

Video Conferencing Guidelines for Faculty and Students in Graduate Online Courses

Cynthia Gautreau

Assistant Professor

Department of Elementary and Bilingual Education
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
cgautreau@fullerton.edu

Barbara C. Glaeser

Professor

Department of Special Education
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
bglaeser@fullerton.edu

L. Carl Renold

Professor

Department of Human Services
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
creynold@fullerton.edu

Shariq Ahmed

Lecturer

Master's in Instructional Design and Technology Program
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
sahmed@fullerton.edu

Joyce Lee

Professor

Department of Educational Leadership
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
joycelee@fullerton.edu

JoAnn Carter-Wells

Professor, Department of Reading

Coordinator, Master's in Instructional Design and Technology Program
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
jcarterwells@fullerton.edu

Mark Worden

Lecturer

Master's in Instructional Design and Technology Program
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
mworden@fullerton.edu

E. Douglas Boynton

Instructor

Master's in Instructional Design and Technology Program
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
edboynton@fullerton.edu

Jim Schools

Instructor

Master's in Instructional Design and Technology Program
California State University, Fullerton
Fullerton, CA 92831 USA
jschools@fullerton.edu

Abstract

A review of the literature revealed that established guidelines were not available to assist faculty who use video conferencing in their online graduate courses. In an effort to address this need, a self-evaluation study was completed with faculty who teach such courses. Drawing on the results of this study together with published Netiquette guidelines and a survey of other extant literature, a set of Video Conferencing Guidelines was created.

Keywords: video conferencing, practical guidelines, online instructors, instructional designers, graduate online courses

Introduction and Background

As faculty members in the fully online Master of Science in Instructional Design and Technology (MSIDT) degree program at California State University, Fullerton (CSU Fullerton), the authors of the present paper hold themselves responsible for integrating emerging technologies into their instruction to meet the changing needs of their graduate students. Synchronous technology options are robust and provide adequate access to video conferencing and related tools such as desktop sharing. The integration of video conferencing provides a personal connection and opportunity for faculty and graduate students to interact in a synchronous learning environment (Kear, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). The ability to converse with students using video conferencing permits the active exchange of ideas and synchronous collaborative discussions ([White, 2010](#)).

In addition, based on faculty observations, the inclusion of video conferencing has enhanced online learning communities and improved communication. Previously, communication was predominately asynchronous and text based, by means of tools such as e-mail, discussion board forums, and announcements. Video conferencing adds a new dimension of interaction and communication that was previously unavailable in the online learning environment (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, 2011). [Wang and Chen \(2007\)](#) contend that the increased interactions and synchronous learning environment promoted by video conferencing address the need for increased human interaction often experienced by online learners. Students expect educators to use the available technologies and implement innovations as available (Reigeluth, 2009).

As faculty, the authors realized the potential that video conferencing provides to real-time communication and community building in web-based courses. At the same time, they acknowledged that along with the advancements in communication tools there is an increased level of responsibility to incorporate them into their courses in ways that are systematic and research supported. Thus, there was a need for a set of established guidelines for synchronous video conferencing.

Program faculty determined that they needed specific guidelines to promote the effective use of video conferencing during synchronous course sessions. In addition, faculty members were interested in guidelines that were consistent with effective research practices and paradigm shifts in education. Building on previous theoretical research ([McPherson, Wang, Hsu, & Tsuei, 2007](#); [Smyth, 2005](#); [White,](#)

2010), Netiquette guidelines (Shea, 2005), findings of a self-evaluation survey, and consensus from experienced online faculty, the Video Conferencing Guidelines (VC Guidelines) were developed.

Literature Review

Literature related to online instruction and video conferencing in higher education provided a foundation for the VC Guidelines. Two major themes emerged in the literature: the shift in faculty roles from a leader to a facilitator (Beldarrain, 2006; Gunga & Ricketts, 2006) and community-building support influenced by video conferencing (McPherson et al., 2007; Smyth, 2005; White, 2010).

