



Presentations



How to Nail a Hybrid Presentation

by Sarah Gershman and Rae Ringel

How to Nail a Hybrid Presentation

by Sarah Gershman and Rae Ringel

Published on HBR.org / May 05, 2021 / Reprint [H06C2R](#)



Giada Canu/ Stocksy

We recently spoke to a CEO who was feeling anxious about public speaking in the hybrid office. “When I give presentations now, it’s simple. Everyone’s on Zoom,” he told us. “What happens when some people go back while others still work from home?”

His anxiety makes sense. While Zoom presentations are far from ideal, at least the audience is on an equal playing field. Literally, the boxes on the screen are the exact same dimensions. Hybrid presentations, on the other hand, run the risk of putting remote participants at a serious

disadvantage. A major reason has to do with the energy created when we are physically together — and the energy that is missing when we're not. We derive our shared energy in part from the nonverbal cues that happen when we are together in the room. The knowing glances, the facial expressions, the personal eye contact are all part of what makes conversation flow more naturally. This is tangibly absent online, and the lack of shared energy among remote participants can be enervating (hence one of the factors of Zoom fatigue).

Corporate leaders looking to make hybrid presentations more inclusive, energetic, and successful can look to the classroom for guidance. During the early days of the pandemic and lockdowns, we worked with a number of teachers and educators looking to improve their on-screen speaking skills and presence. This academic year, as some kids returned to school, we've seen some remarkable teachers master the challenge of teaching effectively to hybrid classrooms.

We recently had the privilege of witnessing one of them in action. This 7th grade teacher from Bethesda was teaching poetry to a hybrid class. We were immediately struck by his energy. His body was in constant motion, and his eyes seamlessly moved from the screen back to the faces in the room. He also encouraged the kids to move — asking for raised hands or having the remote kids stand up to read. Even more importantly, he assigned small working groups where remote and on-screen kids worked together. Despite being hybrid, the class was one.

Below are seven strategies for presenters and meeting leaders to more effectively engage everyone in their hybrid audience:

1. Focus on the positive.

Rather than focus on the liabilities of the hybrid meeting, focus on the value each person can bring. Ask yourself how both the remote

and in-person participants can benefit from hearing your presentation. And how could the entire experience be enriched by having a hybrid audience? A positive mindset will help you make each person essential to the presentation. Moreover, that mindset is contagious. The presenter sets the tone for the entire experience. If the presenter believes and expresses excitement about the hybrid experience, this will positively influence the experience of the audience.

2. Require cameras to be on.

In hybrid meetings, it is more important than ever that remote participants turn their cameras on in order to show their full presence. It is also critical that the presenter be able to engage visually with the entire audience, not just with those in the room.

To level the playing field even further, consider asking in-person participants to bring their laptops and turn their cameras on, keeping themselves on mute when not talking. It can also be helpful to have a screen in front of the room so that remote participants can be seen by everyone.

3. Make direct eye contact.

Begin your presentation by first looking deliberately and directly at the camera. This sends the whole group a message that the people on Zoom are critical. Try to focus on the camera as if you were making contact with one person. Then throughout the presentation, continue to switch between looking at individuals in the room to returning your focus back to the camera.

4. Move around to include everyone.

When your presentation begins, move towards the camera to help remote participants feel connected to what is happening in the room.

As you continue speaking, move purposefully towards the people in the room and then back again towards the camera. But be sure to keep the camera frame in mind. You don't want to venture too far out of the shot. This back-and-forth movement communicates greater inclusivity and makes participants both in and out of the room feel more connected to each other.

Also consider spotlighting. If someone in the room is speaking, lift the camera (laptop) and move it closer to the speaker (if they didn't bring their own). This reminds the people in the room that their remote colleagues are part of the room.

5. Emotionally engage remote participants.

The hybrid model need not be a passive experience for those who are dialing in. It is critical to help them feel heard and seen. Greet virtual participants personally at the beginning of the session. And continue to address and engage them throughout the presentation. This is easier said than done. Presenters may have the best of intentions, but their attention is naturally drawn towards people in the room. Designate specific times in the presentation to speak directly to the remote participants, and build into the content messages that are directed specifically towards individuals dialing in.

6. Foster hybrid collaboration.

When dividing a larger presentation into smaller groups, the temptation is to put the in-person and remote people in separate groups. This reinforces the notion that the two are separate groups rather than one group working together. Instead, try mixing it up. Have virtual and in-person participants work together.

7. Keep it short.

Zoom has forced us to waste less time in presentations. When we get back in the room, resist the temptation to speak for longer. Keep hybrid presentations as brief and efficient as possible. Try to time the meeting based on the energy levels of the remote participants. In the end, everyone will appreciate this.

One of the potential advantages of hybrid presentations is that everyone participates from their preferred location. The 7th grade teacher told us that this has created greater equity in his classroom and that his class has been enriched by each student learning from their place of peak performance. This mindset is inspiring — both for his students and for business leaders. As we move into this next era of hybrid presentations, let's follow his example and strive to create an inclusive and energizing environment for each person in the audience.



Sarah Gershman is an executive speech coach and CEO of Green Room Speakers. She is a professor at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University, where she teaches public speaking to leaders from around the globe.



Rae Ringel is the president of [The Ringel Group](#), a leadership development consultancy specializing in facilitation, coaching, and training. She is a faculty member at the Georgetown University Institute for Transformational Leadership and founder of the [Executive Certificate in Facilitation](#) program.