stay with me as I talk and not read ahead and miss the point of the illustration
- Be a bit more animated, modulate your tone more, than you would in person so you don't seem so stagnant.
- Have something engaging- use any tool that can allow people to interact with your presentation or talk to one another.
- Keep presentations and material in smaller chunks than you would in classroom settings.
- Tell people up front you are going to do your best to keep them engaged in the training with different interactive techniques.
- Have a small, short power point that runs itself that covers the basics of controlling the online program (Zoom/TEAMS, etc.) – each one is a bit different and needs a little familiarization. They are not always intuitive.
- Give periodic short quizzes, such as a Microsoft “forms” quiz (requiring prompt response) – to make sure that folks are not just leaving their connection on and walking away [this is in the event that credit or recertification is given from their attendance]
- Have a mix of both presentations (live) and also some premade training videos – to mix things up a bit.
- Always write a script beforehand and practice it, practice it, practice it so that it doesn't sound like you are reading it. You can easily cover everything you intend to cover.
- When presenting a training to fit a fixed time, I have found that keeping the presentation segments to a maximum of 20 minutes (best length for attention span) and manuscripting the presentation/using with a teleprompter or similar setup helps me keep to the set presentation length. I especially use these practices when videotaping for online training.
- For synchronous training, be prepared to work harder at engaging your audience than an in-person training. Depending on whether or not you have a video feed to monitor, you won't have the typical body language to alter the training or sense whether or not there's a need to tweak the delivery or engage the learners more.
- For asynchronous online training, plan to spend 3-4 times the normal preparation time for this type of training. (This assumes the training is prepared ahead of time and not just an edited video of a presenter that's posted online.) Ideally, the presentations should be scripted to provide good flow and clarity of the information. Writing a script takes time if you're not used to doing it!
- Online is not the same as live. You must move slides more often and let the computer screen tell the story. Live allows YOU to tell them the story, online it's the screen. Keep them always looking because it is always changing.
- Use inflection in your voice!
- Go for shorter length programs. Don't try to do it the same way as a live program, especially if it's an all-day live program.
- Keep the training segments shorter. Our 2+2 Pesticide Update webinars have been somewhat successful. That is 2 credits (1 hour) core and 2 credits (1 hour) category for a complete 2 hour session. Also, be flexible with timing of the events. Look to offer when people are available. We often record the events and leave them online for a period of time, for instance one week. This allows people that registered to view if they can't make the live session.

- Keep it engaging. People do not want to sit through power-points for the full hour. Ask engaging questions and if at all possible break the audience into small groups and let them work on answering those questions as a group.