NPS Distance Learning Programs Tip Sheet

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# Tips for Before Programs

## Meeting Logistics

* **Block off more time for your program than it will take**. This gives you some flexibility if scheduling programs next to each other.
* **Keep programs within the time frame given for them**.
* **Try turning off Pulse Secure** on government laptops if you are unable to join a meeting.
* **Location** is flexible as long as you have access to the internet, and a place for the computer, camera, etc. Have a good background, and limit distractions.
  + **Be aware of background noise**.

## Communication with Teachers

### Scheduling Programs

* **Schedule programs out a few days (preferably a week) in advance**. This provides the opportunity to perform test calls with teachers, and for classes to send questions as well.
  + **Specify your time zone** (in case they’re in another time zone).
* **Exchange meeting information and phone numbers** in case internet or other technical issues occur during programs.
* **Decide who is initiating the call**.
  + **Ask teachers when they will send you an invite to the program**. It may be days ahead of programs, or the day of programs.
* Learn if **disability or other accommodations** are needed, and arrange for any third party services or interpreters as soon as possible.
* **Request teachers to send questions by a specific date** (preferably a few days before programs).
* **Send teachers a list of resources** for further classroom research.
* **Respond in a timely, polite manner** to teachers, whether it’s addressing a request or RSVPing. Make sure to be reassuring.
* **Touch base with teachers the day before** in a friendly manner.
* **Communicate with teachers beforehand about the setting and materials**. Specify if students should be in an open area with space for physical movement, have materials such as a pen and paper, etc.
  + **Students may not have their video on** (especially older students). They may be calling from the couch, a car, etc.
  + **Plenty of engagement if teachers prefer to keep the students muted** during the program. Encourage students to speak out loud and move in their space.

### Test Calls

* Ensure audio and visual components are working well for both rangers and teachers, and **ask the teacher questions** before programs.
* **Make sure you have the students’ questions**, or at least know the overarching topics that students are studying.
* **Have teachers show you their classrooms** if students are learning in the classroom. Remind teachers that if one microphone is being used, students asking questions should approach the microphone and speak directly into it. They could even practice during the test call if time is available.

# Tips for During Programs

## Entering Meeting

* **Turn off your phone ringer and** **computer notifications.**
* **Have all needed props ready and windows open**, like for PowerPoint, videos, YouTube, etc.
* **Close** **unnecessary programs or tabs.**
* **Jump on meetings around 15 minutes beforehand.** Meet the teacher and work out any issues.
  + **Ensure students and teachers can see and hear you.**
  + **The default microphone/camera could be on the wrong settings**, so check those.
  + **Check if you can screen share.** If you don’t have permission to share your screen, ask the teacher to allow it in their settings.
* **Ask teachers when to begin the program.** They may wait a few minutes to allow students to join if they're a bit late.
* **Remind students to mute (if preferred)** their microphones for programs if that’s applicable, and then unmute students for comments and during Q&A sessions.
  + Some teachers will mute all students, and rangers can unmute later.
* **Provide a brief introduction** such as who and where you are, then segue into the presentation.

## Props and Physical Alternatives

* **Don’t use laminated images**.
* **Print pictures on cardstock**.
* **Have everything set up for easy access**, i.e. on tables to the side out of sight.
* **Hang cheat sheets at eye level out of view.**
* When presenting props or pictures, **hold them close and steady to the camera** so the video will focus. Check your video to see if it’s clear.

## Presentation Tips

### Practice Tips to Prepare for Presentations

* **Open your mouth fully when speaking**. Check this by speaking into a mirror! You might feel silly, but it will help to improve your speech quality during programs..
* **Listen to yourself speak**. Focus on the tone of your voice; conversations have peaks and valleys in speed, emphasis, and inflection. Make sure your voice does not sound flat, which frequently occurs when using a script.
* **Practice your vocal delivery**. Take a script for programs and put it aside. Record yourself presenting the same information as you would a friend.
* **Perform mock programs with colleagues or record yourself doing one**.
* **Edit scripts to suit you**. Make sure scripts fit your personality and feel authentic by switching out words, etc.
* **Practice recovering from mistakes**. Practice making mistakes aloud, then moving on. Make sure you can recover without sounding hesitant after tripping over words or skipping a sentence.
* **Practice with different angles and lighting**.
* **Remember to look into the camera**. Consider putting a post-it next to it. Keep looking into the camera and don’t spend too long looking at student reactions. It looks like you’re looking down and not at them.

### Software Tips for Presentations

* **Practice screen sharing with different platforms.** Explore the different options when sharing your screen, as they can slightly vary between platforms.
* **Be prepared for technology to fail occasionally**. Have alternatives such as print outs if what you plan to screen share is important to your program.
* **Use computer shortcuts**. One shortcut is to toggle between windows with Alt + Tab and between internet tabs with Ctrl + Tab.

