

# Top Tips for Delivering Communication Skills Teaching Online

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# CONSIDERATIONS FOR ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS TEACHING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## Top Tips for Delivering Communication Skills Teaching Online

### Introduction and Background

It is widely acknowledged that face to face teaching using role-play, feedback & re-rehearsal is the gold standard for communication skills teaching but during the Covid-19 pandemic other methods need to be explored and new innovative approaches used.

To help in these challenging times **EACH: International Association of Communication in Healthcare** has put together a series of practical guides aimed at helping teachers of healthcare communication, simulated patients and learners consider the challenges and potential adaptations for online communication skills teaching.

It is recommended that, where possible, these guides are used to supplement online training sessions for facilitators (and Simulated Patients) prior to teaching. The training works well as a 'mock' / practice experiential session where all participants can experience first-hand the likely process, content and structure of a virtual classroom.

We acknowledge that many different virtual meeting applications such as Webex, Microsoft teams, Jitsi etc are available and that choices are often influenced by academic institutions or financial constraints. However, for the purpose of this document we have chosen the 'Zoom' platform, and its associated functions, as our worked example. We use the term teacher as representative of other titles such as facilitator, tutor or lecturer. The term Simulated Patient (SP) is used for actors, medical role-player etc and learner or student to represent the participant receiving the teaching.

If you have any questions or would like to share your own experiences of online teaching, we would love to hear from you: [info@each.eu](mailto:info@each.eu)

## Preparation for Course/Session Directors

### Structuring online teaching

Participating in online sessions for prolonged periods of time demands considerable concentration and can challenge even the keenest teacher or student to remain engaged.

#### **Top Tip:**

When designing your online communication skills teaching pay special attention to time frames. Try to keep your lessons short. For online role-playing sessions of 1.5 – 2 hours has been seen to work best in terms of achieving a good balance between opportunities to role-play and group engagement / concentration.

If you are teaching for longer periods of time recognise the need to factor in regular breaks.

### Optimising group size

Given the time limitations of online learning you will need to review your class size.

Students may not be used to learning via a video platform and may feel inhibited about role-playing in front of a large number of other students. The larger the class the less time there is for individual students to role-play and feedback.

#### **Top Tip:**

Where possible try to aim for a maximum of 5-6 student in any online experiential session.

If you usually work with larger groups, then consider dividing your groups in half and running consecutive sessions (e.g Re configuring a 3 hour face to face teaching session for 12 students into 2 x 90 minute session for 6 students) or use break out rooms to subdivide the large groups into small group trainings .

### Teaching plans

In order to accommodate a shorter time frame for an online session, teaching plans, learning objectives and simulated patient roles may need to be decreased and/or simplified prior to teaching.

#### **Top Tip:**

If you usually have a variety of different simulated patient roles in a given session think about the practicalities of delivering this same range online.

Consider having just one or two roles to offer learner choice but avoid needing to change roles too often in shortened session.

Maximise the time available for role-playing by reducing the amount of theoretical content. This is made possible by students completing the necessary theoretic content beforehand using e-learning, narrated PowerPoint presentations or by analysing videos demonstrating the skills to be practiced in the role-play session.

## Provide a map of resources for learners

Students often rely on their peers or face to face classes to help direct them through expected learning. In times of social distancing these support mechanisms may not be readily available.

### **Top Tip:**

Provide learners with a guide as to what the expected learning outcomes are and direct them to additional resources available to support this.

Provide access to pre-recorded video examples of specific skills which learners can use as a guide. The EACH website has a teaching tools database which may help with this.

## The challenge of different time zones

During periods of social distancing many learners will be working from home and may therefore be in different time zones.

### **Top Tip:**

Information about each learner's location can help the teacher to schedule the most suitable time for teaching and therefore maximise attendance.

If delivering a series of learning events, consideration should be given to varying the class times to give all learners an opportunity to participate.

Think about whether particular components of the teaching can be recorded or made into e-learning packages so learners unable to attend can access the teaching materials at their convenience.

## Review, review, review

This format of teaching is new for most of us so, after the first one or two sessions, take time to ask your students to evaluate the teaching and identify:

- What is working well?
- What might be done differently to enhance your learning experience?

# Facilitator Guide for Running Communication Sessions

## Preparation for the Session

- To ensure that the session is ready to deliver on time it is recommended that both teachers and simulated patients meet online at least 15-20 minutes before the students join. This not only helps to identify any potential technical difficulties but also allows time for briefing the simulated patient and answer any questions about the days learning
- Prior to starting the session, the facilitator should logon to the session in order to test that everything is working well.
- Ensure phones, email notifications and other devices are off/on silent during the class to avoid sound interference
- Reduce background noise wherever possible (Use headphones if available)
- Be aware of background lighting/view – if you can try to provide a nice, plain background and resist the urge to use the range of artificial backgrounds as these can be distracting.

## Initiating the Session & Supplementary Ground Rules for Working Online

### Introductions - What's in a name?

Introductions play an important part in setting the scene for any teaching event, but for online teaching exhaustive introductions may be unnecessary, particularly if your group of learners have met before and already know each other well.

If you have not met before, as a minimum it is important that you introduce yourself and ask the students to introduce themselves to you, using their preferred name. Always have the simulated patient introduce him or herself to the group.

#### **Top Tip: Introductions**

Whilst students are introducing themselves it is helpful to check if their 'video name', displayed at the bottom left of their 'video tile', matches their verbal introduction. If students have signed in using initials or an email address, please invite them to rename themselves so that you can address them correctly throughout and invite them into discussion during the session. This habit not only mirrors good clinical practice but also builds rapport.

*To rename yourself hover over your name, right mouse click and select option to rename. Enter the name you'd like to appear in the class*

### Checking in

Even though time is of a premium, with shorter online sessions, there is value in checking in to see how everyone is doing. This is particularly pertinent given the current situation, impact of Covid-19 and social distancing, where students might be feeling isolated from peers and teachers.

### Top Tip: Building Rapport

Engaging learners and building rapport by encouraging each student to have a 'voice' can significantly impact on their willingness & ability to participate in the remainder of the session.

