



**TOON  
VERLINDEN**

**HANS  
VAN DE WATER**

# HOW TO PRESENT ONLINE?

A global pandemic that requires you to defend your thesis or doctorate online? A meeting from home? Or an online class for students spread out across the world? Tricky! This guide from The Floor is Yours will help you on your way.



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# PRESENTING ONLINE: A QUICK START GUIDE

**A global pandemic that requires you to defend your thesis or doctorate online? A meeting from home? Or an online class for students spread out across the world?**

Plenty of possible reasons why you would need to give an online presentation. But how should you go about it? How will you hold the attention of your audience and ensure that they stay with you to the end? Because make no mistake: your audience will be distracted even easier than in real life.

Are you a student, researcher, teacher or professional? In this e-book we will show you how to structure an online presentation, what you should pay attention to when putting together your story, and how to ensure a powerful performance. All this based on the many questions we received over the past weeks. Hopefully this e-book will help you present your story clearly and convincingly in front of the webcam. Have fun!

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# THREE GOLDEN RULES FOR ANY ONLINE PRESENTATION

Presenting online is completely different from any regular presentation. And yet: many of the things you do to impress with a regular presentation can also be used for an online presentation. A few minor adjustments, and you're all set.

Let's start with three golden rules that will make the difference between online success and failure.

1. **Create a plan.** You will need a well thought out structure that takes your audience step by step through your story. Without a plan, you will be hopelessly lost. Now is not the time to shake things up.
2. **Engage to the end.** Make your presentation exciting, use cliffhangers, and regularly reward your audience for their attention. By offering them a useful insight or, for instance, by telling your students what they really need to know for the exam.
3. **Keep it short.** While a regular lesson may take 60 minutes, you will never last that long online. Focus on the essence. Can you tell your story in ten minutes? Then do that and refer to any additional background information that your audience can download for themselves. Or divide your lesson into shorter sections of a few minutes each, which you can place online separately.

## What makes online presentation different?

**First, your online audience gets distracted easier.** Because one person may be having breakfast with her laptop on the bed, while the other is sharing the sofa with his toddler playing. What happens if things get a bit boring? People click to the news site, or they quickly check how many likes their photo has received on Instagram. So, you will have to do even more to get their attention!

**Second, you are speaking to a camera lens rather than a physical audience.** You have to imagine that there is an audience in front of you, but you cannot read from their faces whether they understand what you are saying and whether they find it interesting. The longer the presentation lasts, the more energy it will take to continue to focus. You will have to be even better prepared!

# 1. THE CONTENT OF YOUR PRESENTATION

Your story should stick to your audience. Unfortunately, that often goes wrong with online presentations. Here are three steps you can take to find the right content:

## Step 1: Select your goal.

What would you like to achieve with your presentation and with whom? Suppose you are preparing an online presentation for students on the topic of anxiety. Would you like them to:

- Remember the definition and the ten types of anxiety?
- Or learn to recognize anxiety in themselves and develop ways to do something about it?

Depending on your objective, your presentation should look very different. So, start by choosing a clear goal that is relevant to your target audience. You may have multiple goals but choose just one main goal.

## Step 2: Drop the things that don't apply to that main goal.

Does something not apply to your goal? Then it does not belong in your online presentation. Now is not the time to stray from your course. Online presentations should be as short as possible, remember? Go straight for your goal.

I attended an online presentation recently. The presenter was having technical difficulties and the connection dropped. As a result, another organizer took over and said, "We will continue with her presentation, but we will only cover the most important slides."

A comment like that should immediately set off alarm bells in your head. Really, an online presentation should only contain important slides.

## Step 3: Take a blank sheet of paper and develop your structure.

The intro serves to engage your audience and to briefly outline what you will be sharing with them. Demonstrate what the underlying problem or challenge is, what solution you have to offer, and why this is relevant.

Take the anxiety example. Your intro could look like this:

"This is Nico, student of the first Bachelor of Law. He has trouble sleeping at night because he is constantly brooding over things. His girlfriend just broke up with him, he's broke, and he is afraid he will fail his school exams. He doesn't know what to do.

