



Humanize the Screen

How to Connect With
Your Live-Online Learners

By Matthew Murdoch

Co-author of *The Webinar Manifesto*
and *The Learning Explosion*



Communication is a Process, Not Just an Idea

The best teachers, presenters, and facilitators thrive on human interaction. But put them in front of a computer screen instead of a classroom full of actual warm bodies, and the whole dynamic changes. Some are able to connect with their audience, while others aren't.





This guide will share some insights from our experience leading over 30,000 Live-Online learning sessions over the past decade.

One thing we've learned is that having great content isn't always enough.

While content matters, the delivery is just as important. And a Live-Online format requires a different approach. Pair high-quality content with good communication principles—adapted for a Live-Online format—and your audience will connect with your content.



Your job as a Live-Online facilitator is to get people sharing, talking, creating, and innovating.

Draw Them In, Then Draw Them Out



We don't need people to sit more. We need them to say more, see more, and do more.

It's easy to lose someone during a poorly designed and facilitated virtual learning experience. Attendees are often sitting in a very distracting environment.

And during your Live-Online class, they could be doing anything—texting their friends, checking the price of their favorite stock, or catching up on their social media feed.

To captivate bright people, you need to draw them into a virtual experience that engages them at multiple levels. We don't need people to sit more. We need them to say more, see more, and do more. And in the process, we need them to help others say, see, and do more as well.

Your job as a Live-Online facilitator is to both draw people in and draw them out—to get them sharing, talking, creating, and innovating as actively in a virtual classroom as if they were in the same room together.





Stop emphasizing the technology and start acting like we're all in the same room together.

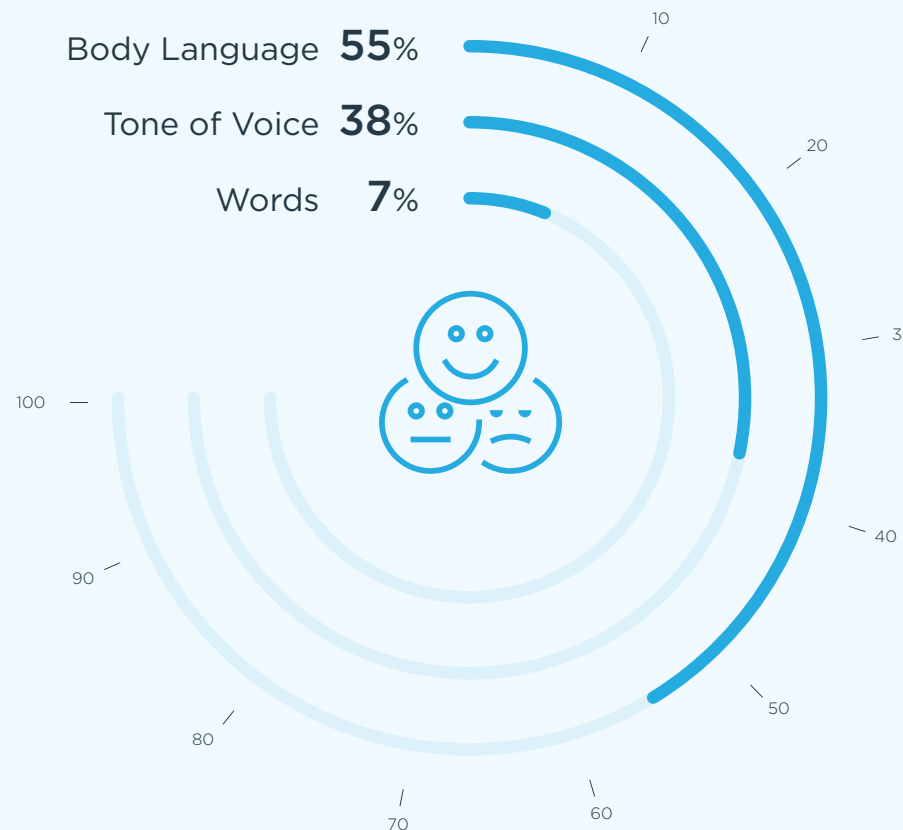
The Most Important Messages Are Still Nonverbal



Great instructors of the virtual classroom era understand that a new delivery channel requires a new skill set.

