

# PREPARING TO TRAIN ONLINE

## REFLECTIONS OF AN AMATEUR!

### Online/Offline

You're used to standing in a room with a bunch of people delivering some training, and now have been asked to do it online. If, like us, you're new to this, we thought it might be helpful to provide a brief guide to what we have learnt so far.

### What Are We Doing?

There are lots of different types of online learning (we've identified nine so far). It is important to be really clear what we are doing. A webinar is very different from a training day, a three-day conference is very different from an online module. This guide is specifically focused on delivering an online training day (with clear overlap with a training morning/afternoon/evening, but different from a webinar).

### Structure of the Day

We would typically run a face-to-face training day from 10.00 to 16.00 using a structure like this:

09.45 Coffee  
10.00 Welcome, prayer and introductions  
10.20 Session 1  
11.20 Coffee  
11.45 Session 2  
13.00 Lunch  
13.45 Session 3  
14.45 Tea  
15.05 Session 4  
16.00 End

Online we have found a different structure works

better, partly because being on a screen all day is more tiring and partly because there is less possibility of interacting with others over the breaks. The following is a possible outline for timings of a day, although of course variations are possible. We start earlier because people don't have to travel and it makes it possible to have a longer lunch break.

09.40 Get online and join the Zoom call. Check you've removed all distractions from your work area.  
9.45 Welcome, prayer, introductions and protocols for the day.  
10.05 Session 1  
11.05 Coffee break  
11.25 Session 2  
12.25 Lunch  
13.55 Session 3  
14.50 Tea break  
15.10 Session 4  
16.00 End

We have three types of break through the day.

1. **Stretch break** Research shows that ideally one moves and takes eyes off a screen every 20 minutes, so we build in 20 second stretch breaks approximately every 20 minutes.
2. **Mini breaks** If energy levels are flagging a two minute mini-break gives people time to walk around, go to the loo, get a breath of fresh air. Often good to have a countdown timer playing.
3. **Main breaks** Coffee, tea and lunch. Online less time is needed for coffee and tea because there is no interaction with others. However, a longer lunch break can be good for energising people for



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the second half of the day. We encourage participants not so spend their time on screen, but to go for a walk, have a nap, get away from screen.

An alternative approach is to spread a day over two mornings (could be consecutive or a week apart).

- 09.50 Get online and join the Zoom call. Check you've removed all distractions from your work area.
- 10.00 Welcome, prayer and protocols for the sessions.
- 10.20 Break. This will give us time to sort out any technical issues before we dive into the rest of the morning.
- 10.30 Session 1
- 11.15 Coffee break
- 11.25 Session 2
- 12.10 Coffee break
- 12.20 Session 3
- 13.00 End

#### Thursday

- 9.50 Get online and join the Zoom call.
- 10.00 Session 4
- 10.45 Coffee break
- 10.55 Session 5
- 11.40 Coffee break
- 12.00 Session 6
- 12.45 Review and prayer
- 13.00 End

There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach, although we tend to find people prefer the single day.

## Numbers

Training typically requires fewer people than other forms of engagement (for example a webinar where you may have many hundreds of people), and we work with groups of 16-24 as our ideal size, although I know many other trainers who prefer groups of 6-12. Interestingly we do find a consistent non turn up rate, around 2-3 people out of 24 are no-shows, even if they have paid for the day. We therefore tend to set maximum bookings at 28, knowing some won't turn up.

We run other types of online events with 60 people, and others with 300. But for an interactive training day we find an upper limit of 24 works best. Whilst you can get 49 people on one screen on Zoom, the videos of each person are so small and the level of engagement so much more difficult to manage that we are generally saying 24 people is our limit. This also means everyone can be unmuted and it still works.

## Content

We've learnt some things about the content of an online training day and how it might differ from a physically present event. There are some significant advantages and disadvantages, so it is about maximising the former and minimising the latter. See the next page for some ideas.