Video Conferencing Applications in Coursework

Communication and collaborative technologies that involve audio, video, social networking, and content sharing constitute some of the basic elements of Web 2.0 (Beldarrain, 2006). Web 2.0 technologies add a new dimension to online education and provide opportunities for both real-time and time-delayed collaboration among students and between students and instructors. There are many video conferencing applications available online, including student initiated self-help groups, action learning circles, real-time action or problem-based learning (Smyth, 2005), teamwork, student-to-student mentoring (Mellott, 2010), real-time peer tutoring, practical demonstration with synchronous interaction, inclusion of guest speakers (White, 2010), immediate feedback, virtual fieldtrips, literature circles and book discussions (Hampel, 2006), and audio conferencing (McPherson et al., 2007). There were notable benefits of video conferencing that were evident in the literature. Gunga and Ricketts (2006) found that e-learning or online learning can compete with face-to-face learning in richness in terms of psychosocial and emotional flexibility; however, they stated that there is a need to enhance audio/visual and interactive capabilities of learning management systems to compensate for the sensory and emotional loss. Synchronous tools such as interactive whiteboards, desktop sharing, and audio and video chat bring the online experience a step closer to being face to face. In order to accommodate these tools, faculty roles must evolve.

Shift in Faculty Roles to Adapt to Video Conferencing

Peters (2003) states that virtual learning spaces "encourage far-reaching, even radical changes" (p. 90). These changes influence how faculty teach online, particularly the interactions between students and faculty. Implementation of Web 2.0 technologies, specifically video conferencing, requires a change in the androgogical practices for adult learners (Knowles, 1984). One major shift is the role of instructors from deliverers of content to facilitators of learning. This shift places learners at the center of the attention (Beldarrain, 2006; Gunga & Ricketts, 2006). Schools at varying levels of education have embraced the student-as-center design principle. For example, Beldarrain notes that Florida Virtual School, the largest public online high school in the United States, has identified student interaction as one of its design priorities. Instructors are encouraged to integrate synchronous experiences through voice conferences, chats, instant messaging, and whiteboards (Beldarrain, 2006).

Carr-Chellman and Duchastel (2000) assert that faculty who teach online courses should be mindful in selecting the types of materials that they incorporate into their courses. The materials selected should "enhance the student's identification with the course, motivation to learn and sense of instructor personality at a distance" (p. 234). The design process is affected by the shift in faculty roles from instructor to facilitator. Hampel (2006) asserts that incorporating video conferencing into online practices changes the way that course content is designed, allowing for a "multimodal virtual environment" (p. 106). As recommended by researchers (Carr-Chellman & Duchastel, 2000; McPherson et al., 2007; Wang & Chen, 2007) faculty should design instruction that incorporates the full use of interaction among students and include virtual elements that promote effective communication. For example, to promote video conferencing in online courses, McPherson et al. (2007) and Roblyer and McKenzie (2000) suggest that design elements for video conferencing in a small group might include a designated student who facilitates the discussion, specific roles for each student, and a set time limit. Incorporating a pre-discussion and planning strategy will promote productivity during the live video conferencing session. Designing and creating questions that are properly phrased to elicit thoughtful responses are skills that online faculty should possess. Meskill (1999) contends that designing video conferencing sessions to incorporate topics and questions with multiple answers and varying points of views will increase interaction among participants. In addition, Carr-Chellman and Duchastel stress that the mode of learning that occurs online is "less dependent on the acquisition of information or content coverage via lectures, and more dependent on the application and use of such information in real world settings whenever possible" (p. 234).

Faculty as facilitator is a common theme in the literature. The role of faculty in online courses includes that of instructional designer, facilitator, moderator, and mediator of groups and conflicts ([Morris, Xu, & Finnegan, 2005](#); [Van Duzer et al., 2007](#)). Due to the change in the role of faculty, the need for faculty development is a prominent issue among researchers. Researchers note that to affect a shift in androgogical practices that will allow these suggestions to be realized requires professional development and practice for faculty.

Faculty Development

It is common knowledge that technology changes at a rapid rate, and therefore faculty need time and support in developing their teaching skills to utilize these emerging technologies effectively. Instructors need to receive training to create an appropriate, functional, and effective online learning environment ([Pankowski, 2004](#); [Spicer, DeBloise, & EDUCAUSE Current Issues Committee, 2004](#)). Continuous training and mentoring are critical aspects of faculty development. In addition, [Phipps and Merisotis \(2000\)](#) emphasize that instructors should be provided with resources that promote independent assessment of technical issues that may arise during video conferencing implementation. [White \(2010\)](#) notes that it is essential to train faculty in using the video conferencing system and ancillary content, and that facilitation skills are essential and should not be overlooked.