Albert Mehrabian, a renowned psychologist in the field of nonverbal communication, defined effective face-to-face communication decades ago. His theories and research have since become the de facto standard.

How Humans Communicate Feelings and Attitudes



Mehrabian found that we convey information about our feelings and attitudes primarily through our body language (55%) and tone of voice (38%).

The bulk of Mehrabian's work was published in the 1970s, and communication has changed dramatically since the era of bell-bottoms and disco. The era of virtual communication on a screen requires an upgrade to the original Mehrabian philosophy, and a new set of skills.

Four Core Humanizing Skills



Effective, probing questions let you make sure that what you wanted to say is very close to what learners heard and experienced.



- 1. Look at me.** Eye contact is a very intimate and personal human activity. It communicates all kinds of things—interest, concern, attention, empathy. In virtual face-to-face interactions, eye contact is still essential, but it now involves focusing attention on the computer screen. Vibrant eye contact helps maintain itself, and lively screen contact will likewise increase another's willingness to stay focused.



- 2. Talk to me.** Some people shout into their cell phones. Some are just loud talkers. But when technology's working well, there's no need to yell. Moderate your volume and tone. Talk as if the other person were right next to you. Also, watch out for the tendency to shift into a distant monotone. In regular face-to-face situations, we often adjust our presence to regain focus—we shift in our chairs, stretch, stand up, and lean in or out. We use physical movement to gain mental attention. Pay attention to your own energy level, and adjust your voice and body to re-engage yourself and reconnect with your audience.



- 3. Listen to me.** You may be an expert facilitator and subject matter expert, but you're not the Great and Powerful Oz, and your virtual participants aren't mindless robots. Physically or virtually, in any form of face-to-face interaction, there needs to be a speaker and a listener. Those roles need to regularly switch, and they need to find some reasonable, fluid balance, or you don't have a conversation—you have a keynote.



- 4. Let me think.** We all communicate through code. Words, pictures, graphics, and diagrams are all code. The challenge lies in the fact that we tend to choose code that's comfortable for us, not for the person receiving the message. So pay attention to your audience and think about how they might prefer to receive the information. To ensure your learners can decode your message, give them time to process the information. And then ask questions to confirm comprehension.



Don't assume that your learners will show up physically and mentally prepared for an immersive learning experience.

Learner Prep: Set the Stage for a Meaningful Learning Experience



Sending this checklist in advance lets learners know that you expect their full attention.

These days, everyone’s grandparents know how to log into Zoom. But don’t assume that your learners—from any generation—will show up physically and mentally prepared for an immersive learning experience.



The day before the class, send your participants this helpful checklist. It provides practical tips and sends a message that you expect their full attention during the class.

Learner Preparation Checklist:

- ✔ Before attending the class, check to see that you have all the right equipment and software.
- ✔ Print out any necessary materials.
- ✔ Inform your co-workers and boss that you’ll be busy during that time.
- ✔ Place a “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door or near your desk in a visible place.
- ✔ Turn your cell phone off, not just on silent mode.
- ✔ Eliminate all sources of noise or interruptions.
- ✔ Shut down all programs on your computer that you won’t need for the class—especially email and collaboration platforms (like Slack, Teams, or Glip) that notify you when you get new messages.
- ✔ Fill up your water bottle and have a snack on hand.
- ✔ Visit the restroom beforehand.



Facilitator Prep: Set the Stage for a Meaningful Learning Experience



If you facilitate many Live-Online events, it's a good idea to have a second computer as a back-up.

As the facilitator, you may start preparing for your session weeks or even months before the event—especially if you're teaching it for the first time.

But even if you're presenting content that you've shared in a virtual classroom many times before, you'll still need to do the same physical and mental preparation as your learners, every time, to make sure you're fully present during the class.