One of the fundamental principles of online learning is the 'flipped classroom'. In essence what this means is that you try to get the content delivered as much as possible ahead of the event, and use the time online to contextualise, process and apply the content. This approach is typically used in the academic world, where they have realised simply delivering a live one-hour lecture isn't the best way of engaging people in learning. People might as well watch the lecture in their own time when it suits them (if necessary broken down into



In the room	Online
Preparation can theoretically be done right up to the last minute.	Preparation needs to be done further in advance to ensure (a) pre-day materials are sent out with plenty of time for people to complete them (b) handouts are sent far enough in advance for people to print them off ahead of the day (c) instructions for the host can be talked through to ensure they understand what they are going to need to do.
Arrive in plenty of time to set up ahead of participants arriving, normally one hour before the start, to sort layout, projection, flipchart, refreshments, and so on.	Arrive 30 minutes before the start time to check everything is working.
Plan carefully the set up of the room and your own space within it.	Plan carefully the set up of your own space to ensure maximum audibility, visibility and energy (see our How to be a Zoom Ninja guide). For example, don't sit back in a chair, but sit on the front edge of a chair not using the back support, This forces your body to hold itself, and creates more energy in the body.
Welcome people as they arrive, serve refreshments, chat.	Ask people to arrive 10 minutes before the Zoom call starts and welcome each personally as they enter the room. Encourage them to have microphones unmuted so there is a bit of banter and atmosphere as people arrive.
Ensure everyone speaks within the first 15 minutes of the start time	Ensure everyone speaks within the first five minutes of the start time.
	Help your participants to use Zoom well. See Zoom set-up tips.
Input maximum length, 20 minutes.	Input maximum length, 10-12 minutes.
Use a flipchart to develop a sense of the unveiling story of the journey through the day	Use the Whiteboard or Padlet boards to capture feedback.
Interaction with people over the breaks/lunch often provides the opportunity for some of the most fruitful conversations of the day.	Make yourself available during part of the breaks for those who want to chat about something. This does make it more tiring for you, but increases the opportunity for interaction with you (albeit very public!).
	Be aware that things take longer online, partly because people may be getting used to the technology and need things explaining several times, partly because sometimes the transferring between different tools can take a bit of time.
Videos can be of varying lengths depending on what you are doing.	Best not to rely on videos, and if you use them only 2-3 minutes long as they often play in rather a clunky way through Zoom, depending on people's bandwidth.
Once you have arrived and set up it is unlikely technology will go wrong.	Technology will go wrong, so build a bit of space for this into your timetable/thinking about the day, and have a back-up plan if you as the trainer get cut off.
You can direct all the different elements of the day easily, for example getting them into groups.	You need someone who is managing the process of the day as the host. They set up the breakout rooms whilst you are engaging with participants, they handle the person who is trying to get back into the event, they post instructions to Chat that you have pre prepared for them. They will need a document outlining their instructions for the day.
Distractions can be relatively easily spotted and managed.	There are more distractions present, both within their space and in the space of other people. Encourage people to remove potential distractions (i.e. phone etc.) and then be relaxed about the inevitability of children walking in, the doorbell going and so on.

chunks), then the time with the lecturer can be spent more profitably discussing and debating the content.

With those who attend our training days, we have less ability to ensure they complete the pre-work, so we may need to be more realistic with what we ask them to do. I have experimented and so far have found that up to 30 minutes of pre-work seems to go well. For example, for one day I asked them to watch a video I recorded (eight minutes), then read a side of A4 (five minutes), and then complete a questionnaire that asked some questions about what they had watched and read, as well as questions about Zoom confidence, what they were hoping to get out of the day and so on (ten minutes). However, worth noting that there are nearly always some people who don't do the pre-work, and therefore one has to work out how much to allow that to disadvantage them on the day.

I find online I get through less material than I would when physically present in a room with people.

## Delivery

### YOUR SET UP

Preparing your own space is vital. Far too many people don't do this well. See our How to be a Zoom Ninja guide for the details (and implement it!). The basics are:

- Have your camera at nose height (if you can see the ceiling in your shot it is almost certainly too low).
- Make sure there is good light on your face (natural is ideal, but if not an LED light source is best, at 10 or 2 o'clock, ideally at both).
- If you can afford a reasonable microphone (lapel or desktop) this will significantly improve the quality of the call. Generally speaking headsets aren't ideal. They don't look great, often the sound quality isn't good, and you can find yourself getting very hot ears!
- Remove distractions from your background. Simple, uncluttered is generally best.
- Get your eyes on the top third line (imagine the screen



divided into thirds) so there is minimal space above the top of your head.

