

LEVELING UP YOUR PRESENTATION STYLE: A GUIDE FOR INSTRUCTORS

COMMANDING PRESENCE & VOICE PROJECTION

- ☐ Stand in a place where everyone can see and hear you—avoid hiding behind a podium.
- ☐ Project your voice to the furthest participant. If someone asks, “Can you repeat that?” it likely means volume could be improved. Also consider if there are vending machines, HVAC units, or other noise distractions in the environment that need to be managed.
- ☐ Use open body language (no crossing arms, hands out of pockets) to appear confident.



ASKING QUESTIONS & ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE

- ☐ Avoid leading questions that suggest the answer (e.g., “Salt use is a big issue, right?”). Instead, ask, “What challenges do you face with salt use?”
- ☐ If there are no responses or students appear confused, rephrase the question.
- ☐ Give students time to answer. The “PAUSE” technique: Ask the question, wait at least 3-5 seconds before saying anything else. No answers? Redirect them to partner dialogue to brainstorm an answer.
- ☐ It’s normal to feel the urge to answer your own question but good instructors practice the pause, and learn to have patience. Answering your own question results in students “learning” to hesitate or remain silent during answering with the learned expectation that you will answer it yourself. The longer you wait for their response, the more learners will have time to formulate their own responses, and you will likely receive more complex or valuable answers to further dialogue.



REDUCING FILLER WORDS

- ☐ Filler words reduce the impact of what you’re saying—replace them with short pauses.
- ☐ Practice slowing down. Many fillers happen when we’re thinking ahead too quickly.
- ☐ Practice your presentation, and if you notice frequent filler words, adjust your content to feel more natural and familiar—without relying on a script.
- ☐ If needed, record yourself teaching to identify filler word patterns.

KEEPING ENERGY & ENGAGEMENT HIGH

- ☐ Move with purpose—a little movement keeps energy up, but pacing back and forth can be distracting.
- ☐ Vary tone & emphasis—a monotone delivery makes even the best content less engaging.
- ☐ Engage with the group—ask for input, use small activities, and watch for engagement cues (e.g., students leaning in vs. looking at their phones, holding head in hands and looking down, eyes closed).



MANAGING BREAKS EFFECTIVELY

- ☐ Set clear expectations for how long breaks will be and when participants need to return. Use a timer or give a verbal “2-minute warning” to help keep things on track.
- ☐ Avoid getting pulled into lengthy one-on-one discussions during breaks—if someone asks an in-depth question, let them know you’d love to follow up after the session or open it to the group if relevant.
- ☐ Use a strong cue to bring people back together, such as flicking the lights, playing music that stops when it’s time to return, or simply stating, “*Alright, let’s regroup!*” and moving physically toward the front of the room.
- ☐ Resume immediately when the break ends—this signals that time management is important and encourages participants to return promptly in future breaks.

MANAGING SIDE CONVERSATIONS & DISRUPTIONS

Monitoring for Side Conversations

- ☐ Be situationally aware—look for clusters of conversation rather than assuming all eyes on you means full engagement.
- ☐ Watch body language—if multiple people are glancing at one area, it may indicate a disruptive sidebar.
- ☐ Listen for shifts in attention—if a hum of conversation starts growing, it may signal disengagement.

Proactively Setting Expectations

- ☐ Before the session starts, set the tone for respectful engagement by:
- ☐ Stating “We’re all here to learn together, so let’s keep discussions open and inclusive.”
- ☐ Introducing the parking lot method—a visible space (whiteboard, sticky notes, flipchart) where off-topic questions or side discussions can be noted for later follow-up rather than derailing the session.
- ☐ Encouraging learners to speak to the group rather than just to their neighbor, reinforcing that valuable contributions should be shared.

Re-engaging Learners & Addressing Sidebars

If a side conversation starts during the session, address it without embarrassing anyone:

- ☐ Move closer to the group—Standing next to a sidebar conversation is often enough to quiet it down without needing to call it out directly.
- ☐ Assess whether the conversation is relevant:
 - If it’s relevant, invite them to share: *“Sounds like you’re talking about something related—do you want to bring that into the discussion?”*
 - If it’s off-topic, gently redirect: *“Let’s bring it back to the main discussion—feel free to jot that down in the parking lot so we can touch on it later.”*
- ☐ Use eye contact and strategic pauses—If a sidebar continues, make intentional eye contact with the participants involved and pause briefly. The silence often signals that it’s time to refocus attention.
- ☐ Directly acknowledge without confrontation—If necessary, say: *“I want to make sure everyone can stay engaged—let’s keep the discussion open so all can participate.”*
- ☐ Use humor strategically (if appropriate)—Sometimes, a lighthearted approach can re-engage without conflict: *“Sounds like a great side conversation—but I’m feeling left out!”*

Reinforcing Engagement Without Losing Momentum

When bringing attention back, immediately transition into an engaging question or activity to refocus the entire room.

If sidebars become frequent, reassess your session dynamics:

- ☐ Are participants getting enough opportunities for discussion in the main session?
- ☐ Is unclear instruction leading to whispered clarifications?
- ☐ Is the pace too slow or too fast, leading to disengagement?

Final Thought: Managing side conversations is *not about shutting down participation* but redirecting it into meaningful group engagement. By setting clear expectations, staying aware, and addressing sidebars effectively, instructors foster a more productive, respectful learning environment for all.

EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING ADULT LEARNERS

Think-Pair-Share

- Think: Pose a question and allow individual thinking time.
- Pair: Have students discuss their thoughts with a partner.
- Share: Invite pairs to share their ideas with the group.



Pausing for Responses

After asking a question, wait at least 5-10 seconds before speaking again.

- Count silently to ensure adequate wait time. This prevents answering your own question too soon.
- If after a pause there are no answers volunteered, ask the room to turn to their neighbor/group and chat for one minute about the question, and then ask it again.

Open-Ended Questions

Use questions that require detailed answers rather than yes/no responses, and don't prompt the answer.

- Encourage explanations and elaborations by asking "*How?*" "*Why?*" "*What do you think?*"
- Follow up with: "*Can you explain more?*" or "*What makes you say that?*"

Avoid Prompting the Answer

Ask questions without giving hints or leading phrases that suggest the answer.

- Example to avoid: "*What do you think about pre-treating roads with brine? It's pretty effective, right?*"
- Instead, ask: "*What's your experience with pre-treating roads?*" and allow students to generate responses independently.

Encouraging Participation

If no immediate response:

- Ask students to discuss with a neighbor or in small groups to generate ideas, then ask the question again and invite a group or pair to share what they discussed.
- Offer a different way to engage: "*Take a moment to jot down a few thoughts before sharing.*"
- Acknowledge all contributions:
- Even a partial answer can be reinforced with "*That's a great start! Who can add to that?*"

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