

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT - Overview

Module #17

For many program attendees, the experience is not only about gaining information on the topic at hand, but also about the social aspect – the ability to meet up with others that are keen on the subject matter, to interact and to share. It is the engagement that deepens and creates value in the experience of attending an event.

As programmers and presenters we are looking to facilitate several types of engagement:

- Student to student
- Student to instructor
- Student to content
- Student to technology

For the most part we are comfortable with creating these opportunities with live, in person presentations. We allow time before and after a presentation for socializing; we ask questions of the audience to gauge the level of knowledge or experience in the audience, or just to break the ice. We expect and invite questions and comments from the audience and if we are engaged in a longer, multi-session class we might have planned group activities, project, or other ways to interact.

When delivery content in an online environment, the goals remain the same, but the methods of engagement are different. By nature, attending and delivering an online program is remote, and the ability to interact with others is difficult. For this reason, it is even more important to take the time to plan opportunities for engagement.

A good, strong presentation only occurs if the audience is engaged. This is hard to achieve if a presenter is just reading off the slides, not making eye contact, and otherwise not interacting with the audience. In a live presentation, a speaker's personality will often shine through, and helps to capture people's attention. Questions and answers between the speaker and the audience also help to build connection. In an on-line environment the ability to engage the audience is even more important, but is also more difficult.

A Society staff or volunteer (Host, Moderator or Program Coordinator) should reach out to you before your event. It's important to discuss ahead of time how questions from the audience

will be handled as well as to discuss the possibility of any other kind of audience engagement that can be used.

Zoom offers several options which your Host and/or Moderator should be able to assist with.

- Use of video
- Audio interactions
- Chat
- Reactions
- Polls

USE of VIDEO

Take the time to ensure you look approachable, and professional – this is your first opportunity to set the tone for the rest of the event. As a presenter you should have your video turned on so attendees are able to see you. If you find this distracting – seeing yourself on screen – refer to **Module #10** for tips on selecting different Views (including Hiding Self View).

Something as simple as using an engaging, funny or unusual **Virtual Background** (see **Module #2**) can often be enough to prompt comments from the audience, which can lead to conversation – audio, or through Chat.

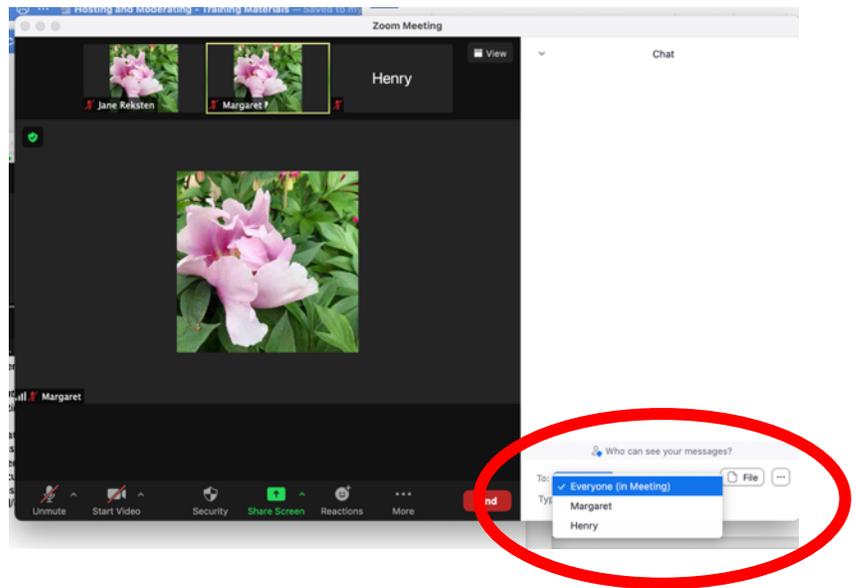
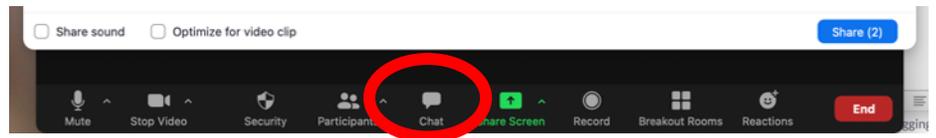
As the presenter, you can also encourage attendees to turn their video on – even just briefly – to allow for you and others to see people’s faces and get a sense of the humanity in the space, rather than blank video screens. This is a positive touch for both presenters, and attendees.

AUDIO INTERACTIONS

This will be the closest to what would occur at an in person event, but comes with some challenges. If too many people unmute themselves at the same time, feedback can occur. It can also be very easy for people to talk over each other and for the Host or Presenter to be unable to tell who is talking. Using audio questions will work best if people raise their hand (using Reactions – see below) and have been asked to wait until they are invited to ask their question. Much like a live event. Whoever is fielding the questions needs to be sure they scan through all the gallery screens so they don’t miss anyone with their hand up. Be sure to explain to attendees how Audio Questions will be handled, if applicable. This is usually handled by the Host or Moderator

