Using slides and using whiteboards in virtual space – uses, advantages and drawbacks for each

Slides in virtual sessions are not really like slides in face to face sessions. Where we may feel there is 'death by PowerPoint' in face to face sessions, we may experience 'death by boredom' if we have no slides to show when running a meeting or event virtually! Slides are not an 'add on' in virtual sessions – they are used differently to face to face sessions, and are very often the 'backbone' of the session, providing instructions, stimulating activity, questions to consider, a mood and an engaging space to play and learn in. But, just as in face to face sessions, you need to make sure you use them appropriately.

Slides are excellent when:

- You need to have something prepared and ready uploaded to show participants
- You have little time and need to 'tell' or 'present' – to set your ideas out quickly and clearly
- You want to use visual images to create a mood or theme rather than text
- You want to provide a clear structure to a session – the slides are the 'backbone' of the virtual classroom session
- You want to ask a group to provide ideas and you just need a quick reaction, one word or phrase – you can use a slide with a 'named grid' on it so people are given a space to write in with the Text tool
- You are doing team activities/games – e.g. with two teams thinking of answers to different questions, and writing them on a slide. You can see both teams' responses together at the same time, and compare them; you can also make this a timed activity for energy and pace.
- You have a big group (e.g. between 15 – 30 people) and you want a one word response to an idea (e.g. yes/no) – the slide with a named grid on it for people to find their named space and write their one word answer is inclusive, visual, immediate / quick, and a great way to achieve this spontaneous response which includes the whole group and is visible to all. This could work for a big group Check In activity, for example.
- When you are working with a big group and don't want to use the Poll feature for any reason, and want to try something different than the green tick or the red cross, a slide with a grid on is a good alternative for a quick, one word inclusive response from all.
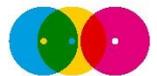
Slides are generally less useful when …

- You want to invite a 'free flow' of ideas – because having a small space to write in may cramp some people and 'freeze' their thinking and creativity
- You want people to take time to reflect and even to map their ideas out visually using the crayon tools, shapes and colours – there is little space on a slide to do this usually, and often the way a slide looks somehow is less inviting than a whiteboard.
- If you are working with a team and want to invite creative responses to a question, and then connect individual's responses, slides may be less good for this because of limited space for visual connection.
- You use them with lots of text, just to present your ideas rather than engage people.
- You use them too much and forget to use other features of the platform e.g. the whiteboard!

Whiteboards in virtual sessions are much like flipcharts in face-to-face sessions.

However, what is different is that everyone can write freely and publicly on a whiteboard with the **T** (**text tool**) and with the **crayon** and **shape tools,** at any time. Whiteboards in virtual sessions are a great 'public' space for sharing ideas and creative thinking spontaneously and easily, and for connecting ideas among team members.

In face-to-face facilitation, small groups tend to use flipcharts, then share their flipcharts one at a time with the rest of the big group. Or the presenter may write on the flipchart what others are saying. But in virtual sessions, using whiteboards is much more inclusive because they are more public, and open to all to see and write on / draw on at any time (if that is what the presenter wishes people to do).

TIP: You can save the annotations on a whiteboard and share them at a later session, or later in the same session simply by clicking on the tab. The whiteboard will stay open with all the annotations on until the presenter decides to close the tab. Remember that once the tab is closed, the annotations are lost.

Whiteboards are excellent when:

- You want to create an enabling 'blank space' for people to be creative and share their ideas freely in response to a question or topic.
- You want to encourage people to draw as well as write their ideas and be more visual/creative than text allows.
- You want to invite people to create a 'team mural' of inter-connected ideas and visuals.
- You want to invite people to let you know how they are experiencing the session by inviting them from time to time to 'mood doodle' on a whiteboard – share their feelings or reactions visually or by text, so you can get a sense of how the group is going. This can work well in managing big groups.
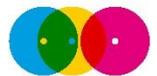
- You want to encourage the less expressive people to share their views.
- You are working with a big group and need lots of space for comments and reflections – you can scroll up or down on a whiteboard and there is plenty of space for responses.
- You are working with a producer and doing an inclusive activity with a group where people are invited to give their responses one after the other to a question. You can invite people to speak, and the producer can write their answers on the whiteboard, where there is more space than on a slide. (TIP: You could also do all this without a producer, but it would take time to write as well as listen, and be sure to invite everyone – multi-tasking again!)
- Whiteboards are less useful when …
- You need to get reactions from a group to a particular question, and it needs only a very quick yes/no style response, or one word/short phrase in reply. A slide is better for this.
- When you want to share information quickly as well as invite reactions.
- When you are working with a group who like a lot of structure, and may feel intimidated by the 'blank space' for reflection a whiteboard offers.
- When you forget to ask people to 'claim their space' with the pointer tool, because people may write over each other and time is wasted.

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