### Delivery Tips

* **Check your uniform**. Do you need to tidy up or fix a collar?
* **Sit up straight**. This ensures your voice carries well and that you look professional.
* **Sit still** when you are not engaged in moving activities to help the camera focus.
  + **Consider having a reminder to sit still** such as a post-it note. This could be especially helpful for people who move a lot when talking.
  + **But start moving when there’s an activity with movement!**
* **Make eye contact**. Engage with the camera like it is a person. It’s okay to briefly check a script, but try to keep your head up; otherwise, viewers see the top of your head.
  + **Have a word or prompt next to sections of scripts** as a quick reminder of the main idea you mean to present.
* **Speak clearly and slowly**. Practice enunciating words, pausing between sentences, and thinking before speaking. It is difficult to understand a speaker who doesn’t enunciate their words. Slow down and say every word properly.
* **Don’t be afraid to change scripts on the spot**. The mandatory parts of the script are cues when working with fellow rangers.
* **Adjust sentence length to sound natural**. Make eye contact with the camera and aim to sound natural. Too long sentences are hard to speak because you're waiting for the to breathe at the end. And repeated short sentences don’t sound natural.
* **Use body language and interaction**. Engage with your fellow ranger (if applicable) conversationally, and joke around. Respond to students’ comments. Have fun with your audience! And be sure to smile.
* **Be energetic**. Students feed off of your energy during programs.
* **Change pace**. Avoid giving a lecture.
* **When you’re co-leading, mute when the other ranger is talking**.

## Software and Screen Managing Tips

* **Video use should be minimal.** Videos do not have the best quality on any meeting platform and are often choppy or glitchy. Do not use videos with fast movements.
  + **Check your volume** ahead of time, or mute your video.
  + If you’re playing a video in a program like Media Player, it will not show up as an option if it is resting in full screen mode. The video page must show the taskbar at the bottom of the page, for it to show up as an option to share.
    - Using a Chrome tab may work better.
* **The best quality video** seems to be using a Chrome tab with an mp4 file.
  + Go to the folder that has the video that you want to play.
  + Click on the pathway and copy.
* **Youtube videos**
  + **Let videos run through once** to ensure they are completely loaded.
  + **Have YouTube video clips ready in theater or full screen mode**, then expand once you are sharing. Hide inappropriate advertisements or suggested videos to the side.
  + Also **be sure to “Share computer audio”** when sharing a Youtube video.
  + **Use the lowest quality** possible under settings (usually 480 p).

## Moderating

**Be flexible and respect the teacher’s wishes.** Every class has different ways they’re used to doing video conferencing. You can make recommendations, but also **accommodate what students are used to.**

**The program may not go as expected!** Expect others to join in. And during Q&A sessions, questions and comments may be off topic. For example, students may share their pets.

Younger Elementary Students

* **If possible, students should mute themselves**, and then unmute at the end of the program for the Q&A session. But accommodate the teacher’s preferences if they prefer students to be unmuted during the program or muted during the Q&A. Consider discussing these preferences with teachers beforehand.
* **Background noise may be picked up** when students aren’t muted.
  + **Students may only see the video of who is making the sound** (if no one is pinned or spotlighted) depending on the program, so being unmuted could interrupt their view of the program. The video shown could be of unmuted students instead of the ranger.
* **Chat box**
  + **It can be difficult to monitor the chat** for younger students, as programs are more of a “show”.
    - **Presenting with a fellow ranger could avoid this.** One ranger could be answering questions, and the other could be monitoring the chat.
  + **Every class is different**. Teachers may prefer students not use the chat box without permission, or encourage them to use the chat. Ask teachers before programs about this preference.
  + **If there’s distracting off-topic discussion**, teachers may prefer to deal with it.
    - * **If the teacher doesn’t**, you could respond with “You’re being silly, please stop that.”
  + **You can address chat comments** when they come up, or later during the Q&A session when you have the chance to check the chat.
    - **The chat box can be used for students to respond** when you ask students a question when muted.

### Older Elementary Students

* **Programs can have the Q&A sprinkled throughout**, compared to programs for younger students where it may be preferable to have a Q&A at the end.
* **Older elementary students use the chat box more often.**
* **Students can unmute then mute throughout** the program for communication during programs.
* **The chat box can play an important role**, especially for students who are more comfortable writing out than speaking their thoughts.

## Troubleshooting

* **Have a back-up laptop** if possible, in case your primary one has issues.
* **Consider tag-teaming with another ranger!** If one ranger’s computer fails, the other can take over.
* **Troubleshoot audio and video in the settings**. Become familiar with the setting options. Know what mic and video options are available.
* **Learn common issues from the teacher’s end** to help teachers with troubleshooting if they are having issues. Every minute counts during programs!

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| **Issue** | **Potential Solution** |
| **Switching between platforms** | * CTRL/ALT/DEL -> task manager -> force quit any other programs |
| **Participants cannot hear video audio** | * Make sure computer sound is shared along with the screen. * Mute all participants. |
| **Videos are choppy/broken up** | * Have participants turn off their own video. * Ask if they are connected via wifi or Ethernet. (Wifi might make it a poor connection). * Download videos rather than streaming when possible. |
| **Your own audio and mic aren’t working** | * Make sure you have the correct speakers and mic selected. Either external mic and speakers (2nd option) or your computer’s mic and speakers (3rd option) |
| **WiFi Issues** | * Restart router or your computer. |
| **Video Conferencing Platform Issues** | * Leave the call and re enter. |
| **Issues with the Camera** | * Internal Camera: Make sure no other application is using it. * External Camera: Unplug it from your computer and plug it back in. |
| **Issues with the Microphone** | * Unplug it from your computer and plug it back in. * If you aren’t sure if it is the mic itself, try the mic on a different computer. |

# After Program Tips

* **Request feedback after programs** from teachers if there is time.
  + **Record any notable feedback**!
* **Follow Up**
  + **Send teachers your educational program evaluation** a day or two after the program so they can provide feedback, that is valuable for continually improving distance learning programs.

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