

Virtual class is
in. Click the
link to join.

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Contents

3

A Brief History and Introduction

4

Have a CAN DO Attitude

5

Step 1: Planning Your Virtual Classroom

6

Step 2: Choose your Activities

7

Step 3: Getting the most from Learners



A Brief History & Introduction to Virtual Classrooms



"One of the things that's very, very important in computer science research is a regular and dependable flow of caffeine," explains Dr Quentin Stafford-Fraser

You are probably wondering what in the world coffee has to do with virtual classrooms. Let us explain.

According to the article "[How the world's first webcam made a coffee pot famous](#)" by [Rebecca Kesby](#), the world's first webcam was set up to monitor a coffee pot in a computer lab at the University of Cambridge.

Legend has it that the scientists and engineers got tired of constantly being disappointed with an empty coffee pot. Consequently they set up a crude program and webcam to "monitor" the coffee situation. Since 1998, things have transformed completely. With the advent of high quality cloud based video conferencing platforms, online learning is highly accessible and here to stay.



"In 10 years it had gone from being a wacky new idea, to a novelty that a reasonable number of people knew about, to a widely viewed icon of the early web, to a historic artifact, and then to something that people were mourning over when it was no longer there," concludes Dr Stafford-Fraser



With a little ingenuity anything you can do in a live classroom can be replicated in a virtual setting.

Anything? Yes anything.

Wrapping your head around that may seem difficult. You are probably saying "but what about..." and that is totally normal.

It is good to question/compare what you have been doing in the live classroom with what you think you can do in the virtual classroom. It means you are thinking.

By turning on your camera, it opens a whole world of possibility beyond just didactic learning.

Have a CAN DO attitude:

- product demonstrations
- role play
- discussion based learning
- workshops
- group/single learner debrief
- reflection assignments
- drawing assignments
- matching assignments
- scavenger hunts
- online research
- distillation exercises
- SWOT/PEST analysis
- competitor comparisons
- video/written document review

Step 1: Planning your virtual classroom

Create a plan, but as always, be ready to flex.

Failing to plan is planning to fail. We say this all the time. Sometimes people think that running a virtual classroom learning is easy. Everyone just clicks on the link and bam everyone is good to go. Not necessarily true.

From your first communication to the final wave goodbye on camera, everything has to be planned.

Getting your participants online, setup and ready to learn is equally as important as your content. If the learners have a poor experience with the first session, you are in for a long ride.

With thoughtful communications to the participants that lay everything out very clearly, you can start your training correctly.

This level of planning will carry throughout your training.

Top tips for Virtual Classrooms:



Communicate clearly:

One invite with objectives, link, dial in number and expectations for the session.



Have a roster:

This will help you keep track of your learners. Not only being there, but tracking their participation as well.



Content:

Ensure that you have all of your content prepared, tested and in the order you want it displayed.



Time:

Everything in the virtual environment takes just a split second longer, plan for it.



Step 2: Choosing Activities

"What do I want my audience to do or say differently"

You might have seen this quote above in another white paper. But it rings true for any training planning process. Determining the outcome first and then working backward from there is a sure fire way to get the results you are looking for.

Taking the time to ask yourself a few basic questions will help you plan your content accordingly. Here are a few we suggest using for the virtual environment.

Do my learners need to see a video on this subject?

Do they need to breakout into groups and role play this topic? How many in each group?

Does showing them a pdf work?

Do I need them to compare products and/or services from a competitor?

Do they need to hear from an expert in the industry?

Do they need a walk through on an iPad or other program?

Can I use poll questions to reinforce this content?

Do I have written material that they can use and take notes on during a workshop?

Can we make a game or competition out of this?



Step 3: Getting the most out of learners

"Lets get you up and rolling, once we have you all set up please feel free to relax and grab a cup of coffee"

Comfort. It is critically important in the virtual learning environment.



Beyond the physical comfort of their own home/office, getting your learners comfortable with the technology and other elements is vitally important to their success.

This ALWAYS starts with a "tech check". During the tech check, it is important to work through the following items.

- Can we see and hear each other?
- Do you have earbuds or a head set for audio?
- Are you in a comfortable learning environment?
- Are you logged off a VPN (virtual private network)?
- Do you have a good stable internet connection?
- Have you rebooted your computer lately to make sure all updates have been performed?
- Do you have too many windows open?



Ensuring that your learners understand the basics in advance will pave a very smooth pathway for the rest of your sessions.