### Ground rules

The ground rules for face to face communication skills training are well established and include important considerations such as confidentiality, respect, participation and the principles of constructive feedback. In considering online communication skills teaching these same ground rules still apply, but some additional items should be added.

### Top Tip: Additional items for discussion under ground rules

- All video cameras should be on during group discussion so that the teacher can see all members of the group, noting who wants to speak and how others are reacting to discussion (non-verbal cues).
- Unlike in online meetings all microphones should be unmuted to encourage spontaneous group interactions & dialogue. The simple act of having to unmute oneself can sometimes be a barrier to engagement in learning groups.  
*If learners are experiencing background noise then they may like to have their microphone on mute and just hold down the space bar to join the discussion*
- Students should be viewing the class in **Gallery view** (all participants showing) to help with both group cohesion and flow of conversations. Negotiate practice of raising hands (either physically or by using "reaction" icon available at bottom of the screen).
- Outline the use of the 'chat' function. Individual students can be nominated to monitor the group chat and be invited to summarise questions and comments periodically to the rest of the group.  
*Please note: It is very difficult to facilitate experiential learning & monitor chat simultaneously so having a student take on this role can be really useful.*
- Chat function should be set so that participants can only chat with the 'host' or 'everyone'. No private messaging, especially during role-play as this may impact of feelings of safety or vulnerability for the role-playing student.
- Reduce background noise by encouraging use of headphones, switch both mobile phones and emails off. Emphasise that there should be no recording or screen capture by students unless permission is explicitly obtained.
- Discourage use of virtual backgrounds which can be both distracting and reduce the authenticity of role-play.

### Setting the scene for learning

Prior to starting role-play it can be useful to engage the group in a short reflection about the communication topic for the session (e.g. history taking, breaking bad news etc.) This reflection can help to identify specific challenges, in relation to this task, as well as help the learner to set their own agenda.

### Top Tip: Facilitating discussions and setting the agenda

For online reflection & discussion several tools can be used:

- Pair/Share – place learners into smaller groups for discussions using the **Breakout room** feature of zoom. Students can share key points from discussion on returning to the larger group.
- Use the White board function to brainstorm and share the groups ideas on specific communication skills or frameworks.
- Use the Chat function to invite learners to share their learning objectives/ individual ideas/challenges/etc
- Teachers or students can Screen Share to show PowerPoint slide/s on relevant content.
- Show a pre-prepared Video as a trigger for learners to analyse.
- Use the Polling option to quiz students about their previous learning or understanding of a topic.

## Facilitating Role-Play Online

It is important to describe exactly how role-play will be organised in the online classroom and whether you are expecting all students to role-play during the lesson or if you will be looking for volunteers.

If all students are to role-play it may be helpful to agree an approximate time for each person. Reiterate that students can request **'time out'** at any time and that opportunities for retrying specific aspects of the consultation, as a result of feedback, can be built in.

### Top Tip: Preparing for role-play

- Consider having all learners except the one conducting the role-play (and the simulated patient) turn off their video and mute themselves during the actual role-play to avoid distractions and interruptions.
- For the role-play encourage all learners to have their screens in **speaker view** so that just the simulated patient and role-playing student are on the screen during the consultation.
- Clarify whether this encounter represents an in-person consultation or a telehealth consultation.
- Acknowledge that virtual role-play may feel less than authentic but is good practice as it reflects an important skill set being used during the current healthcare emergency and is likely to be part of future clinical practice (telemedicine).
- To aid authenticity and avoid confusion the teacher or simulated patient can change the screen name to the 'patient' being interviewed. Brief clinical details can also be added e.g. Tom Walker, hospital admission with central chest pain.

## Identify the learner's individual agenda and prepare the group to watch the role-play

As with usual teaching practice in face to face sessions, briefly describe the clinical case and identify the tasks for the interview e.g. establishing rapport, taking a history or giving information about a particular condition. Before starting the role-play ask the role-playing



student what skills they want to practice and what they might want feedback on. Based on the learner's agenda assign feedback tasks to other learners in the group.

See [Appendix 1](#) for further information on structuring feedback using the **Agenda-Led Outcomes Based Analysis (ALOA) Framework**.

#### **Top Tip: Ensuring high quality feedback**

- To maximise online engagement and participation in feedback, assign specific observation tasks to the learners not role-playing (for example, noting non-verbal communication, questioning style, developing rapport, etc.).  
This is even more pertinent given that students (not role-playing) will be asked to turn off their cameras and will be out of sight during the actual role-play itself.
- As the teacher make a note of which learner has been given which observation task, so that when the cameras are switched back on again you can ask learners by name for their feedback.

**Watch the encounter and remember to take notes yourself of what you are observing and what feedback you want to give.**

#### **Managing feedback - Start with your learner**

Start by asking the role-playing student to share their feelings about the encounter and help them to refine their agenda to guide feedback.

Question options could include:

- What in particular would you like feedback about?
- What do you think you did effectively and what would you change?
- What parts were particularly tricky or challenging?
- What they were trying to accomplish?

#### **Top Tip: Feedback**

You could also add the question to the learner about how it felt to role-play online.

#### **Managing feedback - Involving the group**

Ask the group to turn on their video/audio and invite feedback based on the role-playing student's self-analysis (above). Request feedback from the simulated patient and remember to pick up on observation tasks allocated to individual students.

Check out at regular intervals how the feedback sounds to the learner who role-played and offer them an opportunity to re-try a small section or utilise a different skill as required.

#### **Top Tip: Feedback**

For brief re-rehearsal ask learner if they prefer other participants' cameras on or off.

#### **Closing the session**

Revisit learning outcomes and student's agenda points, generated at beginning of session, and discuss if these have been met. Ask learners to identify one take home point.

### **Top Tip: Closing**

- Reviewing agenda items and take-home points. This can either be done verbally or using the chat function.
- Consider having group complete evaluation – either through polling or embedded link with particular emphasis on what worked and what could be improved with online approach.
- Ensure that the students have a clear idea of the plan for next steps. This might be when their next teaching session is or how to continue to develop their skills at a time when clinical placements have been cancelled and patient contact is limited. Direct them to other learning resources if available.