Faculty who teach primarily or frequently online may already have an advanced technology skill level, and thus the integration and training related to emerging technologies such as video conferencing will likely be a low learning curve. Even so, [Peters \(2003\)](#) suggests that faculty who integrate new online technologies should first test the technology in a pilot study. This strategy will promote faculty confidence with the integration and application of the new media and allow for problems to be solved in advance.

In addition to learning how to use and apply the video conferencing hardware, faculty will likely need to transform their current teaching methodologies and will need professional development to do that. The interactivity and the increased learner-centeredness afforded by video conferencing promote an engaging and constructivist-centered course ([Dudding, 2009](#); [Kent, 2009](#); [Schroeder, Minocha, & Schneider, 2010](#); [Smyth & Zanetis, 2007](#)). [Dudding](#) notes that in order for video conferencing to be effective, faculty should incorporate an interactive style where students are active participants during the sessions. Faculty will need to understand that they can no longer serve as the deliverer of information, but rather they need to learn to guide the instruction in ways that support increased interactions, contributions, and active participation by students during the video conferencing session ([Smyth & Zanetis, 2007](#)).

Video Conferencing and Community Building

According to [Palloff and Pratt \(2007\)](#), enhancements to synchronous technology highlight the usefulness of this resource in community building and delivery of online courses. Video conferencing increases communication and connectedness to other students. The added community-building option helps to establish a tight-knit group among online students ([Kearns & Frey, 2010](#); [Palloff & Pratt, 2007](#)). The use of interactive learning tools such as video conferencing, the whiteboard, and chat sessions support learners and builds a community in online courses ([Kearns & Frey, 2010](#); [Wang & Chen, 2007](#)).

A Sample of Institutional Guidelines for Video Conferencing

A review of several selected institutions determined institutional guidelines exist along a continuum of both depth and complexity. Institutions with longstanding distance programs provide both "look-your-best"-type guidelines as well as detailed legal standards. Table 1 includes a sampling of the information provided by four institutions with decades of experience in technology-enhanced instruction.

The sampling from other universities reinforced the need for a set of established and organized video conferencing guidelines that could be used by any faculty member teaching online courses.

Summary

Faculty in the MSIDT program understood and supported all of the suggestions found in the literature review. In addition, they felt that their experiences with video conferencing could also offer valuable insights for developing guidelines for successful video conferencing. To do this, a self-report study was initiated. Faculty who participated in this study were actively teaching online courses and used video conferencing to facilitate collaboration and learning.

Table 1. A sample of video conferencing guidelines from various institutions

Institution	Video Conferencing Uses	Rationale	Example Guidelines
The Pennsylvania State University (PSU, 2006) (USA)	Faculty use video conferencing as a method of extending their classrooms to students at different locations.	"Increased availability of technology has expanded opportunities for presentations and meetings via video conferencing, which is an enhancement over earlier conferencing due to its visual and audio connections." (PSU, 2006 , p. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run a test • Send written material ahead of time • Ensure proper lighting • Distribute etiquette • Have backup plan if technology fails
University of Pittsburgh (2008) (USA)	Create virtual meeting environments that allow participants at different locations to see and interact with one another.	"Video conferencing uses audio and video to bring people at different sites together for a meeting. The meeting can be as simple as a conversation between two people in private offices (point-to-point) or can involve several sites (multipoint) with many people in large rooms." (University of Pittsburgh, 2008 , para. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure adequate lighting • Properly position microphones • Eliminate background noise • Label site • Provide copies of handouts used during session
Stanford University (2012) (USA)	Distance learning, donor outreach, group meetings, interviews; lectures, office hours; peer reviews, study groups, virtual classrooms.	Stanford "offers three video conferencing options ... that [can be used] to meet and collaborate with colleagues across campus or around the world, reducing travel time and expense while increasing communication and sharing." (Stanford University, 2012 , "Overview," para. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copyright concerns • Professional standards for classrooms • No third-party content without permission • Do not use cumulative material • Do not include private (patient) information
Charles Sturt University (CSU, 2012) (Australia)	Teaching, research, administrative needs.	"DVC [desktop videoconferencing] at CSU provides the ability to connect to traditional scheduled room based video conferencing meetings as well as conduct ad hoc desktop video conferencing meetings with other desktop video conferencing participants." (CSU, 2012 , "Introduction," para. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security concerns • Etiquette • Encourage all to participate • Eliminate "back chatting" • Introduce all participants