X% of all students suffer from anxiety. But did you know that with the help of several simple techniques you can tackle this yourself? Let me teach you these techniques in the next ten minutes."

After this intro you can briefly introduce yourself and move on to the middle section.

Ideally, choose three points that you would like to delve deeper into. Such as:

1. Why is anxiety such an issue?
2. Three techniques to get started yourself
3. How do you build a routine?

Share this structure with your audience so they know what is to come, and come back to it from time to time.

At the end, you repeat your main message and why it is relevant to your audience. Ideally, you would circle back to the hook you started out with. For example, you could conclude by saying that Nico got rid of his sleeping problems with the help of those techniques.

## 2. HOW DO YOU MAKE THINGS INTERESTING?

Now that you have your structure, how do you get your audience to stay with you to the end?

### **Create a clear structure**

Make sure you have a clear structure, with one section following the next. Try using phrases such as “That is clearly a problem, but how do we solve it?” Or, “This concludes the section about... and we now turn to the section about...” Also consider including keywords on your slides.

### **Include wow factors in your presentation**

Wow factors are elements that grab your audience's attention and make them curious. Try to launch each new step in your structure with a wow factor. Or find a contrast, meaning something that goes against what the public expects.

- ⇒ More about wow factors: [thefloorisyours.be/en/science-is-boring/](https://thefloorisyours.be/en/science-is-boring/).
- ⇒ More about the power of contrasts in your presentation: [thefloorisyours.be/en/find-the-opposition/](https://thefloorisyours.be/en/find-the-opposition/).
- ⇒ Easily explain more about difficult things: [thefloorisyours.be/en/how-to-explain-difficult-things/](https://thefloorisyours.be/en/how-to-explain-difficult-things/).

### **Vary your content**

Don't just limit yourself to a dry explanation. Look for elements that make your story engaging to your audience. For example, share an anecdote, or add a poll to your presentation, where participants can give their opinion about a statement. Exercises or questions (see below) are also a good idea. We do not recommend showing videos: that rarely goes smoothly via an online presentation.

### **Ask rhetorical questions**

By regularly asking questions, you involve the audience in your presentation and make it easier for them to follow. Insert questions that encourage the audience to think along with you, without having to answer the question.

Some examples:

- “Have you ever had the following happen to you ...?”
- “How could we solve this problem?”
- “But would this solution also work outside the laboratory?”

## 3. INTERACT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

An online presentation will quickly become a form of one-way traffic, where you alone are speaking, without further interaction with your audience. If you wish to keep their attention, you should interact with them. But how do you do that when you are miles apart? Here are some tips to interact with your audience. Before, during and following your presentation.

### Interaction beforehand

Are there sections from your presentation that you could already pass on to your audience? Then do so. That way you can make the online presentation more interactive and shorten it. This is especially interesting if you are giving an online lesson.

#### Warm up your audience with a video or text

Are there any good videos available on Youtube, or with a bit of luck maybe even a TED talk, that perfectly explain a section of your presentation? Share this in advance. Videos rarely play smoothly during an online presentation. Why not let the participants view them in advance, after which you can discuss them together during your presentation.

Or beforehand, refer to an interesting website or text that you will be discussing during your presentation.

#### Give an assignment

Would you like your audience to do something beforehand? Make the assignment as specific as possible. Some examples:

- Send me three questions that you want answered during the presentation.
- Choose one newspaper article about fake news that you find interesting and explain why. Please forward this to me in advance.
- Summarize your project in three words. During the online presentation you will share those three words with the other participants.

#### Pre-record the theoretical part

Are there concepts or definitions that the participants really need to know? Then record them in advance and deliver them a few days before the presentation.

Because they have already watched the video in advance, you can delve deeper into the applications of those concepts during your presentation. Or you can answer questions and discuss things further with your audience during the online presentation.



Record the theoretical sections beforehand and provide them to the participants.

## Pre-recording a presentation

You can record your explanation including screen sharing using software such as Zoom, Cloudapp or Camtasia.

If you have the necessary equipment and software, you can also record yourself with your smartphone or camera on a tripod, and then add the necessary slides or trim the image. This gives you more control over the end result. Are you recording with your own camera? Do not forget to turn off the auto focus to keep your camera from going in and out of focus.