## Technology

One of the biggest challenges for delivering online teaching is mastering the technology. For the purpose of this guide we will be using Zoom as our working example.

## Online Features to Enhance Your Teaching

### Devices

Using a Laptop or Desktop computer offers a greatly enhanced experience over a tablet or phone and we would strongly recommend using one for your sessions if possible.

There are 2 main video layouts on zoom

- **Speaker view**– This is the *default* setting on zoom. Speaker view automatically displays the person who is speaking in the large video window.
- **Gallery view** - This is the *preferred* setting for consultation skills teaching as it allows you to see displays of all participants in a grid pattern on one screen. Not only can you see all learners, but they can see each other too, leading to an enhanced sense of working together as a group.

To switch from Speaker view to Gallery view go to the upper right corner of your Zoom window and click on the grid icon.

To find out more visit the link below:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362323-How-Do-I-Change-The-Video-Layout->

### Think about your background

Try to provide a nice, plain background and resist the urge to use the range of artificial backgrounds, such as outer space etc, as these can be quite distracting and reduce the image quality. These are also look rather odd when role-playing a consultation.

Adjust your lighting and don't sit directly in front or beside a bright light source, or else all the audience sees is a bright light and a shadowy figure. Experiment with moving lamps and your camera until you can see your brightly lit face on the screen!

### Be yourself

Although it feels artificial being on a screen try to deliver the teaching in your usual animated style. Hand gestures and variations in pitch, pace and tone can assist with maintaining learner engagement.

### Break out rooms

Breakout rooms allow you to divide your group up by placing them into smaller, separate rooms for either pair/share or small group discussions or role-play practice e.g. in triads.

As the tutor you have the option to divide the students into break out rooms either automatically (randomly generated) or manually (you decide who works with who).

If you wish to decide which students you want to work together in your session it is easiest to manually assign them to breakout rooms/groups before the session.

You, as the teacher, can visit any of the breakout rooms to answer questions or observe practice. You can also broadcast a message to all breakout groups, including reminding them of their task while in the small groups.

Breakout rooms can be used during the session to re-calibrate role-players and deal with upset students if required.

To find out more visit the link below:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206476313-Managing-breakout-rooms>

## Screen sharing

Both teacher and student have the ability to share documents and PowerPoint slides via the screen share icon which can be found in the bar at the bottom of your zoom screen (see below).



To share a document or presentation with your students select - "New Share" and the screen will automatically show all of your open documents. Select the one you want and wait a few seconds for it to upload and the students will be able to see what you can.

### Top Tip:

If you are planning to share any resources open and minimise these before the session begins so they can be easily accessed.

Worthwhile noting that when you are sharing your screen your video tiles will be moved to one side offering you a limited view of your students. You can enlarge your view of video tiles in screen share by dragging the edge or bottom of the tile box.

To end your screen share meeting simply select "Stop Share"

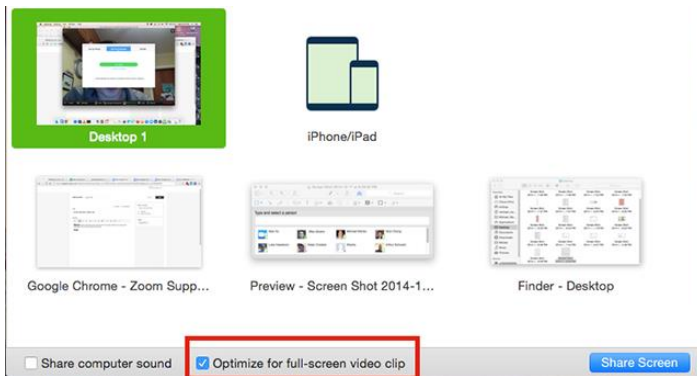
To find out more access the link below.

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362153-Sharing-your-screen>

## Sharing videos

You can also share a pre-recorded video with your students to illustrate specific skills or as a trigger for role-play. To enable this feature:

- Click the Share Screen button located in your meeting controls.
- Select the screen you want to share and select both Share computer sound and Optimize for full-screen video clip.

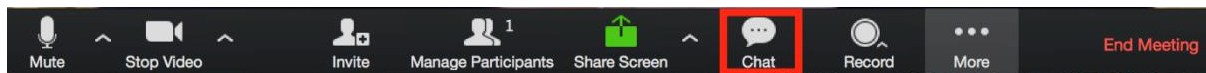


- Click Share Screen
- Start playing your video in full screen while sharing your screen

To find out more access the link below.

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/202954249-Optimizing-a-Shared-Video-Clip-in-Full-Screen>

## Chat function



The in-meeting chat allows you to send chat messages to students within the class and can also be used to quickly gather student comments on discussion topics. This function allows participants to send a private message to an individual or the message can be sent to an entire group (everyone) However, due to the sensitive nature of role-play, we strongly recommend that the teacher configures the settings for online classes to only allow sending messages to all.

When typing a message into the chat box press enter to send your message. See notes above regarding student volunteering to monitor chat box.

To find out more access the link below:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203650445-In-Meeting-Chat>

## Polls

The polling feature for online classes allows you to create single choice or multiple-choice polling questions. If you are planning to use polls it is advisable to write them before teaching instead of taking the time to write them during teaching.

You will be able to launch the poll during your class and gather the responses from your teachers.

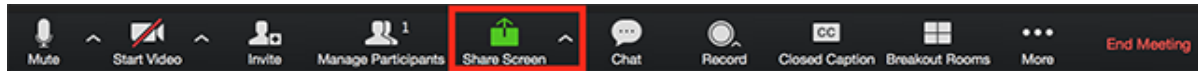
Polls can be conducted anonymously, if you do not wish to collect participant information with the poll results.

