

Tips and Trick for optimal performance during an online PhD Defense

Having an online PhD defense differs quite significantly from a traditional “offline” defense. You as the presenter are unable to look into the eyes of the assessment committee, audience and moderator and sense how the room is reacting to your presentation and arguments.

This short guide will provide you with a set god advice and tools in relation to the following:

- Exceeding the limits of your screen
- Engaging the audience
- Experience from other PhD students

1. Setting the scene

All though you are presenting highly specialized knowledge to an audience that presumably consist of academics within the field it is still important that you understand what your role is as the presenter and what the best approach is for communication your knowledge.

All though the following points may sound trivial they are often overlooked by the presenter:

- **Lighting**
 - Ensure that your face is well lit (non-interrogation lighting ☺) – try having a desk lamp shin above your webcam.
 - Your surroundings must be well lit – avoid total front or back lighting
 - Take into consideration if its dark or bright outside.
- **Surroundings**
 - Make sure that your **background** suits your presentation – academic situation calls for a somewhat serious approach. You can start of softly but overall it must be a background that does not disturb your message.
 - Consider the colour of the background in relation to your outfit and lighting.
 - Be aware that a custom background or blurred effect might reduce your network performance.
- **Sound – noise**
 - Make sure they can hear you! Online presentations requires the application of a good microphone, it us under no circumstances advisable to use the one that is built into your laptop. Avoid giving the presentation in a room with a lot of echo. Do test the sound in due time prior to the defense.
 - You should also make sure that there are no disturbing noise from your surroundings. For example: Make sure to close any windows so that noise from traffic do not disturb your presentation.

2. The presenter

The main asset during your presentation is yourself – make sure that you at least consider the following elements prior to the defense:

- **Making eye contact?**
 - Although this may seem a bit impossible through a camera make sure to look into the camera whenever possible.
- **Use and exaggerate your mimic and gestures**
 - When presenting online it is even more important that you consider and remember to use your body. Although you may not be able to walk around, remember to use your hands, shoulders and face to maintain your audience.
- **Dress accordingly**
 - Consider how you present yourself – working from home may often allow you to wear more informal clothing – you are NOT working from home, you are presenting 3 years of hard work.

3. Technical setup

It is of utmost importance that the technical setup is working and that you are familiar with it.

- Select the setup you are most comfortable with
- Consider how you are going to change slides if you are standing up
- The audience should be able to see both you and your presentation at the same time
- Test, test and test again. Everything from audio, camera, bandwidth and ensure that all required software is updated
- Remember the IT department (9940 2020) is more than glad to assist you – you can also read more here: <https://www.its.aau.dk/it-for-ansatte/undervisere/moeder-eksamen/online-phd-forsvar/>