

Student Guide to DE/Videoconferencing

As you progress through your course work at the University of Wisconsin you will see the use of videoconferencing as a technology for distance education become more common.

Videoconferencing (a.k.a. Interactive Television or 2-way video) makes it possible to link two (or more) electronic classrooms that may be hundreds of miles apart and create one classroom environment.

When you walk into the class, you will see cameras, television monitors and microphones. All this technology allows everyone in one location to see and hear everyone in the other location (or locations).

Why are we using videoconferencing? For classes, the system makes it possible for students on other campuses to take courses not available on their home campuses. For conferences and meetings, the use of this system saves both travel time and expense.

The Purpose of this Guide. There are some ways in which videoconferencing is different from the classroom situations to which we are most accustomed. This guide will give you a handful of guidelines that will make your videoconferencing experience more productive and pleasurable.

Ground Rules for the classroom:

Be on time. The system that controls the routing of signals between campuses and classrooms is computer controlled. A class will start and end on time. If the class does not end on time there is a good chance that the connection will be broken anyway since the computer is pre-programmed. We recommend that you arrive a little early for your class. If the technical set-up proceeds, the class is trouble free, then you may have time before class to talk with the instructor or students at the distant sites.

Sit near the Microphones. The microphones in front of you are designed to be voice activated. They switch on when someone talks, but they can also be activated by random noise. The rustling of papers, zipping bags and whispering are examples of sounds that may switch on and be "picked up" by the microphones. Be careful not to make unnecessary noise, and of course do not set books, papers, or other articles over the microphones.

When speaking in class, face forward and talk normally. It is not necessary to lean forward but avoid leaning back or slouching away from the microphones. The audio system in the classroom is not a public address system, so to make yourself heard by the other people in the room with you, project yourself, as you would in a normal classroom.

If you are in a room in which the microphones are not attached to the tables, do not move microphones by picking them up or turning them around. Sliding one closer to you along the table is okay. If the room has push-to-talk microphones, you need to press and hold the button the entire time you are talking. Speak directly into the microphone.

Be Assertive. It has been recommended to your instructors that they establish some type of protocol that allows you to interrupt and get his or her attention. Feel free to interrupt the instructor if you cannot hear or see what is happening. If more than two sites are connected the instructor may not be able to see you to know that you have a question or that you are confused. When you ask a question or interrupt the instructor it is best to state your name and your site location. For instance, "Dr. Smith, this is Mike Jones in River Falls and I have a question." Also you need to let the instructors know if they are talking too fast

or if the type on the supporting graphics is too small or hard to see.

Camera Control. Sometimes the instructor may control the camera switching from the front of the room. In some classrooms there may be an assistant/helper or an operator assigned to manage the cameras. Or the cameras may be automatic, moving as someone speaks. In what ever case, if there is a problem with sound or picture you will need to contact the operator about it. If there is no operator/teacher in the room, you will be given instructions on how to contact an operator technician. The problem may be something easy to fix if the right person is made aware of the problem.

You need to participate. This system is called interactive, and you are expected to participate in the experience. In order to make your participation easier you should know that there might be a delay between the time you ask or answer a question and the time that the next person will speak. This delay is a characteristic of the videoconferencing system and is caused by the time it takes for the equipment to code and compress video and audio information and send it back and forth between sites.

Usually we expect a delay of two or three seconds, so do not worry if the response is a little slower than you expect. The reason for the delay could also be "deep thought."

Feedback. Your instructor(s) may ask how things are going in relation to your general distance learning experience or specifically regarding a certain issue or problem. Don't be shy! Providing feedback and input will improve your experience and make the process easier for future students.

Other Concerns You May Have:

Assignments. Since more than one site may be connected for a given course, label all you work with your site, course title and your name, so that you will get credit for your work and will get your work back.

Instructor Contact. Remember that usually, you will not be able to stay after class to confer with the instructor. If your question has to do with individual grading decisions, approval for a topic for a paper, or other individual matters, you should contact your instructor outside of class time. Usually the hours and method of communication with the instructor are published in the course syllabus.

Serving as an Assistant. As in a conventional classroom, you may be asked to help the instructor by collecting assignments at your site or handing our materials. Your help will be appreciated.

*This Guide was Developed by the Instructional Communications Systems
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