To find out more access the link below:

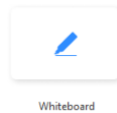
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-Meetings>

## Whiteboard

The whiteboard feature will allow you to share a whiteboard that you can write or type on. This can be a useful tool for agenda setting or brainstorming. To use the whiteboard click on the share screen icon (below)



The whiteboard icon is displayed



To find out more access the link below:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205677665-Sharing-a-whiteboard>

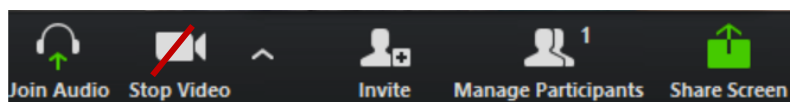
## Troubleshooting- When Things Go Wrong

As we all know there is the potential for things to go wrong when using any type of technology. Below are some of the frequent questions that teachers have raised so far about using Zoom. Do let us know if you have other questions to add yourself.

### My video camera isn't working

If you cannot get your video to start working, look at the bottom left hand corner of your screen to see if a red line is showing. If it is, click on the video camera icon to remove the red line, this will open your camera. It will take a few seconds.

To stop your camera, click on the video camera again, the red line should appear. Clicking on this during role-play means you will stay connected to the class via audio but cannot be seen. Your profile will show as a blank screen with your name in the bottom.



If camera problems persist make sure that all other programs that utilise the camera are closed. If all else fails try restarting your computer.

### There is echo in my class

Generally, if you are hearing echo, it means that there is a device nearby that is channelling your audio back.

- Try to identify the participant causing the echo:
- Tutor can mute the students one at a time
- Tutor can mute all, and unmute one at a time
- Students can mute him/herself
- Ask that all students only use one device during the class
- Advise that wearing headphones reduces echo

## Can I use a headset?

Yes, as long as the device is compatible with the computer or mobile device that you are using.

For some computers you or your students might have to adjust the external headset. To adjust the headset you have to go to `System preferences`. Here you can change the audio-/microphone system from computer-based to external headsets.

# STUDENT GUIDE: TOP TIPS FOR LEARNING CONSULTATION SKILLS ONLINE

## Introduction and Background

Whilst undeniably challenging, the current situation has created a valuable opportunity for us to support you in developing the skills to work remotely both effectively and efficiently in your future careers as healthcare professionals, where remote consultations will increasingly feature as a routine part of your practice.

To help in these challenging times we have put together a practical guide aimed to help you maximise your learning using this new format.

This is new ground for us all so please do bear with us if we experience any difficulties as we all get to grips with this new way of learning and thank you in advance for your understanding.

## Special Considerations during the Covid-19 Pandemic

### The challenge of different time zones

We acknowledge that some of you will have chosen to return home and may be in different time zones. As a result, it may not be realistic for you to attend at the allotted time, if so please email to let us know that you will be unable to attend the virtual classroom and we will endeavour to signpost you to the most relevant learning resources.

### Illness

We appreciate that some students may be unwell or caring for others during the pandemic and to help with this supplementary communication skills teaching resources such as e-learning packages and video resources etc are being developed. These will be available for you to access at your convenience and will form some of the required pre-learning that needs to be completed prior to attending the skills practice sessions.

### Proposed structure of online teaching

Being in an online setting for prolonged periods of time demands considerable concentration and can challenge even the keenest students to remain engaged!!!

We will therefore be delivering shorter sessions. To reflect the shorter time frame the vast majority of your online sessions will be dedicated to role-play, hence the vital importance of completing the necessary theoretic content beforehand as described above.

### Ground rules/Group agreement

The ground rules for face to face communication skills sessions are well established and include important considerations such as confidentiality, respect, participation and the principles of constructive feedback. In considering online communication skills training these same ground rules still apply but some additional items should be added.



- Preparation
  - Complete any pre- session tasks prior to attending the session
  - Keep to time (arrive online at least 5 minutes before start)
- Environment
  - Ensure phones, email notifications and other devices are off/on silent during the class to avoid sound interference
  - Reduce background noise wherever possible (Use headphones if available)
  - Be aware of background lighting/view – if you can try to provide a nice, plain background and resist the urge to use the range of artificial backgrounds as these can be distracting.
  - Dress appropriately
  - Avoid eating during sessions
- Confidentiality
  - Sessions will be password protected & will not be recorded or shared.
  - No screen capture or recording please, unless this has been agreed with your teacher and group.
  - Where possible please try to ensure your environment is as private as possible – a supportive and safe environment is key to your learning and being overlooked by others not in the session is not appropriate.
- Honesty & support
  - This is new for all of us so please be supportive of each other.
- Participation
  - Willingness to engage in both the role-play and feedback process
  - All video cameras and microphones should be on/unmuted during group discussion so that your tutor can see all members of the group, you can see everyone else and to encourage group interactions & dialogue.
  - Please view the class in **gallery view** (see ‘Technology’ section below)

To help increase authenticity during the role-play:

- If you are not role-playing please turn off your camera and mute your microphone
- Have your screen in **speaker view** so that just the simulated patient and role-playing student are on the screen. (see ‘Technology’ section below)

Your teacher will negotiate how you should indicate you would like to speak during discussion (e.g. either physically raising hands or by using zoom icon).

- **Chat Function** (see ‘Technology’ section below)
  - Your teacher will negotiate the use of the ‘chat’ function.
  - You can use the chat function during the feedback process to elaborate on your verbal feedback
  - One student may be nominated to monitor the group chat and be invited to summarise questions and comments periodically to the rest of the group.

- Chat function will be set so that participants can only chat with the ‘teacher- host’ or ‘everyone’. No private messaging, especially during role-play as this may impact of feelings of safety or vulnerability for your peers.
- Be honest and constructive
  - What was working well and what might be improved?

## Technology

For your CS teaching the platform we will be using is Zoom.

## Online Features to Enhance Your Learning

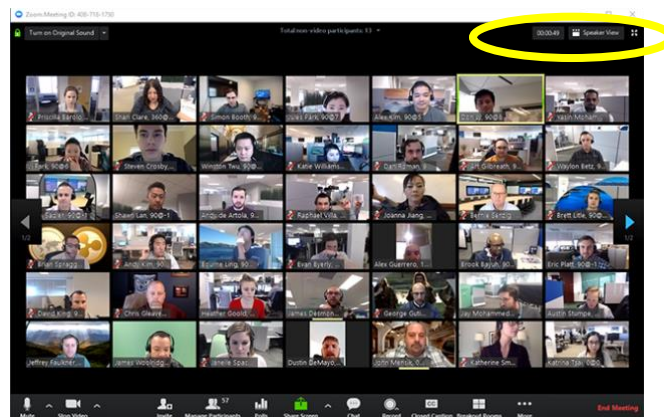
### Devices

Using a Laptop or Desktop computer offers a greatly enhanced experience over a tablet or phone and we would strongly recommend using one for your sessions if possible.