Facilitator Preparation Checklist:

- ✔ Apply all of the same practices you're asking your learners to follow (see the [Learner Preparation Checklist](#) on page 9).
- ✔ Practice using your virtual classroom platform until you're so proficient that the technology fades into the background and you don't have to think about it (see [Practice Makes Perfect](#) on page 12).
- ✔ Since your computer is your training room, take precautionary steps to make sure it's functioning properly. If you facilitate many Live-Online events, it's a good idea to have a second computer as a back-up.
- ✔ Choose a physical location—ideally your home or office—where you're confident in the speed and reliability of the Internet service.
- ✔ Warm up your voice and get energized. One of our FranklinCovey consultants, Dave, actually puts on his favorite rock song and sings along to it before going “on stage.”



You'll need to do the same physical and mental preparation as your learners, each and every time.

Practice Makes Perfect



Make the virtual experience your own—an expression of your personal teaching style.

We've witnessed what happens when facilitators practice—and when they don't. With enough practice, you'll become so comfortable in the Live-Online environment that you won't get flustered when something unexpected happens, and you'll be able to work the controls just like you drive a car.

At FranklinCovey, we propose four stages of personal practice:








- 1. Prepare.** Immerse yourself in the technology. Read up on the platform's capabilities and watch the online tutorials created by the vendor.
- 2. Observe.** Watch an expert facilitator lead a Live-Online work session on the same topic, taking careful notes about what worked well.
- 3. Imitate.** Based on your observation, emulate what you liked by practicing with a real audience. Use a copilot until you're ready to fly solo.
- 4. Personalize.** Make the virtual experience your own—an expression of your personal teaching style.

No matter which platform you've chosen, it likely has far more potential than most instructors usually tap. Part of your job is to shape the platform to your own ends. You don't need to use every single feature. In fact, deciding what to ignore is as important as deciding what to use.



Once you're proficient in the technology, you can stop worrying about it and focus on the learning outcomes you want to achieve.

Live-Online Learning Event Checklist

TIME FRAME	CONTENT	DELIVERY	TECHNOLOGY
 2 weeks out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the content flow and all of the materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send out the invitations. Practice teaching the class with other people present, if possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and test all technical components.
 Day of your Live-Online Work Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have materials on hand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate all sources of noise or interruptions. Place a “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door. Warm up your voice to get energized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double-check your network connection. Close down all other applications and programs on your computer.
 30-60 minutes before		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close your door and turn off your phone. Eat and drink something to boost your energy. Visit the restroom. 	
 10-30 minutes before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get your training guide ready. Double-check that your content is ready for delivery. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open the virtual classroom and display a welcome message on screen.
 0-10 minutes before		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start welcoming learners as they arrive. 	
 Start of the class		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set expectations for how you want learners to participate during the class. 	
 End of the class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest some next steps for your learners to take. Use polls to capture any additional information you may want. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give learners your email address, in case they have follow-up questions or feedback. Remind learners about additional materials that are available to download. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite learners to provide feedback on the class and explain how to do it.

Invite Learners Out of the Screen and Into the Room

Updating Mehrabian's rules for the new age of virtual communication helps you create a Live-Online environment that feels more like a regular conversation.

And in acting as if you're part of a regular conversation, it becomes more real. As conversations become real, the technology moves to the background, and the people come out of the screen and into the room.

This guide is based on concepts found in The Webinar Manifesto and The Learning Explosion, which were written to help captivate your audience, push the limits of your technology, and transform Live-Online design and delivery. Matt Murdoch, who co-authored both books, led the team that designed and implemented FranklinCovey's Live-Online solutions—delivering industry-leading learning solutions around the world. He currently serves as VP of marketing in the enterprise division.

FranklinCovey has spent more than a decade perfecting our approach to virtual delivery, bringing Live-Online training sessions to more than 600,000 people around the world.

To learn more, email us at info@franklincovey.com, or visit franklincovey.com.

Or call us at:

1-888-868-1776