- Be far enough away from the screen of your device for people to see more than just your head. Most of us use our hands when communicating, so make sure they are visible when in front of your chest.

For more on this take a look at [this video](#).

### NOTES

Where you place your notes is also important. If you place them to the side of the screen it looks odd every time you look at them. Above also doesn't work so well. You could use a teleprompter App, but most of us are used to seeing speakers look down at their notes, so this is the more natural place to put them. However, if you place them close to you, you will be looking down a long way and exposing the top of your head to your audience. Instead, place them either on the laptop keyboard so you only have to glance down, or put your notes on post-its notes and stick them to the bottom of the screen.

### USE OF THE CAMERA

Think carefully about where you look. Remember that you are only looking directly at people when you look directly into the camera (the equivalent of eye contact in a physical room). I put a sign on my screen pointing to where I need to look to remind me, as it is easy to look elsewhere.

### ZOOM SET UP TIPS

Participants often have quite different levels of competence with the functionality of Zoom (I normally try to find out their level of competence through a brief pre-event online questionnaire that helps me gauge how best to approach the training). It can be a big help to explain a few things before the event by sending them a [video](#) or walk them through this at the start of the day:

- How to switch between speaker and gallery view.
- How to set up the screen share space well. Before sharing your slides ask them to be on Speaker view. Then when you have shared your screen, ask them to click on view options (hover over middle top of screen) and in the menu to go to zoom ratio and select fit to window; then go to view options again and select side by side; then hover their mouse just to the left of their video where there are two small white lines, click on these and drag the slider bar to adjust the size of the speaker and slides so 60% slides/40% speaker.
- If they are muted they can press and hold down the space bar to temporarily unmute themselves.
- If they minimise the Zoom window, (top right) they can see other programmes and place the minimised window anywhere they want on the screen.

I always mention the following as part of the introduction to the day.





Zoom is brilliant but there are three inherent difficulties:

- Medium lends itself to observation rather than participation, so please participate, ask questions, contribute your best insights. What helps this is to remain unmuted unless there is a reason not to. It aids the flow of the interaction, a little banter even, and we won't have to constantly say 'You're muted'. Also, a little background noise actually helps it feel less sterile and aids engagement.
- Whereas if we were in a room together most of the distractions are removed, in our own room not only are there distractions all around, but also we can't necessarily see them. So please close down all other programmes, put your phone and the temptation of Facebook or Ebay out of reach, close that interesting book and focus on the day. It will not only enable you to get more out of it, but also others as well. Please keep your video on throughout, as that also helps with engagement.
- Weariness of sitting in front of screen, known as Zoom fatigue. There are two things you can do to combat this. Firstly, hide self view (click on your video image and you can select hide self view. Research shows that constantly looking at yourself actually contributes to Zoom fatigue. Secondly, research also shows that regular breaks from the screen helps. So we will have three types of break today: stretch breaks every 20 minutes or so for 20 seconds to simply stand up, stretch, look out of the window. Mini breaks, two minutes to walk out the room, grab some fresh air. Coffee, tea and lunch breaks, when I encourage you to get off screen and out of the room you are in.
- At some point highly likely something will go wrong, so please be patient.

It is worth noting that some devices don't work so well for a training day like this: (a) Tablets or phones don't have enough 'real estate' so it is better if people are on Desktops or Laptops (b) Chromebooks don't work with breakout rooms in Zoom.

## Engagement

Zoom meetings can feel more functional, sterile and stilted than normal meetings, partly because we are not used to them, and partly because the technology makes it more difficult to create a good atmosphere for a meeting. This means the trainer has to work harder to run a good event.

Zoom is also less forgiving of people speaking at the same time. (It's why, for example, saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted doesn't work on Zoom.) The way it works is that it cuts off the person speaking if someone else tries to speak. Negatively this means that fun banter is much harder to have (but not impossible) in a Zoom meeting. Positively it helps us to focus on the good practice of not speaking over one another.