### Views

There are 2 main video layouts on zoom

- Speaker view– This is the **default** setting on zoom. It will switch the large video window between to the person actively speaking at the time.
- Gallery view - This is the **preferred** setting for your consultation skills sessions as it allows you to see displays of all of your group and your tutor in a grid pattern.
- To switch from Speaker view to Gallery view go to the upper right corner of your Zoom window and click on the grid icon.

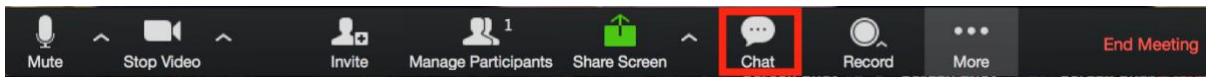


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### Chat function

The in-meeting chat allows you to send chat messages to everyone within the group. Due to the sensitive nature of role-play, we will configure the settings for online classes to only allow sending messages to everyone.



Opening the icon shown above will open the chat on the right. You can type a message into the chat box. Press enter to send your message.

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## Troubleshooting- When Things Go Wrong

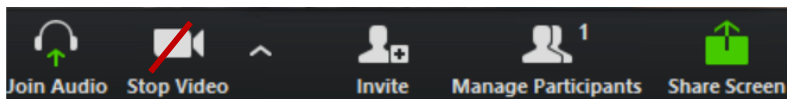
As we all know there is the potential for things to go wrong when using any type of technology. Below are some of the frequent questions that students have raised so far about using zoom. Do let us know if you have other questions.

### My video camera isn't working

If you cannot get your video to start working look at the bottom left hand corner of your screen to see if a red line is showing. If it is, click on the video camera icon to remove the red line, this will open your camera. It will take a few seconds.

To stop your camera, click on the video camera again, the red line should appear. Clicking on this during role-play means you will stay connected to the class via audio but cannot be seen. Your profile will show as a blank screen with your name in the bottom.

If you are using a camera other than the one integral to your computer, you will need to ensure you have selected the correct video source. This can be done by clicking on arrow next to video and picking the camera you wish to use.



If camera problems persist make sure that all other programs that utilise the camera are closed. If all else fails, try restarting your computer.

### There is echo with my audio

Generally, if you are hearing echo, it means that there is a device nearby that is channelling your audio back.

As with the camera, if you are using a microphone that is not integral to your computer you will need to ensure that the correct one is selected in settings.

Use of headphones may reduce both external noise and echo.

### Can I use a headset?

Yes, as long as the device is compatible with the computer or mobile device that you are using. For some computers you might have to adjust the external headset. To adjust the headset you have to go to 'System preferences'. Here you can change the audio-/microphone system from computer-based to external headsets.

## What do I do if during the session my internet connection is poor?

If the picture and audio remain poor quality and freeze you can try;

- Ensure that 'Enable HD' is deselected in your video settings.
- Temporary turn you video off and continue to session with audio only.
- Leaving the zoom class and re-entering which sometimes solves the problem.
- If this doesn't work then you may have to remain on audio only for the rest of the session. This needn't be a barrier to engagement with role-play as telephone consultations are also an important and valuable skill.
- If you are experiencing difficulties, please can you let the rest of the group know via the chat function.

If you have any questions or comments about the online sessions, then please do not hesitate to contact us via email.

# TOP TIPS FOR SIMULATED PATIENTS ROLE-PLAYING ONLINE FOR LEARNING CONSULTATION SKILLS ONLINE

## Introduction and Background

It is widely acknowledged that face to face teaching using role-play, feedback & re-rehearsal is the gold standard for communication skills teaching but during the Covid-19 pandemic other methods need to be explored and new innovative approaches used.

To help in these challenging times the **EACH: International Association of Communication in Healthcare** has put together a series of practical guides aimed at helping teachers of healthcare communication, simulated patients and learners consider the challenges and potential adaptations for online communication skills teaching.

It is recommended that, where possible, this guide is used to supplement an online training session prior to teaching. The training works well as a 'mock' / practice experiential session where all participants can experience first-hand the likely process, content and structure of a virtual classroom.

We acknowledge that many different platforms are available and that choices are often influenced by academic institutions or financial constraints. However, for the purpose of this document we have chosen the 'Zoom' platform, and its associated functions, as our worked example. We use the term teacher as representative of other titles such as facilitator, tutor or lecturer. The term simulated patient is used for actors, medical role-player etc and learner or student to represent the participant receiving the teaching.

## Setting the scene

- Please dress appropriately – as you would for a normal session or to represent the patient you are portraying.
- Try and ensure that your camera is positioned so that you can sit comfortably, with your head and shoulders clearly visible.
- Try to ensure your camera is positioned to avoid extreme light levels. Particularly avoid light sources or windows being directly behind you if possible and try to be lit from the front.
- Keep what's behind you as neutral as possible and free from distractions. Personal objects and decor that may not fit with the patient you are portraying may reduce the authenticity of the role-play.
- Try to minimize background noise and position yourself somewhere quiet if you can. If there are people around, let them know that you are working.

If you are using a spare room or home office, it might be worth popping a sign on your door reminding everyone you'll be role-playing and how long the session will last.

- You must make ensure you are in a space where you cannot be overheard or overseen by others to maintain confidentiality for all participants.

## Tips for role-playing to camera

Role-playing in this environment may be challenging at first. Here a few tips for making your delivery as smooth as possible.

