

The MLA Webinar Guide (2022)

This is your guide to developing a powerful and engaging webinar. Contact the MLA Education Department at [medlib-ed@mlahq.org](mailto:medlib-ed@mlahq.org) with questions, corrections, or suggestions.

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# The Essence of this Guide in Eight Bullet Points [[return to TOC]](#9k93mctxjtdx)

* A webinar is a means of teaching, i.e., of transforming participants
* Design your webinar “backwards” from the change you want to create in participants (your learning outcomes)
* Thoughtfully plan of every aspect of your webinar
* Present with passion, humor, and authority
* **Engage your audience with many opportunities for meaningful interaction**
* Practice, practice, practice, and tweak before going live
* Deliver what you promise
* *Violate any guideline if you have a better idea!*

Read this guide--skim or study, as your interests and prior knowledge incline you--look at other sources, develop your (always evolving) ideas on how to best use the webinar format, and become the best webinar presenter you can be!

# Webinars: What? Why? Who? When? [[return to TOC]](#9k93mctxjtdx)

## What is a webinar?

A webinar is a teaching/learning event conducted over the internet. More specifically, a webinar is:

* everything you say and do
* and ask participants to do
* for a period of time (90 minutes at MLA)
* over the internet
* that helps *engaged participants* (participants with a sincere desire to learn from the time you spend with them), with their particular interests and prior knowledge and skills,
* *To be able to demonstrate to themselves that they have met the learning outcomes of your webinar*.

In a webinar, you can ***teach by* communicating information**:

* tell stories
* lecture
* show photos
* present graphs and charts
* show a PowerPoint
* demonstrate software
* demonstrate websites
* do nothing (i.e., pause while your audience completes a task)
* share handouts
* show pictures of your kids and pets :)
* show videos
* examine cases

And ***teach* by interacting with your participants**:

* discuss assignments, polls, or handouts you distributed prior to the webinar
* poll your audience
* interact with your audience by answering chat questions
* interact with your audience by posing chat discussion questions
* give attendees problems to address
* give immediate feedback on audience responses
* do whatever else you can think of to do with a computer, and an internet connection to captivate your audience!

Both ways of teaching are important. But the best single piece of advice in this document may be: *A successful and effective webinar requires a substantial amount of teaching through interaction*. More on this below.

You can “begin” your webinar days before the actual event by:

* Including handouts on [MEDLIB-ED](http://www.medlib-ed.org). Please submit these to Deb at least a week in advance.
* Soliciting ideas, problems, questions, scenarios from attendees in advance of the session and developing some of the session around this material.
* Doing a quick pretest or survey to get a better picture of your participant’s prior knowledge and skills to use in designing your webinar.

You can “continue” your webinar days after the actual event by providing post-webinar material in response to participant requests and interests

## Who gives webinars?

Teachers. We may call you a presenter, but you are really a teacher: someone who helps students (AKA attendees, participants, an audience) transform (change) in specific ways (meet learning outcomes).

## When do you begin to design your webinar?

You can start designing your webinar six to eight weeks before your webinar date. Begin thinking about what you will actually do in your webinar. The description and learning outcomes in your webinar listing in MEDLIB-ED are a contract with your audience. ***Please be sure that what you do in the webinar will enable engaged participants to leave your webinar with the skills listed in your Learning Outcomes.***

# Designing Your Webinar

In designing your webinar, keep in mind all the means a webinar affords you to transform your audience. *Talking over* a PowerPoint presentation is but one (and not the best) webinar design. *Having* a PowerPoint presentation is, however, an excellent way to *organize* everything you do, including, of course, talking over some slides.

But the first question to ask yourself when planning your webinar is **not**: How can I put together a great PowerPoint presentation? It **is**: How can I use a computer, an internet connection, and *myself* to be most effective in helping my live, remote audience meet the learning outcomes of my webinar?

What follows are recommendations for one way to structure a webinar. Take what makes sense to you and add your own creative ideas.

## Timings

* 0-2 minutes: Moderator instructions, introduction, and time for latecomers
* 2-80 minutes: Your presentation
* 80-90 minutes: Final questions, wrap-up and thank you, and moderator announcements.

## Layout of slides

Simple slides with a rich spoken narrative coupled with frequent audience engagement is best. See *MLA PowerPoint Accessibility Guidance* for Accessibility requirements.

## Key slides and slide types

### 1. Title

Begin with a title slide.

### 2. Personal introduction

Welcome your audience while showing a slide with your name and your photograph or make a brief live appearance. Be personal.