As trainer you will need to ensure that people only speak one at a time. You may need to be a bit more directive about asking people to raise a hand (virtual or physical) when they want to contribute, so you can see and draw them in. It may also require you to quieten the more vocal, or those who tend to go on a bit too long, to enable others to contribute. I don't suggest using the mute key to do this. Normal good practice will work just fine.

You may also need to draw the quieter, more diffident ones into the discussion as for some, being online makes it more daunting to contribute. Create opportunities for people to speak. For example, if people have been in a breakout room, invite a quieter member to offer any feedback from the group. Or half way through a discussion simply say, 'Great contributions everyone, let's listen for the contributions of those who haven't yet said anything.' And if someone fills the silence who has already spoken, ask them to hold on until others have had a chance to speak.

In a physical meeting, it is easier for everyone to pick up the cues from one another about who wants to speak, what is going on. In a Zoom meeting people are far less likely to do this, so you may also need to curate the contributions in a clearer way than normal, for example, 'Mike is going to speak



next, then Mai-Li, followed by Sami and then Onde.’

## A MORE RELAXED STYLE

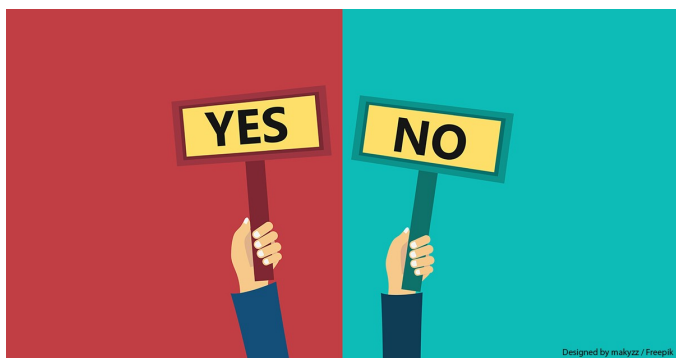
The nature of a Zoom call means that communication can ‘feel’ more direct, and lacks some of the nuances that happen in a physical space. So alongside a firmer hand, try to have a relaxed style. Smile, build in some moments to reduce intensity, have regular breaks, encourage some healthy banter.

For example, when we disagree with someone in a physical space there is often (a) some distance between us and them, (b) an ability to look at others as we are raising an alternative view, which lessens the sense that it is a direct conflict with the original person, (c) an ability to read some of the body language of the room and sense the ‘temperature’.

In a Zoom meeting, disagreement feels more intense, more personal, more direct. Knowing this means the trainer can keep an eye on this, stop to check the ‘intensity’ level and draw others in, while, as always, seeking to mine conflict, as healthy conflict is vital for a productive event.

## Technology

Familiarising yourself with the technology will make it more likely that the event progresses well. Be clear about both



how functions work and how you are going to use them.

If it is still relatively new to you it would be good to gather a group of around six people to trial the various functions ahead of your training day. You will be glad to find out things that don’t work as anticipated ahead of the day, giving you time to sort them out before running the actual event.

Again, our guide ‘How to be a Zoom Ninja’ is worth checking. It will be useful to send out to all participants ahead of the event. You may also like to create a simple short introductory video to the various functions of Zoom, and how to set up the Zoom environment on screen well. Both these can be sent out ahead of the day to help people prepare well.

Be sure to update Zoom regularly (they produce updates on almost a fortnightly basis) to ensure you have the latest functionality.

Here are six key Zoom functions that could be a great help to

your day. You will find them in the bar that appears (normally) towards the bottom of your screen when you hover your mouse over that area.

### 1. CHAT

This provides a place for the group to interact with one another, or potentially to interact privately between two participants. If you don’t want the latter to occur you can switch off this function in your Zoom account settings (generally it is best to switch off private conversations).

Think through how you want people to use chat (if at all), and then offer some guidelines either ahead of your meeting or as you start.