Always test a recording a number of times before giving the real presentation. Before you know it, you could forget to click a button somewhere and would risk having no recording, or a recording without sound.

## Interaction during your presentation

### Use the chat box

Most programs have a chat box where questions or comments can be posted. Encourage your audience to use this during your presentation. You can immediately pick up on questions that come up.

During your presentation, include moments when you view and answer the questions, for instance after you have covered a certain topic.

Do not respond immediately when you are explaining something and a new question comes in. First complete your explanation and then proceed to the question. Make sure to test beforehand how you will view the questions on the screen, so they won't distract you during your presentation.

### **Let your audience vote via a poll**

Polls are useful to engage your audience and receive information about what your audience is thinking. You can use polls for many purposes, such as:

- "Which of these three titles appeals to you most?"
- "80% of the respondents gave me the same answer. Which of these three do you think that was?"
- "Your feedback is important to me. What did you think of this presentation? Please answer these three questions."

### **Place participants in breakout rooms**

Some programs such as Zoom allow you to set up breakout rooms. This allows you to place participants together in groups of three or so in a separate virtual space. Ideal to have an assignment worked out or to have a discussion with one another.

## **Interaction after your presentation**

### **Provide additional info**

Do you have one specific result that you would like to emphasize? Then an online presentation is not the time to go through your entire data table. Better to quote that one important result during your online presentation and afterwards provide the participants with a handout or link where they can find additional data and information.

## 4. YOUR BODY LANGUAGE AND VOICE

How can you be convincing when your audience sees only your head and part of your upper body? And why is your voice so important to draw and keep your audience's attention? Here are some tips regarding your body language and voice use.

### Use your facial muscles

Did you know that you have around 40 muscles in your face? The more expressive you are, the more you will captivate the audience. An occasional smile works wonders.

### Make eye contact by looking into the camera

When talking to your audience, look straight into the webcam. Of course, when discussing a slide, graph or table, you can look at the slide.

Do you have trouble looking into the webcam? Consider attaching a small doll (or something with eyes) right above your webcam. That will give you an audience to look at.

Or do you tend to look at yourself in your own video screen? Then slide the screen to just below your laptop camera. This will surely help you to always look in the direction of the camera.



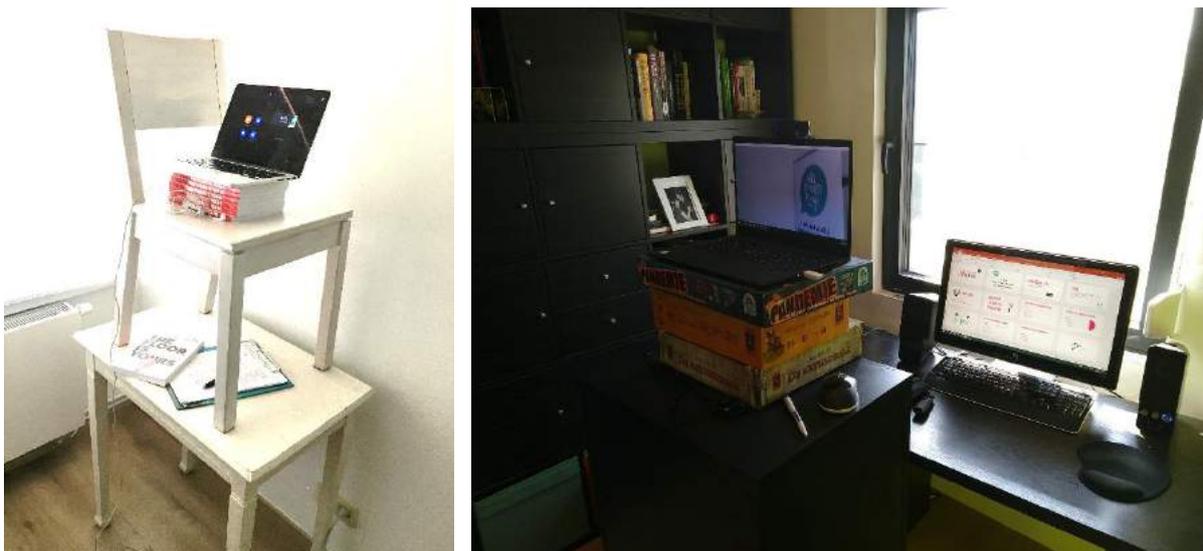
### **Present sitting down or standing up?**

Standing up when presenting is better because it will make you more convincing. When sitting down you tend to bend over. When you stand upright, you will open your chest and shoulders more easily, which gives a confident impression. Automatically, you will also make more hand gestures.