- For most online meetings, we often look down at the image of the person we are talking to. When the role-play is in progress, try as much as possible to look directly into your camera when talking – this will give the student the best opportunity to pick up on non-verbal and physical cues (and is also a good signifier that you are in role).
- Much as you would in a face to face setting, it might be useful to give yourself a physical position to denote being in and out of role. This could be as simple as sitting forward, closer to camera when role-playing, and sitting back when out of role.
- When asked for feedback, keep it as succinct as possible and stick to the rule of identifying something that was said and how it made you feel

## Technology

One of the biggest challenges for delivering online teaching is mastering the technology. You will be delivering a professional role-play /simulated patient session, so having appropriate equipment and stable connections are essential.

## Devices

Using a Laptop or Desktop computer offers a much better experience over a tablet or phone and we would strongly recommend using one for teaching sessions if possible.

## Views

There are 2 main video layouts on zoom

- Speaker view– This is the *default* setting on zoom. It will switch the large video window between to the person actively speaking at the time.
- Gallery view - This is the *preferred* setting for your consultation skills sessions as it allows you to see displays of all of your group and your tutor in a grid pattern.
- To switch from Speaker view to Gallery view go to the upper right corner of your Zoom window and click on the grid icon.

To find out more visit the link below:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362323-How-Do-I-Change-The-Video-Layout->

## Screen name / Patient's name

Each participant has a 'screen name' showing throughout.

Please note: when you are role-playing a particular patient either the tutor will or you can change your screen name to the name of the patient the students are about to interview.

To rename yourself hover your mouse over your name in the "Participants" list on the right side of the Zoom window. Click on "Rename". Enter the name you'd like to appear in the class and click on "OK"

There is also the option for adding some clinical details as an aide memoire for the students if required. E.g. John Smith, 53, Emergency admission with chest pain.

## Dealing with technical issues

Checking in early to confirm technology is working OK.

- Check in early to confirm your technology is working OK. It is recommended that you go online at least 15 minutes before the teaching begins to troubleshoot any potential technical difficulties.
- Some difficulties with audio and internet connections are inevitable; if you are unable to hear anything which is being said to you during a role-play or during feedback, ask for it to be repeated.
- Echo: Switch off any of your other devices in order to reduce noise/feedback loops distorting the sound. Generally, if you are hearing echo, it means that there is a device out there that is channelling your audio back. Tutors can mute the students/role-players one at a time or mute/unmute all to see where the problem is coming from. Students/role-players can mute him/herself which can help if necessary.
- If you identify a problem or issue which needs addressing during the session, send a message to the teacher using the Chat function.

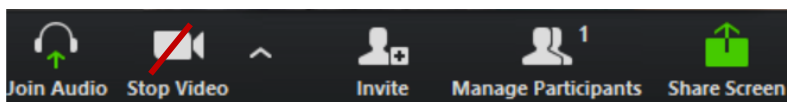
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203650445-In-Meeting-Chat>

## My video camera isn't working

If you cannot get your video to start working look at the bottom left hand corner of your screen to see if a red line is showing. If it is, click on the video camera icon to remove the red line, this will open your camera. It will take a few seconds.

To stop your camera, click on the video camera again, the red line should appear. Clicking on this during role-play means you will stay connected to the class via audio but cannot be seen. Your profile will show as a blank screen with your name in the bottom.

If you are using a camera other than the one integral to your computer, you will need to ensure you have selected the correct video source. This can be done by clicking on arrow next to video and picking the camera you wish to use.



If camera problems persist make sure that all other programs that utilise the camera are closed. If all else fails, try restarting your computer.