For example, you could use it to post questions for discussion, especially before they go into breakout rooms. It is worth noting that when breakout rooms start, Chat will need to be reopened for them to see previous posts, and also that anything posted in Chat when in breakout rooms is only visible to the people in that particular breakout room.

### 2. BREAKOUT ROOMS

Just as in a physically present training day, if there aren’t multiple times during the day when you have been in small groups, you are probably not enabling people to give of their best. Breakout rooms are a great way to do small groups, anything from pairs upwards.

- They can be set up so people are randomly allocated to a group, or you can choose who will be in which group. The latter obviously takes more time and may well require someone to be sorting this out as you introduce the item where breakout rooms will be used.
- You can set the time of groups, and also the length of warning before the groups close (I generally set it to 15 seconds as the standard 60 seconds can mean you have people returning into the main room spread over a minute which can be a little awkward for early returners).

The difference with these groups is that you don’t get any sense of (a) how they are going (b) what people are saying. As ‘host’ you can decide to drop into any of the groups if you like, but this can feel a bit odd.

So, when people gather back you may want to use a couple of ways of gauging how the conversation went before you get any specific feedback on content.

- You can do that with a simple show of hands where they hold up the relevant number of fingers. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not so good and 5 is really well, how did your group go? On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not very energised and 5 is very energised, how energised were you by that discussion?
- Or you could use a Poll (see below).

### 3. POLLS

You can set up simple Polls, creating the questions beforehand (go into your Zoom account online, find the

relevant meeting, and you can then set up the Polls ahead of the day). It can be a quick way of gauging where people are. You can choose to share the full results with the group or just go for the trends, as seems appropriate.

#### 4. SCREEN SHARING

Documents, PowerPoints, Whiteboards (see below) videos, websites and so on can all be shared and seen by everyone using this facility.

If using PowerPoint, here are a few specific tips for using it in Zoom:

- It works best in a 4:3 aspect ratio not 16:9 because of the way Zoom is configured on a screen.
- On the whole, avoid using more than a dozen or so words on a slide. Depending on the devices people are using, the slides can be quite small on the screen, and they simply won't be able to read the words.
- For the same reason graphs and charts often don't work very well. Check them on different screen sizes before showing them.
- Use images as much as, if not more than, words.
- Keep the number of slides down, and don't be in PPT mode for too long.

If using a video:

- Be aware you must share your sound with others so that they can hear the video. This is a tick box when you go to 'share screen'
- Videos require significant bandwidth, and often appear smooth on your screen but jumpy/stuttery on other people's screens, so perhaps be a little cautious about using videos. Click the 'optimise video' option in screen

share to improve the quality of video, but note it does mean your own ability to see people during screen share is removed.

#### 5. WHITEBOARDS

The whiteboard is found in your Share Screen options. You can create an interactive whiteboard that everyone can contribute to as a way of sharing feedback from groups, or posting ideas around a topic. You can set these up ahead of the meeting and have multiple whiteboards (click on the + in the bottom right to create an additional whiteboard). The functionality is fairly basic, but it does introduce another way of engaging.