### 3. Learning outcomes

Tell your audience how they will benefit from their time with you. For example, if your webinar has four outcomes, introduce their appearance in the next four slides, one per slide. Simply list the outcomes from your initial description, or better, rewrite them in a way that engages your audience a bit more. For example:

* *Instead of*: by the end of this webinar, you will be able to modify a PubMed search to find grey literature. *Try*: What grey lit is lurking in PubMed and how can you bring it to the light of day? *Or*: Bring the grey lit lurking in PubMed to the light of day!
* *Instead of*: at the end of this webinar, participants will be able to identify and implement pre-planning project management strategies. *Try:* Want to get started on the right foot before you even start planning to manage your project?
* *Instead of*: Upon completion of this webinar, participants should be able to successfully identify key technology trends. *Try*: Want to foresee the future of technology and amaze your colleagues and students? *Or*: Foresee the future of technology and amaze colleagues and students!

You get the idea. Be interesting, fun, and unexpected. See more ideas at [Turn objectives into motivators](http://blog.cathy-moore.com/2007/12/makeover-turn-objectives-into-motivators/).

### 4. Overview

Overview slides show the big picture of your webinar, the main points or sections of the journey (see next point) you will take attendees through to meeting your learning outcomes:

Include an overview slide early in your webinar so participants know how your presentation is arranged. Although this can be a very simple slide, it plays an important role, because it shows the audience the “big picture” of your material and helps them to organize and keep track of “where you are going” (link to source has gone bad).

### 5. Creating the journey: Organizing principles

There are many compelling ways to take your audience on a journey of transformation! For example, you can:

* Tell a story
* Present an argument
* Go step by step through one or more procedures
* Do all the above and more

What’s most important is that the journey:

* has a logic, a sense to the order of the learning activities (lecture, Q&A, etc.), that is clear to the participants and serves your learning outcomes.
* doesn’t consist of the participants only absorbing information you transmit.

### 6. Creating the journey: Tips

* Know your audience. Because you are talking to fellow health sciences librarians/health information professionals and because you’ve described your webinar to define your audience, this is pretty easy, but it still requires attention.
* You want to make sure that your words and slides are understandable and relevant given the description of your presentation you submitted. Avoid jargon, buzzwords, and acronyms unless you explain them.
* If you are demonstrating a process, such as a software package that renders images, prepare slides in advance so that your audience is not waiting for the program to do its thing, i.e., follow the example of TV chefs and bake the cake in advance.
* Use stories, puzzles, dialogue to convey information in an engaging way.
* Avoid information overload: Attendees like to learn new information, but the quality of a webinar is not equal to the amount of information communicated. Learning/transformation occurs “inside” your participants through their engagement with all you say and do. It doesn’t happen by information passing from you and your slides to the brains of your participants.
* Ask reflection questions: How will you adapt, adopt, apply?
* In webinars, there are no social norms that support listening politely to a speaker. You have to hold interest in every way you can: Frequent changes, images, interactions with participants, tone of voice, and the power of what you are offering.

### 7. The journey slides

Spread out words and images across multiple slides instead of loading up single slides with words and images. This keeps you and your audience on the same page, er, slide: Your audience is not reading ahead to bullets you haven’t gotten to yet. And the motion of changing slides helps keep your audience’s attention. WebEx does not support PowerPoint animations.

### 8. Final slide(s)

Close with time for questions, a summary of the teaching/learning journey, and a sincere "thank you" to participants for joining.

# Preparing for Planning Sessions

Deb will schedule two Zoom planning sessions prior to your webinar. In the first session, about 4 weeks before your webinar, she will talk with you about your presentation, plan ways to engage participants, and give feedback on your slides. About a week before the event, you’ll meet to review slides and practice all the activities you’ve planned.

* Four weeks before your webinar: Planning Session: Discuss, plan, and provide feedback (30 minutes)
* One week before your webinar: Rehearsal Session: Walk through and practice all activities. (45 minutes)

# Preparing for the Day of the Webinar [[return to TOC]](#9k93mctxjtdx)

## A few days before

Do a dry run a day or so before: “If a presenter has practiced and prepared sufficiently, then the presentation itself can be as enjoyable for him/her as it is for participants” ([Webinar Best Practices: From Invitation to Evaluation](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiYk4Gm4Pv6AhVJk4kEHVgpAM0QFnoECA0QAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.uwstout.edu%2Fcontent%2Flib%2Fthesis%2F2011%2F2011landel.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0avEvU4_oEOzNbsYBJv0ax)). It's easy to skip this, thinking, “I know my material. I’ll be fine.” But (it hardly bears repeating): Practice makes. . .” If you don’t have the patience to run through your entire presentation, at least practice the parts that you are least comfortable with.

Anticipate questions and prepare answers in advance. Send the moderator questions, so they can pretend questions were asked in advance, in case no one asks questions.