Method

This was a self-report study (Fielding, 2006) in which participants drew on their own behaviors (in this case, professional experiences as an online instructor) to provide information on using video conferencing effectively. Data for this research were collected by means of an online survey that was presented during a scheduled monthly faculty meeting. As part of the self-report process, two faculty members analyzed the results of the survey and reported back to all faculty. The faculty then discussed the findings and collaboratively created the VC Guidelines. The Guidelines were further refined and connected to effective instructional practices and set in the context of existing knowledge as revealed through a review of related literature. Netiquette rules ([Shea, 2005](#)) provided the foundation to design and establish an appropriate protocol beneficial to video conferencing. Netiquette rules are widely used at the university level and are applicable to the communication efforts in online courses and for asynchronous communication among students and faculty.

Participants

Ten faculty members in the MSDIT program participated in this study, all of whom were experienced online course designers and instructors. Their teaching experience varied from seven years to 33 years, with an average of 23 years. Their experience teaching and designing online courses ranged from six years to 15 years, with an average of 10 years.

Survey

The survey consisted of 10 open-ended questions focusing on the 10 Netiquette rules defined by [Shea \(2005\)](#). The question asked for each of the Netiquette rules was the same: "Evaluate the following Netiquette rule, and provide detailed suggestions about modifications to apply this rule (or content related to this rule) to a set of VC Guidelines." All faculty in the MSIDT program were e-mailed an invitation to participate containing a link to the web-based survey and asked to complete it as soon as possible.

Outcomes

The open-ended questions were designed to elicit feedback from participants about each of [Shea's \(2005\)](#) original Netiquette rules. Each suggestion from participants was considered, then the Netiquette rules were modified to incorporate this feedback and findings from the literature review. Selected responses from participants for each of the open-ended survey questions are available in Appendix A. Specific recommendations were made to restructure the guidelines to include the use of video and audio components and to include suggestions for faculty implementing the VC Guidelines. One notable change was made to each of the Netiquette rules: the word "rule" was changed to "guideline." The following is the result of this effort.

Video Conferencing Guidelines for Online Graduate Students

- *Guideline #1: Remember you are on camera and live.* The advantage of video conferencing is that you can take advantage of facial expressions, inflection, and tone of voice. Remember to think before you respond to make your thoughts and ideas clear and coherent to the video conferencing participants.
- *Guideline #2: Adhere to the same standards of behavior during the video conferencing session that you would follow in real life.*
- *Guideline #3: Be mindful of all video conferencing participants.* Allow other participants time and opportunities to contribute to the discussion and share their ideas with the group.
- *Guideline #4: Video conferencing provides synchronous opportunities to share knowledge.* It is important to consider opinions from other participants who are engaged in the video conferencing session. Strive for a fairly equal balance among the participants.
- *Guideline #5: Be mindful of your tone and expressions during the video conferencing session.* This is not an anonymous session. Your voice and video are viewed by all who are participating in the chat session.
- *Guideline #6: Share your expertise and knowledge.* Be an active contributor during the video conferencing session.
- *Guideline #7: Remain professional in your communication with participants.*
- *Guideline #8: Respect the context of the video conferencing session.* Keep video conferencing sessions within the context of the conversation. If the session is recorded do not post isolated comments that may be taken out of context. Synchronous discussions take on a life of their own; therefore, it is important to keep conversations in context.
- *Guideline #9: Be forgiving of mistakes during the video conferencing session.* Video conferencing is a new communication platform. There are bound to be technical glitches; be patient with the participants during the session.