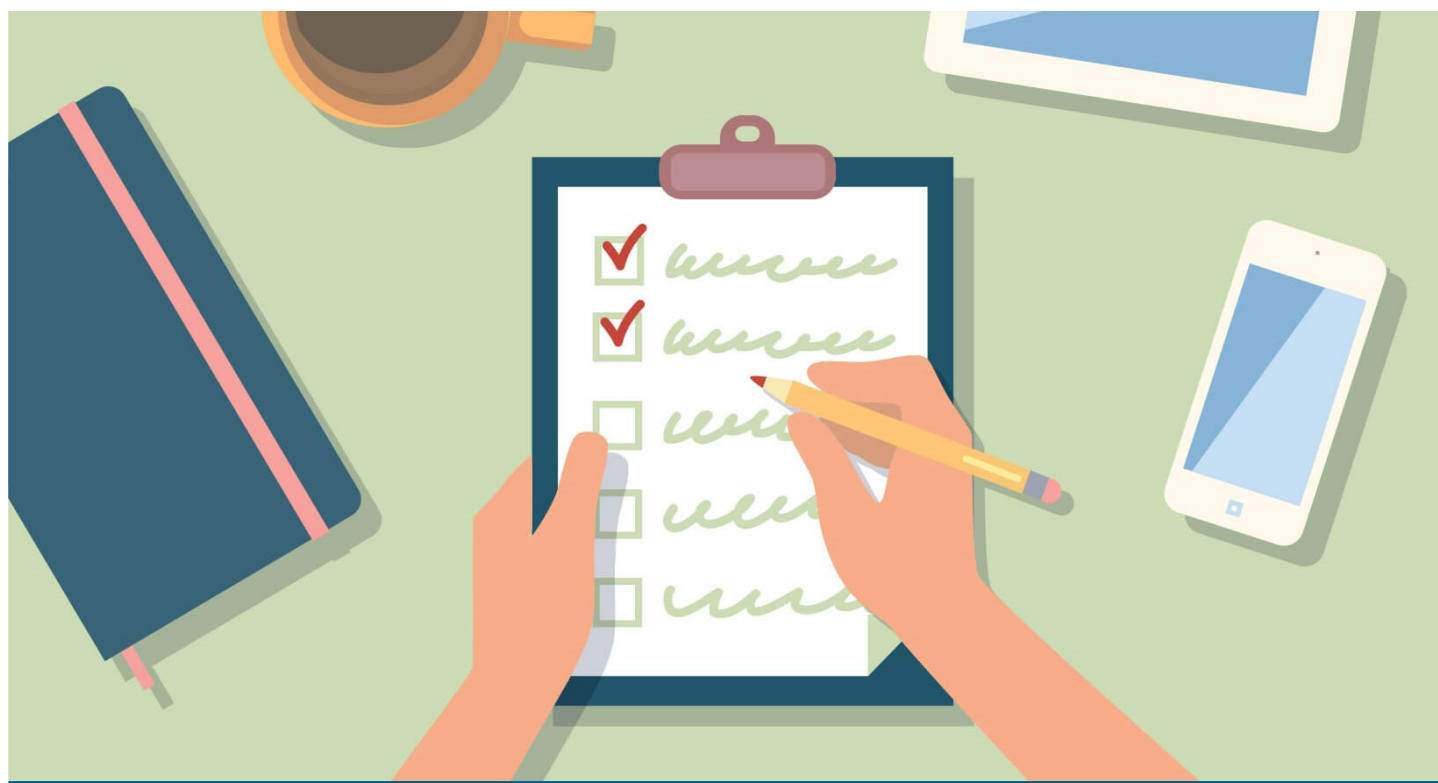
#### 6. RECORD

You can record training through Zoom. This may come in handy for those who want to watch something back to reflect on an aspect of the day. Zoom now automatically alerts participants to a recording happening. You can also pause the recording at any point if there is a section you don't want to have on the recording (don't stop the recording, as this will create two videos rather than keep the recording all in one).

All these tools will take time for people to learn, so don't introduce them all at once, and be sure to explain clearly how to use them as you do introduce them, preferably with a bit of light-hearted humour to ease things along.

#### ADDITIONAL TOOLS

Many other tools can be integrated with Zoom. Here are a few I find useful:



- **Slido** This is a more sophisticated way of polling/engaging your audience than the rather basic polling feature in Zoom. It has a really helpful integration facility with PowerPoint, which is why I prefer it to its popular rival Mentimeter.
- **Jamboard** Google's free 'whiteboard' equivalent offers more features and great interactivity.
- **Padlet** This is a great way to gather information/feedback. It is like an online Post-it wall. There are six different ways you can set up a wall, and people can post using a link, and include links to websites, videos, files, images in their posts.

## Host

It is ideal to have someone hosting the call so you as the facilitator can concentrate on delivery of your material and engagement with participants. That host needs to be competent with the following Zoom facilities:

- Admitting people from the waiting room.
- Renaming people if their names are wrong.
- Creating breakout rooms, both those automatically generated and those where participants are selected.
- The chat function and how to post chats and files within it.
- Muting and unmuting all participants.