But how do you go about this? Because when presenting online using slides, you will have to perform actions that require you to stand close to your laptop.

Place a chair on a table and place the laptop on top. This is a simple way where you can present upright and still have your laptop in front of you. Make sure the camera is at eye level. You may need to put some books on your chair to get the correct height.

Now take a small step away from your laptop. But make sure that you can still operate your laptop with your hand outstretched. From that distance, the audience will see your head and upper body. This is especially important when you present without slides and your image fills the entire screen. And it is best to use a microphone. The earphones of your smartphone usually serve well as a microphone.



*Take a look at our setup, with on the left that of Hans and on the right of Toon.*

### **What is a good dress code?**

You are free to choose what to wear but keep it professional. We are no fashion experts, but our preference during online presentations goes to bright clothing. Why not wear something red during an online presentation? You would definitely stand out as a speaker.

## **Vary your voice**

Your audience may not see you, but they will certainly hear your voice. Use your voice to convey emotion and to keep your audience engaged. You can vary in volume (soft vs. loud), speed (slow vs. fast) and tone (low vs. high). Alternate regularly. Just as with music, a song without variation will be terribly boring.

When you set out a problem, you could speak in a slower and lower tone, and then speed up with a higher tone when offering the solution. Or why not fade into a whisper suddenly during your presentation? Tell your audience you'd like to share a secret with them whilst moving closer to the camera. Your audience is guaranteed to listen up.

## **5. SLIDES: WHAT NEEDS ADJUSTING?**

Your slides don't need much adjusting, but for an online presentation you should think carefully about what to put on them. Here are our three basic rules for online slides:

1. Create action. A slide where nothing moves for 30 seconds is boring.
2. Text is useful (but not too much!).
3. Make it simple so your audience can easily follow.

### **Less is more. Stick to the essentials**

With each slide, ask yourself whether the content offers added value to your audience. If an item doesn't add anything, drop it. During a regular presentation with overcrowded slides, the audience can still focus on the speaker. With an online presentation, however, all they have are the slides in front of them.

### **Use animation to have your text appear gradually**

Your slides should follow the content and rhythm of what you say. Avoid presenting a single slide filled with text, without guiding the audience through it. Either you spread the text out over several slides, or you use simple animation. Show the text only when you discuss it. Make sure you practice several times beforehand to ensure this runs smoothly.

### **Be careful using video and audio files**

An online presentation will crash faster when you present heavy files. Play it safe and drop them from your presentation. Instead, you can share a video with your audience in advance and refer to it during your presentation.

### **Leave space on your slide for your own video screen**

The audience will usually view slides in full screen format, with the speaker in the top right corner. They can move that screen around themselves. Make sure to leave the top right corner of your slide clear, to not have the screen cover any text or figures during your presentation.

### **Why not skip the slides?**

Yes, you can skip the slides. Your audience will definitely listen to you more attentively. But make sure that the structure of your presentation remains clear. The start of your presentation should not contain any slides. Instead, briefly explain what the challenge is and what solution you are looking for. Once you begin to explain each step in more detail, you can begin to introduce slides. Practice beforehand how you can smoothly transition to slides.

Did you know that an object also works well to attract attention? Perhaps you can tell your entire story using several objects, without using slides.

But also during your presentation you can turn off the slides and come into full view to explain something in more detail using an object.

## An example of a slide about running and heart failure

Let's say you are giving a presentation about the effects of running on the heart, with this being your original slide:

### What to Know About Running and Your Heart

The heart is a muscular organ, after all, and like all muscles, it adapts to the stress of exercise. Whether these adaptations are good or bad has been debated for over a century, but the current view is that the most obvious changes are, at worst, harmless.