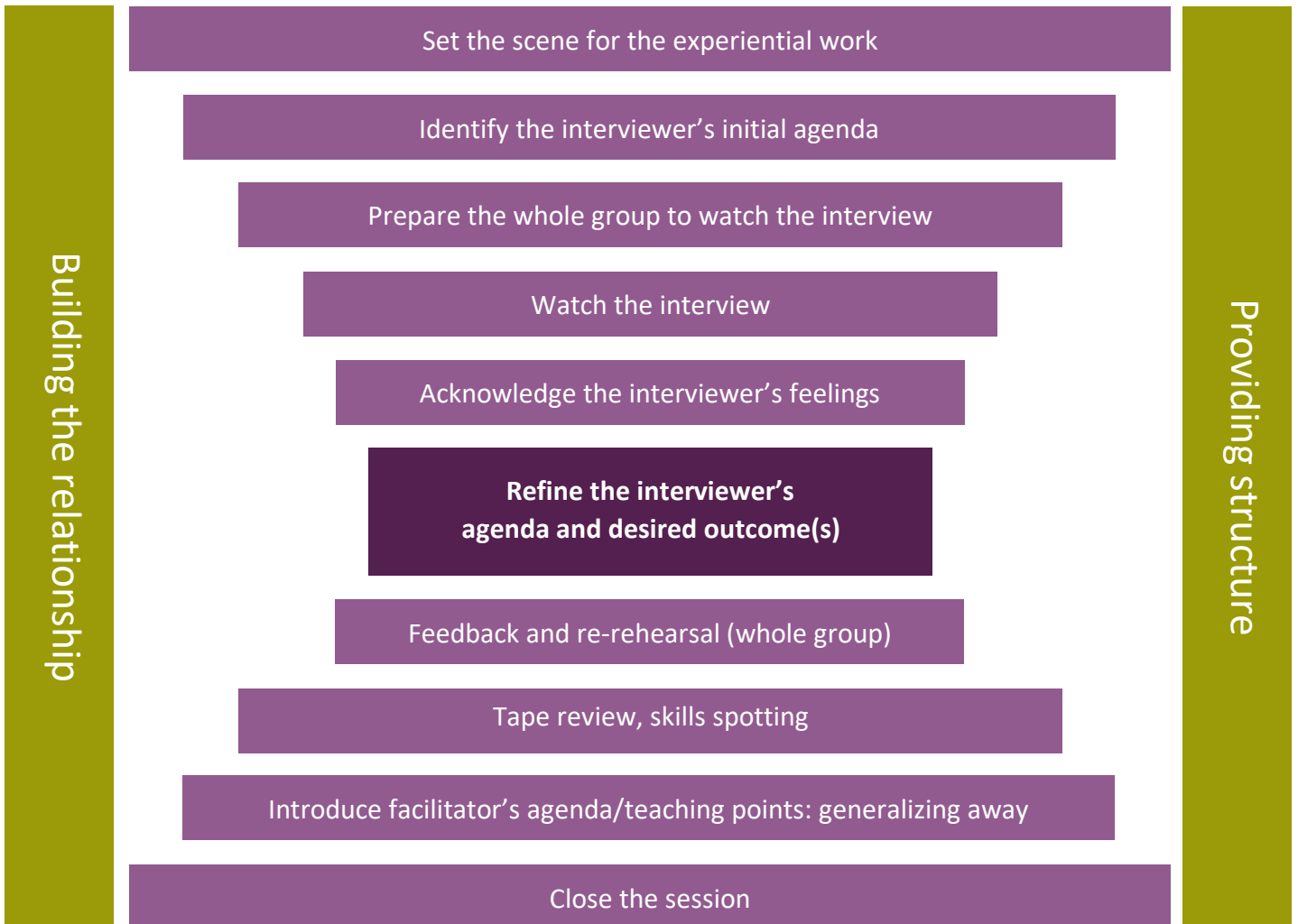
## Debriefing

- It is important to take the opportunity to debrief each session with the facilitator at the end of each session.  
Debriefing should include feedback on: How the SP is feeling after the session
- How the session was delivered overall

- Portrayal of patient online
- Quality and quantity of feedback
- Technical aspects of delivery



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Appendix 2: Concise Guide for Running Communication Skills Session Online using ALOBA.

In this document we provide guidance on conducting small group communication skills sessions using ALOBA as a framework. The guide focuses on using Zoom and its accompanying tools for these sessions (similar features are available on several other virtual meeting applications such as Webex, Microsoft teams, Jitsi etc). More detailed guidance is available [here](#).

I. DESIGN AND PREPARATION OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION SESSIONS		
	PRINCIPLES FOR IN PERSON OR ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS AND TOOLS
<b>Session objectives</b>	Learning objectives help identify the expected outcomes of the session and guide the teaching methods you plan to use	Online learning should ideally be <b>no longer than 2 hours</b> at most to maintain attention. You may need to <b>condense your objectives</b> to just those that can be reasonably achieved using virtual methods.
<b>Supplemental materials</b>		Consider <b>supplemental materials (Documents, PPT slides, video examples)</b> that can be reviewed outside of the sessions to enhance learning. This can either be for learners to review prior to the session or for learners unable to join the session
<b>Session participants and group size</b>	For experiential learning, group size should allow each participant time to learn through practicing and receiving feedback. For example, 5-6 students per session	Online, the larger the group the less engagement and chance for individual practice. Because time needs to be limited consider <b>learner groups no larger than 5-6</b> . If you usually work with larger groups, then consider dividing your groups and running consecutive sessions.
<b>Accessibility and technology</b>	For in-person groups, make sure all materials (handouts, skills cards) and necessary technology (computer, projector, flipchart/pens, video recording) are available. Test them before session starts.	Consider with <b>what devices</b> your learners (and facilitator and SP) will be connecting to the session. Encourage participants to join by computer rather than phone or tablet to be able to use full Zoom features more easily. Have learners <b>test use of technology</b> including video, microphone, headphones beforehand to allow problem solving prior to session.
<b>Co-facilitators</b>	If using co-facilitators, these persons should discuss ahead of time how they will divide session tasks.	<b>Co-facilitators</b> are especially helpful when teaching online, where one person leads the session and the other monitors such things as waiting room, chat comments, etc. Person with these tasks could even be a learner
<b>Security</b>		See <a href="#">detailed information</a> for security including pre-settings for no private chats in chat function and no recording of session without explicit attendee permission.
<b>Facilitator and simulated patient (SP) training and preparation</b>	Meeting with facilitators and SPs is important to discuss what is expected and questions and especially to practice key steps before a real session. Facilitator(s) and SP should plan to meet at least briefly before a session begins to discuss any questions about the session.	Providing <b>online training for facilitators and SPs</b> in addition to written guides can be important for increasing their skill and confidence in transferring this teaching online.  It is recommended that <b>facilitators and SPs meet online at least 15-20 minutes before</b> the students join. This not only helps to identify any potential technical difficulties but also allows time for discussion and answering any questions about the day's learning
<b>Before session starts</b>	Facilitators make sure and review session guide and that room is set up appropriately	Get on Zoom early to make sure audio, video etc is working. Facilitator try to have non-distracting background, be somewhere without distracting noises. Check your video image is clear and you are positioned with light on face, looking directly at the screen.

II. INITIATING A COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR IN PERSON OR ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS AND TOOLS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
<b>Introductions and checking in</b>	<p>If new group, everyone (you, learners, SP) introduce themselves.</p> <p>If SP there from beginning, have them introduce themselves out of role</p> <p>Some facilitators recommend a brief check-in such as “How is the week going” or “How is school going” as a way to gain participants full attention.</p>	<p>Introduce yourself. Make sure <b>learners’ names</b> appear on their Zoom profiles. Have learners introduce themselves if not already known to you.</p> <p>Check that all participants can see and hear effectively. During Covid19 in particular, can be helpful to briefly check in with “how are you coping in the current crisis” or <i>How is Covid19 impacting you</i>. This could be done verbally or using the Chat function, where students enter their thoughts.</p> <p>If recording session, inform participants of how it will be used (e.g. shared with students who could not attend) and gain consent.</p>	<p>How to change <a href="#">profile name</a></p> <p>- can hover over your video tile and right click to see rename option</p> <p>Participants should use gallery <a href="#">view</a> so they can see everyone</p> <p>Using Zoom <a href="#">Chat function</a></p> <p>How to <a href="#">record</a> a Zoom session</p>
<b>Orientation to session/ground rules</b>	<p>Provide an outline of session objectives and how the session will run (Identify challenges, everyone will practice briefly, get feedback and re-rehearse)</p> <p>Discuss the ground rules for session including confidentiality, respect, participation and the principles of constructive feedback.</p>	<p>Additional ground rules for Zoom sessions:</p> <p>Using <b>headphones</b> will decrease outside noise and echoes</p> <p>Encourage everyone to keep their <b>video on and unmuted</b> – unless otherwise instructed – as this will increase engagement and ability to see student reactions.</p> <p>When they want to contribute, encourage raising of hands (physically or using nonverbal reactions in participants tab in Zoom)</p>	<p>Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute</p> <p>Using the non-verbal <a href="#">reaction tools</a> in Zoom</p>
<b>Beginning session content</b>	<p>Prior to beginning the role-plays it can be useful to engage the group in reflection about the communication topic for the session (e.g. history taking, responding to emotions, etc.).</p> <p>Options for doing this include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learner experience with topic</li> <li>- Anticipated challenges with communication task</li> <li>- Presentation or co-creation of a framework for addressing issue (e.g. SPIKES for bad news telling)</li> </ul>	<p>For online reflection/discussion several tools can be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pair/Share – break students into smaller groups to discuss issues and then return to large group to share.</li> <li>- Use white board function to write down and save group ideas or framework</li> <li>- Use chat function for learners to write ideas/challenges/etc</li> <li>- Show PPTs with content/framework information</li> <li>- Show a video as a trigger that learners can analyze</li> <li>- Poll learners about their experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up <a href="#">Breakout rooms</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sharing a whiteboard</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Chat</a> function</li> <li>• Sharing your PPT <a href="#">screen sharing</a></li> <li>• Maximizing <a href="#">video viewing</a></li> <li>• Using Zoom <a href="#">polling</a></li> </ul>