## Advantages of Online

- Accessibility. People who couldn't physically attend due to disability, child care, cost or time may be able to participate.
- Money saved by training organisation and participants.
- Cheaper price for charged events.
- Travel time saved by trainer and participants.
- Environmental impact reduced.
- Access to certain tools like polls, Padlet board, Google forms, Google earth.
- Ease of ability to record a session for people to reconnect with core content.

## Disadvantages of Online

### WHAT THEY MISS

- Getting out of context. I have heard many leaders say that they really value the opportunity to get out of their context to come on a training day. The main advantage is focus.
- The building of collegiality across a group of leaders within a community (e.g. diocese, Venture OLs).
- The opportunity for blessing and serving leaders. The provision of great refreshments, lunch and so on.
- The opportunity to browse and buy helpful resources related to the topic, as well as wider material.

### WHAT COULD BE DONE ABOUT THIS?

- Build refreshment breaks with others as part of the programme, using randomly generated groups as well as giving people space away from screen.
- Offer one-on-one time with trainer using slots during extended lunch break (would require more of trainer)?
- Promote resources by sending review of a few key resources (could they include a preview of a few pages) with link to website for purchase. Offer a discount, or no P+P costs?

## Pre-event Trainer Checklist

This is a quick checklist I created as a result of forgetting to do some of these things ahead of a training day.

- ☐ Print off notes and timetable.
- ☐ Remove/unplug phones.
- ☐ Glass of water (water bottles don't look great on screen).
- ☐ Lighting.
- ☐ Camera at right height.
- ☐ Microphone in place.
- ☐ Check Zoom waiting room details are appropriate.
- ☐ Open up PowerPoint and ensure ready to present.
- ☐ Prepare Zoom whiteboard.
- ☐ Prepare Zoom polls.
- ☐ Prepare Padlet board.
- ☐ Inform others in the household you are training.
- ☐ Put reminder notice on door.

Do share your insights and ideas with us as we learn better how to do good online training days.

James Lawrence  
August 2021





## Appendix: Equipment Recommendations

A good laptop will probably include a half decent camera and microphone these days, but if you want to enhance your online presence a few bits of equipment can make a significant difference. You could spend a fortune on this, but we are assuming a limited budget.

### LIGHTING

The first priority for many people is a decent light to ensure you are visible. It needs to be powerful enough to be placed behind your screen with you sitting approximately 100-150cm away, and ideally adjustable (at least in brightness, and ideally in temperature).

- [Raleno](#) LED Video Light. This light can either be mounted on top of a camera or on a light stand. It has an internal rechargeable battery and can also run off the mains. Price varies, but it can often be found just under £50.
- If you want a complete package, these [two lights](#) are excellent and come with stands. There are cheaper alternatives, but often the stands aren't very strong or the lights very good.

### MICROPHONE

This is the next item to get. Good audio quality is in many ways more important than good visual quality. There are several types:

- Your in-ear mobile headphones and mike can be a good way forward, and many phones come with a reasonable quality set these days. However, some people don't like something in their ears for long periods of time, and they often have relatively short cables, which can be a problem if you need a bit of distance between you and the camera so people can see your hands. Earpods get around this problem.

- A USB mike that plugs into a spare USB port, and sits on your desk has the advantage of being able to be placed close to you even if you are sitting a bit further back from your camera.
- You can also buy mikes that plug into your headphone jack, but that might cut out your speakers unless you have a converter box.
- The fourth option is to buy a webcam with a built in mike (see below).

These USB mikes are good, not too large, and come with a simple desk stand:

- [Fifine](#) is a medium price but good quality mike.
- [Rode](#) is a quality manufacturer at a higher price point.

### WEBCAM

The third piece of kit is a webcam if your computer one isn't that good. Again, the range is huge. Here are a couple of options, but do think carefully about how and where you are going to attach it. One of the problems can be that if you attach a webcam to a fair size screen it will be above your eye height and the angle won't be very flattering.

- This mid price [webcam](#) comes recommended and includes a reasonable mike and is plug and play.
- This is a cheaper [webcam](#) with similar functionality to the one above.

### POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL ITEMS

A laptop stand.

Wireless mouse and keyboard.

Phone stand.