- **The athlete's enlarged heart?** That's just stronger muscle and bigger chambers to pump more blood, not a sign of heart failure.
- **The low resting heart rate?** It's not a sign of an arrhythmia—an irregular or abnormal heart rhythm—as it would be in a nonrunner; it's just that each contraction sends so much blood shooting through your blood vessels that the heart doesn't need to beat as often.

Doesn't make a very organized impression, right? Far too much text and it takes quite some effort to understand what it is actually about.

When giving a regular presentation, I would recommend focusing on what will capture your audience's attention. In this case it would be the image. Make it large enough to fill the entire slide and then continue to tell your story, step by step. You can use text, but this is not necessary. The audience will glance at the image for a moment and will then pay full attention to you.



But when presenting this slide online, it is important to add text. Without text, the slide will remain on people's screens for quite some time and your audience's attention will slowly fade. But more importantly: text gives the audience visual support. Each time you introduce and explain a new element, add several words to the slide. This is what my revised slide looks like:

### **The effect of running on your heart?**

The most obvious changes are harmless

**Athlete's enlarged heart** a sign of heart failure? No!

**Low resting heart rate** a sign of an arrhythmia? No!



My top right corner is open, to leave room for the speaker video screen.

I have added my main message to the slide. And the remaining text only appears when I start talking about it. The image below shows when an animation is enabled and when which text will appear.

### **The effect of running on your heart?**

1 The most obvious changes are harmless

2 **Athlete's enlarged heart** 3 a sign of heart failure 4 No!

5 **Low resting heart rate** 6 a sign of an arrhythmia 7 No!



## 6. WHICH VIDEO CONFERENCING TOOL SHOULD YOU USE?

There are a multitude of online presentation tools available that will allow you to share your screen to display slides while you are speaking.

Your institution or organization will probably recommend the use of a specific program.

But if you are still on the fence, let us give you a brief overview of some options:

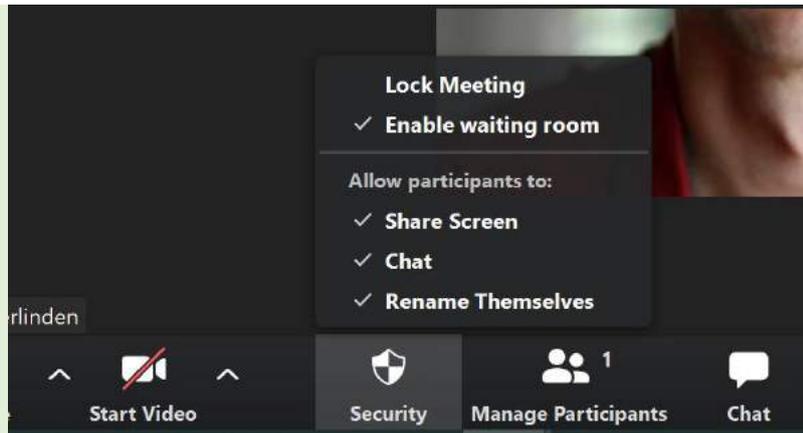
- **Google Hangouts:** Works well, but the free version only allows video calls with up to ten people.
- **Skype:** A stable and safe choice, but quite cumbersome to set up.
- **Jitsi Meet:** A good alternative to Zoom, but at times unstable and lacking good video quality.
- **Blackboard / Smartschool /...:** If your institution already uses a specific platform, you may as well go along with this. That way you can count on your institution's IT support and improved security settings.
- **Microsoft Teams.** Used by many organizations, but some don't find it very user-friendly.
- **Zoom:** Accessible and very user-friendly. A convenient feature are the breakout rooms: temporarily group participants together to increase interaction. Due to possible security concerns, some institutions prohibit its use (see text box).
- **Other softwares** to consider are BlueJeans, Webex or GoToMeeting. Clearly, there are many options available.

### Is Zoom safe?

Zoom is a very user-friendly program and in no time grew from 10 million users a day to 200 million in the midst of the corona pandemic. Naturally, some issues arose as a result of that upscaling.