III. ROLE-PLAY SET-UP			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR IN PERSON OR ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS AND TOOLS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
<b>Setting the scene</b>	Describe details of how practice will work including that all will get to practice for (approximate amount of time), have feedback discussion, retry some aspect of what they have done. Remind learner they can “timeout” if needed and otherwise you will stop them when enough to talk about.	Consider having all learners except the one conducting the role-play <b>turn off video</b> during role-play to make it more authentic Acknowledge that especially virtually it may feel less than authentic Clarify if this encounter is meant to simulate an in-person encounter or a telehealth visit	Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute
<b>Case information</b>	Describe patient case: Either facilitator or SP “I have come to clinic to be seen about my foot”. Describe student role: Are they a student interviewing patient or pretending to be a qualified physician?	The facilitator or simulated patient can change the screen name of the ‘patient’ being interviewed to avoid confusion Provide any additional information such as letter for referring GP electronically beforehand or share document on screen	How to change <a href="#">profile name</a> - can hover over your video tile and right click to see rename option  <a href="#">screen sharing</a>
<b>Recruiting learners to role-play</b>	Can ask for volunteers or pick people based on challenges identified earlier or order in which they are sitting	Same as in person. Can use list on chat function as a way to go through the group in order.	<a href="#">Chat</a> function
<b>Identify learner’s initial agenda</b>	Given the assigned task, for example, start the first few minutes of the interview, ask learner what they want to try and what they might want feedback about	Consider using whiteboard function to write down learner’s agenda	<a href="#">Sharing a whiteboard</a>
<b>Prepare group to watch the encounter</b>	Encourage all learners to take notes on what they observe in terms of effective behaviors and ones they have questions about or could benefit from change Can assign specific observation tasks to learners including those on role-player’s agenda and common skills such as non-verbal, questioning style, developing rapport, etc.	To enhance online engagement and participation in feedback, <b>assigning specific observation tasks</b> is particularly helpful to maintain learner engagement during role-play and subsequent discussion – facilitator should note what task is assigned to each student. If relevant, acknowledge that not all will give feedback every time so as not to overwhelm learner	
<b>Watch the encounter</b>	Take notes during encounter and encourage students to note specific communication behaviors. Watch timing and stop at appropriate moment which may have been decided on ahead of time	Have <b>all but the SP and student role-player turn off</b> their videos and mute themselves. Encourage all learners to have their screens in speaker view so that just the simulated patient and role-playing student are on the screen.	Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute Zoom <a href="#">view</a>

IV. FEEDBACK AND RE-REHEARSAL			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR ANY SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
<b>Acknowledge learner's feelings</b>	Start by asking learner their feelings about the encounter	Could include how they felt it worked doing it online?	
<b>Refine learner's agenda and desired outcomes</b>	Help learner now that it is done to refine agenda as a way to guide feedback. Question options include: What in particular they would like feedback about? What they did effectively and what they would change? What parts were particularly tricky? What they were trying to accomplish?	Same as in-person	
<b>Feedback and discussion of alternative approaches</b>	In response to learner agenda, options for starting feedback include: - Asking SP first if issues raised were about SP reactions	Have all turn video on and unmute for this portion Encourage turning to SP first for what they noticed and using group in particular for brainstorming other approaches May be particularly important to <b>watch for cues</b> from role-player and check in explicitly about how they are feeling about feedback	Either at bottom of zoom screen or in participants/chat window can click video on/off and mute/unmute
<b>Re-rehearsal and feedback</b>	Set time limit on learner choosing some aspect to try again	For brief re-rehearsal ask learner if they prefer videos off or not	
<b>Sequential role-play for multiple learners</b>	Using steps described above, another student can either re-start the role-play case or the learner-SP encounter can continue from where it stopped with the new learner summarizing to SP what they know so far and then moving from there.	Same as in-person	

V. CLOSING THE SESSION			
STEPS	PRINCIPLES FOR ANY SESSION	ONLINE ADAPTATIONS	ZOOM INSTRUCTION LINKS
<b>Generalizing learning and skills</b>	Add any additional insights from your practice, course objectives, etc Revisit list of challenges if this was generated at beginning of session and discuss any gaps	Add any additional insights including any substantive information on PPT etc  Return to white board to review challenges and discuss	Zoom <a href="#">screen sharing</a>  <a href="#">Sharing a whiteboard</a>
<b>Take home points</b>	Ask learners to identify one take home point to enhance their retention	Learners can give take home points online either verbally (in round using list in chat function order) or writing in chat	Zoom <a href="#">Chat function</a>
<b>Evaluation</b>	Evaluating sessions can always provide insight into session impact, strengths and areas for improvement	Consider having group complete evaluation – either through polling or embedded link with particular emphasis on what worked and what could be improved with online approach	