
Effective Presentation in the Distance Learning Classroom

With excerpts from a Myers Group Training Workshop

As relatively new tools in secondary education, distance learning technologies have introduced new issues and considerations into the classroom. For instance, teachers may rarely see a majority of their students in person. Instead, these students may be across town, in another community or in another part of the state. The teacher and students at the other (remote) site relate to each other regularly only with television cameras and monitors. The chalkboard is replaced by a variety of multimedia instructional tools that may include an Elmo (document camera), VCR and computer to transmit text, graphics and other images as well as sound to the other sites.

This is not to say that this electronic environment and traditional face-to-face classrooms have little in common, but rather to recognize that the dissimilarities merit close attention by both teachers and students in order to use the technology effectively. In fact many of the suggestions and techniques presented here apply as readily to traditional classroom instruction as to distance learning. The need for careful planning, structure, and interactivity, however, is underscored significantly in the distance learning classroom.

Presentation Techniques

Recognizing that every experienced teacher has a delivery style and habits that have proved to be successful, the topics discussed in this section are designed to promote a new awareness and prompt some modifications to practices, delivery styles, and techniques so that students at other sites, who do not have the luxury of being in the same room as the teacher, are not thereby unnecessarily disadvantaged.

Active Participation

Remote students may need more encouragement than students in your own room to participate in discussions. They may require special attention to compensate for the inherent passiveness produced by staring at the monitor. The solution may be as simple as soliciting their interaction more often, especially in the early stages of a course. Encourage students to identify themselves when they speak (e.g. “This is Jill in Middleburgh, and I think...”). This is particularly important when there is more than one remote site, when the classes are large or when there are large gaps between speaking instances.

Balanced Attention

In an attempt to address remote-site needs, instructors have been known to overcompensate and overlook students sitting in front of them. This tendency occurs more often early in a class or in the first few sessions of a course. More common is the complaint that the teacher tended to favor the host site and pay little attention to the remote students. This may have much to do with perception and eye contact.

Eye Contact

Look at the camera lens to communicate with your students at the remote sites. Doing this will give them a sense of personal contact and inclusion with your site. Adjusting the camera to show a close-up of yourself or of individual students is a good technique to foster a unified learning environment. **While in the majority of distance learning classrooms the monitors are positioned close the camera lens, it is not always the case. True eye contact with your remote sites comes when you look into the lens, not at the monitors.** This is not to say that you should be staring into the lens any more than you stare into the eyes of the students in your own classroom. It will help to keep in mind however, that an occasional look directly into the lens while you are framed in a close shot addressing a remote student, can very effectively make her or him feel that you are connected and concerned. This is especially true if you address them by name while looking into the lens.

Seating

The way the students are grouped at the host and remote sites will determine how close or wide the shots will need to be in order to **cover** them all. **It is very important to have the students sit closely together, without empty seats or rows between them.** Establishing seating assignments, using name cards with large readable lettering and creating a seating chart are all techniques that have proven helpful during the first few sessions. When addressing your students, especially at the remote sites, if you refer to them by name, it can help give them a stronger feeling of belonging to your class.

Presets

Spend a few minutes before the session begins programming important **camera position presets** on the touch screen. Common presets include one-person **close-ups** for you and students and **medium shots** that show two or three students at a time as well as a **cover-shot** that is **just wide enough** to see all the students at a site. Properly established student and teacher camera presets can be very helpful when you are learning to connect students' faces with names.

Know When Your Session Is About To End

The network sessions end abruptly, often switching to another configuration of schools in a session that follows immediately. The network clock can also be off by a few minutes. It can help your remote sites feel more connected if you can be aware of the approaching end of a class and bring it to a conclusion before they and you are abruptly disconnected.

Fonts & Image Size

If you are producing notes that you want to display using the Elmo, it is best to use a large crisp font.

This font is Arial 26 point. Other fonts may work as well as...or better, but the most important thing to keep in mind is that the type should be large.

Landscape format

Limiting your page length and keeping your typed or handwritten notes in a **landscape format** (the proportions of the camera / monitor frame) can help you avoid the need to be constantly moving the page upward.



It is strongly recommended that you avoid the use of fine point pens or pencils when using the elmo.

Medium or Thick point markers such as **Vis-a-Vis** are much more camera friendly and readable by students in the middle and rear of the classroom. They also add color and visual interest to your presentations.

Felt markers bleed

Keep in mind that felt tip markers tend to bleed through the paper. Please use a template or blotter pad under your marker paper to keep the stage area of the Elmo clean.

Look at your monitor in the back of the room

Students will have a much easier time understanding your notes and displays if your text and images are large and fill a landscape format. Keep in mind that not all schools have the same size monitors or projection screens. A normal size monitor, 30 inches or less, when viewed from the back of a classroom is much different than a 15 foot video projection screen.