Recommendations to Faculty for Using Video Conferencing in Online Courses

The following video conferencing recommendations are proposed for faculty. Considerations should be made with regard to: (a) faculty development; (b) troubleshooting potential problems with video

conferencing; and (c) creating a proactive approach to sharing and discussing the VC Guidelines with students prior to engaging in a video conferencing session.

Faculty Development

There is a learning curve associated with the implementation of video conferencing in online courses. Faculty may benefit from participating in professional development training to refine their skills, modify their instructional process, and learn the hardware and software used in video conferencing. A mentor would be an effective means of learning about video conferencing in online courses.

Troubleshooting

The use of video conferencing requires the faculty member to understand, troubleshoot, and effectively use video conferencing software. Regarding faculty development and technology use, Reigeluth (2009) notes that the integration process is a deliberate one.

Among the motivating factors that encourage educators to use technology are collaboration, a supportive minimal stress environment, and a secure support system. Among the possible drawbacks of synchronous video conferencing is the lack of flexibility offered by synchronous sessions. One of the appeals of distance education as noted by [Griffiths and Graham \(2009\)](#) and [Dudding \(2009\)](#) is the time flexibility for adult learners who participate in online courses. To overcome this potential drawback to video conferencing, Griffiths and Graham propose the integration of pre-recorded (asynchronous) video communication. The pre-recorded videos may be uploaded to a course site and downloaded by users at a convenient time. This strategy does not permit a two-way discussion, but can promote "nonverbal elements associated with human face-to-face conversation" (p. 15).

Bandwidth, according to researchers ([Dudding, 2009](#); [Hossain, Cui, & Xue, 2010](#); [Perez, 2004](#); [Smyth & Zanetis, 2007](#)), is the most important requirement when starting the video conferencing process. The bandwidth can be a limiting factor for individuals who wish to communicate using video conferencing hardware and software. The quality of the video image, audio transmissions, and the delay or "lag" time experienced are factors that are affected by bandwidth, software, and hardware, all of which must be discussed by faculty and then presented to students so as to maximize the likelihood that their experience with video conferencing will be a positive one. Technology advances in bandwidth permit video conferencing and allow faculty to broaden their teaching and learning activities ([Smyth & Zanetis, 2007](#)). The advances in mobile technologies allow for students to video conference using their mobile phones from any location. Other issues that affect video conferencing include cost effectiveness, access to recorded sessions, connectivity, scalability, and participant interaction (Kear, 2011; [Smyth & Zanetis, 2007](#); [White, 2010](#)).

Proactive Approach to Video Conferencing

Faculty strive to create a learning environment that is nurturing and student centered (Kear, 2011). The VC Guidelines may be provided to students by faculty through several means. First, faculty may include the VC Guidelines as part of the syllabus along with the Netiquette guidelines ([Shea, 2005](#)) and introduce the guidelines at the start of the course. Ask students to read and review the guidelines prior to participating in a video conference. Secondly, the instructor may provide a text based asynchronous forum where students may discuss and ask questions about the VC Guidelines. Providing a time for discussion and an exchange of ideas prior to implementing video conferencing will promote a safe and effective learning environment where all students know and understand video conferencing procedures. Many students may already participate in video conferencing with family and friends for non-academic purposes. They may be proficient in the use of video conferencing to communicate socially. However, video conferencing for academic purposes will differ and therefore the established guidelines may help to ensure a smooth transition from communicating socially to actively participating in a video conferencing session for academic purposes.

Video Conferencing Participation Recommendations

To ensure students are engaged in the video conference students should be prepared, answered the pre-session questions, and write out questions they may have related to the topic ([McPherson et al., 2007](#); [Roblyer & McKenzie, 2000](#)). The authors recommend faculty require each student to post one question at the start of the session.

In addition to the students' preparation requirement, the faculty should also be prepared. Ask students questions at the start of the video conferencing session to assess prior knowledge about the content area. Start the session with a check in, and ask each student to share something about themselves. The question prompt could be as simple as, "How you are today?". This will provide each student with the chance to speak and actively participate at the start of the session. Faculty should prepare a specific video conferencing lesson. Plan the discussion topics, share an outline, follow the outline, and conclude the session at a specific time. Providing students with a well-designed and specific video conferencing session encourages active participation and that learning goals are met.