The biggest risk with Zoom is that someone could sneak in by means of the meeting link and begin sharing unsolicited content. You may not want to use it for confidential discussions, but for an average presentation or lesson it is certainly a user-friendly program (if allowed by your institution!).

How do you keep Zoom as safe as possible? As a host you have a number of security options that can be found at the bottom of the screen. The most important one? Disable the "share screen" option for participants.



1. **Turn off the option that allows participants to share their screen.** This makes it more difficult to simply walk in and share the screen (and you will not be at risk of seeing unsolicited or explicit images).
2. **First put participants in the "waiting room".** Then as a host you can allow people in one by one. See a suspicious name? Then you can send that person a message and ask if they really should be there before you let him/her in. You can also decide not to let new (unknown) participants in once the presentation has started.
3. **Set a password.** This prevents just anyone from entering the meeting. But make sure to only share the password with those people who must attend.
4. **Use a Zoom webinar instead of a Zoom meeting.** At a webinar there is no interaction with the participants, except via the chat box. When giving a big lecture to a larger audience of mostly unknown people, a webinar may be an option. Zoom webinars can be arranged via a package other than Zoom meetings. Check out the Zoom website if you want to know more.

## 7. TECHNIQUE: WEBCAM AND SOUND

### **With or without webcam?**

Using a webcam will always be the better choice. Otherwise you only have your slides and your voice to keep people engaged. With a webcam your body posture and hand gestures can help convey your message and you can occasionally demonstrate or show something. It will be easier for you to connect with your audience and communicate new information.

Make sure you appear in the middle of the screen. If your audience only sees your hair, or the inside of your nostrils, a webcam will not contribute much. So, place your webcam at eye level.

### **Should I use a headset while presenting?**

Ideally, you should always use a microphone. This could be the microphone of your smartphone earbuds, which will often be better than your laptop's built-in microphone. A headset is another option but be careful with those large gaming headsets. They can easily become a distraction. Make sure you test the sound beforehand. Schedule a video call with your colleague, partner or friend and ask whether your laptop microphone does the trick or things sound better with a microphone.

### **Is my webcam good enough?**

For a regular online presentation, you will usually not need an extra camera. The one on your laptop should work well. When sharing slides, your video image will be quite small. That of course changes when your head is projected onto a large auditorium wall.

What you can do for optimal results with your webcam:

- **Clean the lens.** Your image may be blurry because of dust on your lens.
- **Find the best exposure.** Some webcams are very light sensitive. Try out different locations with different light sources. You can also use a floor lamp to provide additional lighting if needed. Avoid sitting in front of a window or other bright light source, because then people will only see a black silhouette.

### **How do I deal with a poor/slow connection?**

If you don't understand a speaker well or the connection drops regularly, kindly let him or her know via the chat box. Hopefully they can do something about it. Nothing more frustrating as a speaker to have given a full explanation and then to hear that people had trouble understanding you.

If your own connection is poor, disable as many internet users as possible. Those could be cloud services that are left syncing on your laptop, roommates streaming Netflix on another device during your presentation, or perhaps the many other browser tabs still open on your screen. Close all those prior to your presentation. Do you have a fixed internet connection? Make sure you use it.

## 8. HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE?

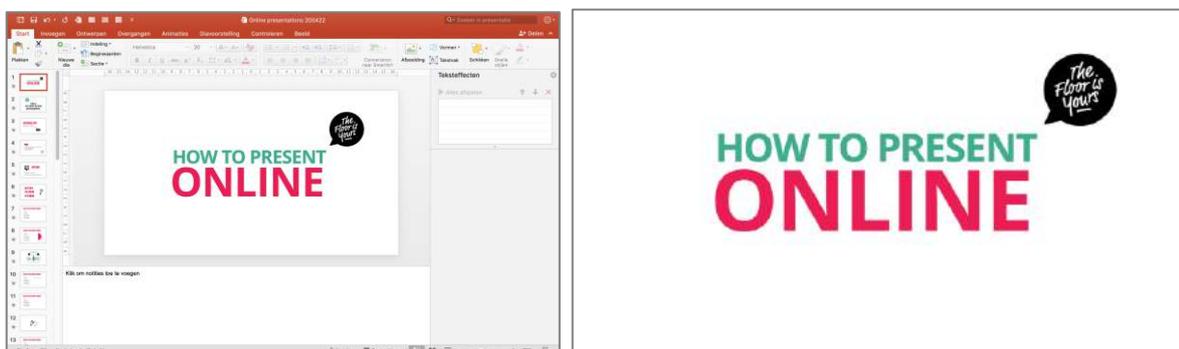
Presenting online requires more preparation time. Keep that in mind. Allow enough time to practice and test all technical matters. And because your slides will need to be better attuned to what you are presenting, you will also need to spend more time on those.