## The day before

* Get plenty of rest.
* Identify a private room in your home or office building from which you will do your presentation

## The day of

* Remove distractions. Turn off your cell. Lock pets and humans out of your room.
* Relax and center.
* Use a headset with a mic on your computer or landline (with a mic if possible). Don't use a speaker phone or cell phone.
* Place "Do Not Disturb" signs on all doors.
* Ensure all telephone ringers are silenced.
* Consider having a second computer on standby with the session loaded in case the main machine crashes or the session window is accidentally closed ([Webinar Best Practices: From Invitation to Evaluation](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2011/2011landel.pdf)).
* Close all unnecessary applications on your computer ([Webinar Best Practices: From Invitation to Evaluation](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2011/2011landel.pdf))
* Be sure to have a glass of room-temperature water nearby ([Webinar Best Practices: From Invitation to Evaluation](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2011/2011landel.pdf)).
* Have a printed copy of the presentation available so if the Internet fails, the webinar discussion can continue.
* Run through a few vocal exercises to ensure your vocal cords can make it through the session ([Webinar Best Practices: From Invitation to Evaluation](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/lib/thesis/2011/2011landel.pdf)).
* Have a clock nearby to ensure the presentation moves at the pace necessary to complete on time with an opportunity to answer questions.

## Live, before you formally begin

* Sign in 10 to 15 minutes early so you and the moderator can through last-minute details, refresh on how to use annotation tools and chat areas, and ensure all systems are running.
* Connect with people as they sign on. Maybe ask attendees to answer a simple question in chat, such as, Where are you from? Or ask a substantive question as a teaser: How important is it to find the grey lit relevant to a systematic review?

# Tips on Delivering your Webinar [[return to TOC]](#9k93mctxjtdx)

* Tips: Start with the camera on, so the audience can see you and so connect better. Briefly introduce yourself and say a few words about why the webinar topic matters to you and why it can matter to your audience. Keep the camera on if you like.
* Be yourself and be personal. Use “I” and “you.” Address participants by name.
* You're an expert on your content: [remove "upspeak" or "uptalk"](https://youtu.be/NQWej-hMiZI).
* Be conversational.
* Imagine one very interested person to whom you direct your presentation.
* Tell a story over your title.
* Treat the audience’s time as more important than yours. Plan, practice, and stay focused on accomplishing your purpose. (This is a variation of [Josh Bernoff’s](https://withoutbullshit.com/) “Iron Imperative” for business writers.)
* The most effective way to respect your audience’s time is to **teach by *engaging and interacting* with your audience**!

Participants need opportunities to actively engage with your material and a break from passive listening. One expert advises giving attendees something to do every 10-12 minutes, e.g.:

* respond to a poll
* respond to a question
* work on a problem or address a scenario ([Webinars: Designing Effective Learning Experiences)](https://bethkanter.org/webinars-prof-dev/)

Another expert advises: ‘Include many, many thought-provoking questions for people to answer in the chat. These aren’t polls or multiple-choice questions. They’re more like, “Here’s a problem. How do you think we should solve it?” or “Here’s a draft of a solution. What’s wrong with it?”’ ([Tips for webinars or virtual training](https://blog.cathy-moore.com/2014/01/tips-for-webinars-or-virtual-training/))

Another recommends having short question-and-answer sessions throughout rather than saving all questions for the final 10 or 15 minutes.

* Keep it moving. Keep it live. Mix it up. Be expressive. Vary your tone of voice. Add a little drama. Create suspense. And teach!
* Eschew verbal pause and fillers (“like,” “um,” “you know,” etc.)
* Instead of saying "um", "like", "you know," pause. Pauses give your audience time to process what you have shared.  
  Invite participants to ask questions as they arise, rather than saving questions for the end.
* Always communicate to your entire audience, even when you are answering a question and especially when you are answering a question or talking to someone you know.

# Self-Reflection and Webinar Evaluations [[return to TOC]](#9k93mctxjtdx)

After you have delivered your webinar, signed off of Zoom, and relaxed a bit, take time to reflect on what you did well, what you can improve, and how your next webinar can be even more impactful! Take notes.

Thirty to 40 days after your webinar, you will receive a summary of participants’ responses to the Webinar evaluation questions. Use this valuable information to reflect as above.

# Appendix: Useful ideas from Participants in Previous Webinars [[return to TOC]](#9k93mctxjtdx)

## What made their course engaging

* Interactive, opportunities for questions throughout
* Answered questions, took polls, slides built upon previous slides.
* Information was chunked into sections.
* At many points the instructors stopped and had us take a survey; they also gave us time to ask questions.
* It was simple and well-organized, therefore, easy to follow and understand.
* I love the polls. They keep me engaged and listening.
* Good recommended resources
* I liked the active learning questions.
* Knows subject well, asked engaging questions of participants

## What made their course not engaging

* LOTS of material. It's hard to engage listeners when info is coming from a fire house.
* Presentation was a bland reading of PowerPoint slides.
* It was very much a "lecture" vs learning about what to do in real world and how this would work.
* Too many [webinars] are just PowerPoints with talking heads.
* Presenter was very monotone, mostly read slides, which were primarily bullet points.
* The slides were too self-explanatory and therefore I found it easy to disengage from the presentation