Conclusion

The VC Guidelines are designed to create a proactive approach to using video conferencing technology to enhance the faculty–student interaction and class discussions in web-based graduate courses. Providing a set of established guidelines with suggestions for using them can assist novice as well as expert faculty to utilize video conferencing more efficiently and effectively. The VC Guidelines build on the work of [Shea \(2005\)](#) and incorporate current research on synchronous teaching and learning that highlights the advantages of real-time interaction, and the video and audio technological advances that are currently available. Faculty in the MSIDT program at CSU Fullerton have piloted the VC Guidelines in the online graduate program, changing them over time to meet their needs as well as those of their students. Over the past few years, after each semester, the Guidelines have been evaluated to determine appropriate changes. As technology innovations continue to advance it is likely that the VC Guidelines will need to be modified and revised to reflect emerging technologies. The authors also sincerely hope that colleagues in the field will provide them with feedback and contribute to the continued evolution of the Guidelines.

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Appendix A: Faculty Feedback about Netiquette Rules

Netiquette Rule (from Shea, 2005)	Suggested Modifications	Selected Comments
Rule #1: <i>Remember the human</i>	Include "VC"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"be aware of their telepresence"</i> • <i>"consider nonverbal messages they are sending out"</i> • <i>"in live situations you cannot revisit your responses"</i>
	Add the terms "on camera" and "live"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"think about your words before you reply ... remember this is instant communication"</i>
Rule #2: <i>Adhere to the same standards you follow in real life</i>	Stress that VC takes place in real time and the communication is live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"in real-life professional or business meetings"</i> • <i>"respectful interactions are even more important in VC"</i>
	Include appropriate standards of behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"show respect for your classmates"</i> • <i>"use a different set of standards for online VC"</i>
Rule #3: <i>Know where you are in cyberspace</i>	Include "VC participants"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"important to include participants"</i> • <i>"mention the students and the faculty in the VC"</i> • <i>"participation that is evenly distributed is a critical goal"</i> • <i>"be clear and concise about your message"</i> • <i>"stay on task and think about what you are saying"</i>
Rule #4: <i>Respect other people's time and bandwidth</i>	Reformat for VC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"fairly equal balance with using VC"</i>
	Emphasis should be placed on synchronous discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"dialogue between all members in the VC is important"</i> • <i>"synchronized opportunities to share knowledge"</i> • <i>"be prepared for the VC"</i>
Rule #5: <i>Make yourself look good online</i>	Mention tone of voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Be clear and concise in your messages"</i> • <i>"think before you speak to present clear ideas"</i>
	Emphasis should be placed on on-camera expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"prepare for a live session with professional appearance"</i>
Rule #6: <i>Share expert knowledge</i>	Stress the need for active contributions to the VC session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"create new knowledge about concepts, course, or program"</i>

	Sharing of expertise, creation of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"learn about the expertise of the audience"</i> • <i>"multiple ideas and opinions is [sic] valuable for everyone"</i> • <i>"add something about learning about the audience"</i> • <i>"listen to what others have to say"</i>
Rule #7: <i>Keep flame wars under control</i>	Remove "flame wars"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"no reason for this within the scope of our work"</i> • <i>"self-control is important to VC"</i> • <i>"consider the tone of interactions in VC"</i>
	Emphasis should be placed on respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"show respect for one another and yourself"</i> • <i>"respect in an academic setting"</i>
Rule #8: <i>Respect other people's privacy</i>	Change focus to context of VC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"taking remarks out of context is an issue"</i> • <i>"keep the Q and A to the end of the session"</i> • <i>"respect the context of the VC"</i> • <i>"know the purpose of the VC"</i> • <i>"VC is designed for a specific purpose, know the purpose and remain focused"</i>
Rule #9: <i>Don't abuse your power</i>	Already mentioned in previous rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"not needed"</i> • <i>"already mentioned in other rules"</i> • <i>"delete this rule"</i>
Rule #10: <i>Be forgiving of other people's mistakes</i>	Include "VC" and modify to make clear that the rule is intended for the VC format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"VC is new and there will be technical issues"</i> • <i>"include VC in the rule"</i> • <i>"modify the rule so that VC is present"</i>

Note. VC = Video conferencing.



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