### Test the technical side!

Make sure you know what you are doing technically. This will save you a lot of stress. Test everything beforehand. Conduct a test interview with your partner, colleague or friend to check whether they can hear you and to master each tool.

For example, find out how you can easily share your screen and where you can switch your (and the participants') video and microphone on and off.

A handy tip for when you are presenting slides: put your slides in "slideshow" mode beforehand. That way, the audience will immediately see your full slides when you share your screen. Guaranteed to look more professional than you opening your PowerPoint screen and manually selecting the slideshow function.



*Do not show your audience your PowerPoint screen (left), but go straight to your first slide (right).*

If you are testing things out with someone, you may as well give your entire presentation a test run. Afterwards, ask if everything was clear and what tips he or she has for you.

### **Prepare your start well**

Practice especially the first minutes of your presentation. Those first few moments in front of the camera always tend to feel awkward. Make a convincing start and look straight into the camera. Don't start with "uh, how does this work exactly?"

But in fact, there are two starting times. The first is when people begin to arrive. You can already have your title slide up while you welcome the attendees. You can have an informal chat where you test whether your audience can hear you. Explain to them that you will be starting in several minutes. This talk is meant to put people at ease in the virtual room they have just joined.

Only when enough people have joined (usually five minutes after the official start moment) will you really begin your presentation.

### **Pay attention to your surroundings**

It is best to opt for a sober environment, without too many distracting background elements, such as a bulging bookcase. Keep your background plain and simple. For example, a white or single-colored wall works well.

In some video conferencing tools you can set a virtual background, although we don't recommend this. It's a nice gimmick when calling with friends, but not so ideal when giving a presentation. Sometimes an arm or part of your face may disappear into that background.

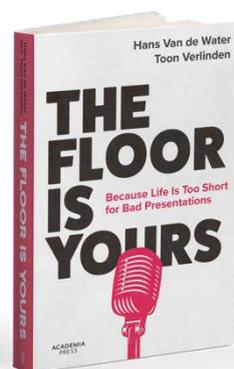
## 9. HOW CAN WE HELP YOU FURTHER?

**WEBINAR** We also give free webinars. Would you like to stay informed? Then [subscribe to our newsletter](#).

**Watch our webinars about online presentations at [thefloorisyours.be/en/online](https://thefloorisyours.be/en/online).**

**BLOG** Our website [thefloorisyours.eu](https://thefloorisyours.eu) offers dozens of articles on how to create a clear and convincing presentation. Do you have a question about your next presentation? You will probably find the answer there.

**BOOK** Are you looking for a handy book that will guide you from A to Z in the development of your next presentation? Then read our book "The floor is yours: because life is too short for bad presentations". More info and sample pages can be found at [book.thefloorisyours.be](https://book.thefloorisyours.be). Enter code "FLOOREN" and **receive a 10% discount and free shipping**.



**WORKSHOPS** Are you looking for training for your students or for yourself? On our website you will find an [overview of the workshops we offer](#), topics ranging from presentation techniques to scientific posters and yes, also online presentation.

### About The Floor is Yours

Science communication experts Toon Verlinden and Hans Van de Water founded The Floor is Yours in 2012. Because "Life is too short for bad presentations". Since then, they have trained thousands of researchers to prepare and deliver effective presentations.

They are the driving forces behind science festival Sound of Science and the Battle of the Scientists, a competition during which researchers present their work to primary school children. More info at [thefloorisyours.eu](https://thefloorisyours.eu).

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