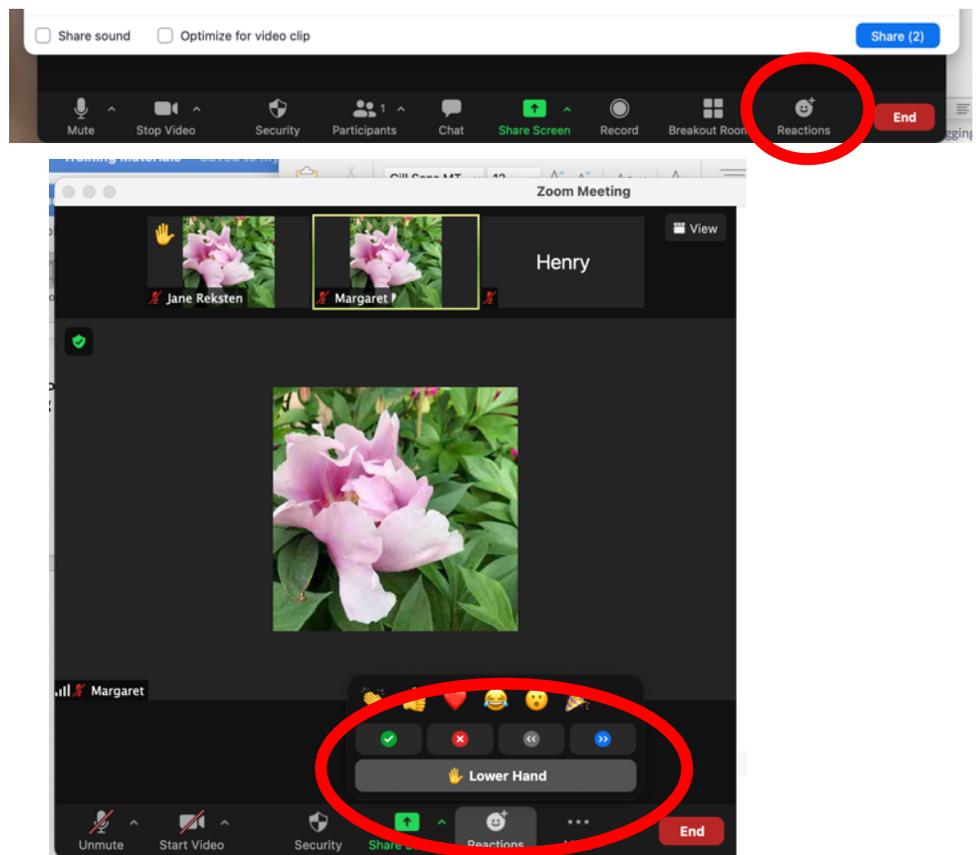
CHAT

The Chat functions allows participants to type in questions, answers, messages and any information that needs to be shared. Materials can also be made available to participants. A web link can be pasted into the Chat, a document can be added and participants can download them to use during the presentation, or save for use at a later date.



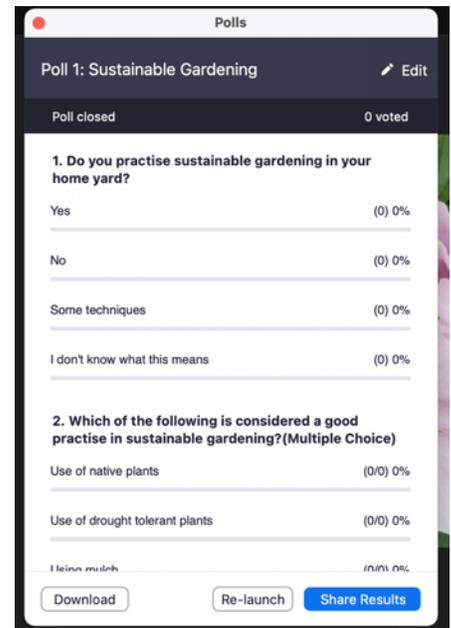
REACTIONS

Reactions are emojis that appear next to a participants video. They allow for feedback from participants.



POLLS

Polls in Zoom can be a great tool to engage an audience – before, during or at the end of a presentation. They allow you to create on-line questions that create an opportunity for input from the audience. Polls must be set up ahead of time.



SUMMARY

Ideally as a presenter you will investigate and plan for several different ways to achieve engagement:

- Student to student
- Student to instructor
- Student to content
- Student to technology

Clearly if you are presenting a one-off workshop or talk, your opportunities are more limited. But it would not be difficult to plan the following:

- Create a short Poll to be shared at the beginning as a way of finding out how much people know about the topic to be discussed.
- Plan to use Chat to share a handout (list of resources) or web link.
- Take questions from the audience using either computer Audio, or Chat.
- Ask a question that requires a simple Yes or No answer which attendees answer with Reactions (thumbs up or down)
- Use a Virtual Background that provides an opportunity to ask for feedback using one of the methods available.

The key is that all the above require a member of the audience to physically do something. They need to speak, type, or click on something on their screen.

This requires that the participant be listening, and connected to the community that is part of the presentation. They will be less likely to experience the presentation in a passive, isolated manner. They will be encouraged to interact which helps with comprehension, retention and a sense of connection to the others involved.

- To learn about **Audience Engagement** strategies and tools for longer courses, see **Module #18**.
- **Chat** and **Reactions** are covered in more detail in **Module #7**.
- **Polls** are covered in **Module #8**.