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USGS Office of Employee Development/National Training Center (OED/NTC)-Instructor Techniques for Virtual Instructor Led Training (VILT)

When considering Virtual Instructor Led Training (VILT), it is important to consider the perspective of your remote students. Then it's just a matter of employing a few simple techniques that will keep them engaged and learning. As a USGS subject matter expert, you have likely taught plenty of classroom-based courses. Your teaching skills are just as vital for VILT classes. The tips in this document are intended to help you connect with your students for maximum learning and retention.

Pre-Course Set up and Communication: Success for your virtual students requires a bit of advance planning. To assist with that process, OED/NTC staff have developed several communication products, including this document, to get everyone up to speed and manage expectations. Pre-course activities ensure everyone understands the VILT environment. OED/NTC staff are available before and during your class to answer questions and assist as needed. In addition, we can help with registering in DOI Talent and any questions about software requirements. All technical support information will be clearly communicated.

Consider Your Students: Depending on the platform used, live video of your students may/may not be an option. Either way, you won't be able to rely on facial expressions to inform you of what your students are experiencing. During pre-testing it's good to mention this fact and encourage students to increase *their* communication. Also, at class start, we recommend "unmuting" each student's microphone during the introduction and ask them to share their name, title and office location.

Number of Instructors: At least two instructors are recommended for a VILT class. This enables one instructor to answer student questions via the Chat feature while the other is teaching.

PowerPoint Slides: Feedback tells us PowerPoint slides should have a minimum 24 pt, Sans-Serif or similar font. *The amount of information on each slide should be limited.* Also, consistent color/backgrounds should be used. Limit slides to 30-40 per hour.

Exercises/Activities: Students learn best by at least one relevant class activity, exercise or polling question every hour of instruction. If there are several remote students from a single office, teaming up to work on more challenging exercises is helpful. You may want to reduce the hours of the training class. 9am to 3 or 4pm MTN works for most time zones.

Engaging Students: Virtual students appreciate being directly engaged by their instructors. Ask your students specific questions by name and solicit comments via Chat to keep them involved

and learning. Repeat any questions out loud to ensure they know what question is being answered. Use the Polling feature with specific questions to keep them engaged and learning.

Eye Contact: The instructor should make eye contact with the camera, especially when asking or answering questions.

Attire: Even though the USGS is casual in terms of work clothing, instructors should consider professional/casual attire just as you would in the classroom.

Enthusiasm: How you show your enthusiasm for your subject matter is unique to you and directly experienced by your students. It's easy to lose the attention of your audience if you're not energized and enthusiastic.

Body Language: Vary eye contact, facial expressions and voice. Starting the class with a friendly greeting (maybe a smile) saying "good morning," depending on when the class is being held and acknowledging any differences in time zones is a great start.

Idiosyncrasies: We all have them. Throat clearing, monotone, repeating certain phrases or words and even laughter, if constantly repeated are highly magnified during a class presentation especially for your students. Ask someone you trust to identify any of these habits you might have. Your increased awareness will help you minimize these behaviors.

Breaks: Taking planned breaks between class segments is important. Let your class know in advance when the breaks will be and how long they will last. It's especially helpful put *On Break, Returning at X am Mtn* on the digital whiteboard or have it on a PowerPoint slide. When you return from a break ask your students to "raise" their electronic hand so you will know when everyone is back.

Humor: Humor works in a VILT classroom just as well as in-person. We have noted that instructors can use humor to emphasize and/or lighten the mood. Your students will also retain better and are more likely to ask questions if you are not deadly serious.

Scripting: A script outline or speaker's notes will help you stay on point and avoid confusion caused by a disorganized presentation.

Starting Each Class Module: As you begin each new instructional module, let all your students know how long each will last and what they are expected to learn (aka "Learning Objectives"). Providing learning objectives on the first slide of each module is highly suggested.

At the End of a Module: Continue to develop rapport with your students by asking questions specific to the content covered. Provide closure by reviewing what has been covered before you move on.

Questions? Contact Ralph Roland raroland@usgs.gov or Patty Gonwa pmgonwa@usgs.gov