Tips and Hacks for Teaching Online

You are doing a great service each time you share practice, and you make a difference. Thank you for teaching online or being interested in teaching online! In speaking to many teachers who are teaching Qigong and Tai Chi online, HWF has been compiling a checklist of things that teachers have mentioned in figuring out what works when teaching online. These tips and "hacks" are enclosed for you to explore and try for yourself. You are encouraged to take what is useful and ignore what is not useful. Teaching, as you know, sometimes involves experimentation in order to find what works for your students. These tips and hacks are offered in that spirit.

Video Audio and Visual Tips

This is a checklist of elements commonly seen in online presentations.

- ✓ **Staging and Visual Quality**. Clear and straightforward visuals are a critical piece of successful presentations. Think of your space and environment and how it appears on screen to the audience, your viewers, and students. What do people see when they see you teach onscreen? What do the space and environment convey? Does your set include intentional and interesting visuals? Plants, flowers, and artwork can convey energy--a sense of calmness and space or depth and whimsy. As an organizing principle to creating presentation space, eliminate clutter as much as possible.
- ✓ **Camera angle and Placement**. Is your Camera in the appropriate place? For example, your camera placement should display you and your teaching space so that you, as presenter appear to be centered onscreen showing from your upper-arm and up, unless demonstrating full-body practices. Do a test for yourself to see how you and your surroundings will appear to the viewers. Tip: Have a few friends be your test audience and ask them about what they see onscreen; take their suggestions about moving furniture. Use tape (or a rug with easy to remember design "markings") as a way to "mark" the space. It is okay to deliberately make a presentation showing only the upper body (from the "waist up"). When you are presenting movement full-body, strive to keep your head, hands, and feet in the screen at all times without "becoming" too small onscreen. Experimenting with setting your Zoom camera to "wide" or original aspect can help you find the right setup.
- ✓ **Presenter Clothing and Presentability**. Keep the focus on your teachings by wearing simple clothing and avoiding clashing with the background. Are you easy to see onscreen, or does your "costume" blend with the furniture or background, making it difficult for viewers to see your movement instruction? The colors you choose to wear also make a difference: bright solid colors tend to look good on the screen. These include cyan, sky blue, indigo blue, lavender, bright pink/rose, and ivory. Avoid wearing complicated patterns (which can be distracting) or wearing bright white (which can make you look "washed out"). Black and red are almost the same color onscreen, and they can work as long as your background is not too dark. You can also consider teaching outdoors in an appealing garden space as long as you have a dedicated microphone that can accommodate the distance.
- ✓ **Video Clarity**: A good quality webcam (e.g., Logitech HD C922 webcam or better) will produce a nongrainy image. Mounting your camera on a tripod can give you flexibility.
- ✓ **Sound**: A good quality USB lavalier microphone for the highest quality audio. Make sure your microphone either has exceptionally long cord or is wireless. Some presenters get good results with the Apple Airpods.
- ✓ **Lighting**: Ensure that your face is well lit. To avoid being backlit, place a light in front of you. The hack: three lamps can light you up one in front, one on your left and another on your right. Simple "work lights" you can get at a hardware store can work—but be aware that they can get very warm. If you find yourself recording video frequently, investing in a small light that is placed right above you can eliminate shadows and very possibly be all the light you need.

Technical Hacks That Help

This is a checklist of elements that can help you increase speed and improve the delivery of an online class broadcast from a typical home office or studio.

- ✓ **A second monitor**. Having one monitor for you is good. Have a second monitor where your students appear to you onscreen as you present can be really helpful in helping you track how people are "receiving" your instruction. Set your computer to use a second screen, then when you are live and presenting, move your Zoom window to that second dedicated screen so that you can see the students/participants when your meeting is running. You can see everyone as long as their cameras are on, so remember to ask people to turn on their cameras.
- ✓ **Network connection**. The best connection will be a direct ethernet connection. You can do a speed test to make sure your connection is the fastest possible for your hardware configuration at www.speedtest.net. Things that can affect network speed include other applications that are running on the network (like video chat, music or video streaming, network games, or even other applications that are performing tasks automatically, like automatic downloads or backups). You can restart your computer and have no other applications running to ensure you have the best hosting conditions for your setup. Then you can test again. Once you do perform a speed test, you will have some information on how fast or slow your internet connection is. If your tests still produce results that seem slow, reboot your device (phone or computer) again and also reboot the modem and router. Make sure that your router does not have any Quality of Service (QOS) features turned on before you test again. If that does not fix the problem and increase speed, you may need to take some time to contact your ISP or carrier for help in making sure you care getting the fastest connection with the setup you have. Be aware that on higher bandwidth connections (150 Mbps and above), you will need a higher quality router to match. You may need to upgrade hardware if you really want faster service.

Security Measures

This is a checklist of elements that can help you increase security, especially if you are using Zoom.

- ✓ **Provide Join Links to your class or gathering with discretion.** Avoid posting join links in public spaces. Make sure people contact you first before you provide join links.
- ✓ **Passcodes and Waiting Room**. Have a passcode associated with your meeting or webinar. Zoom does this automatically. Passcodes will be required on all Zoom meetings very soon. You can also use the Waiting Room and admit only participants that you recognize.
- ✓ **Zoom settings to eliminate potential interruptions**. Set up your Zoom controls to minimize accidental interruptions. Set the Chat feature to "Chat to Host only," so that people can Chat only to the Host (you). This can be toggled on and off. Disable screensharing, so that people cannot share their screens. Set the meeting so that participants arrive to the meeting space muted.

Meeting/Class Experience

- ✓ **Have a Welcome Screen or Slide**. You can share a "welcome" slide or PDF to welcome people and unify the energy before you begin.
- ✓ **Spotlight your Zoom "rectangle" onscreen or ask your participants to "Pin" your video**. This brings your image up to the front.
- ✓ **Encourage people to stay muted while you are presenting**. You can allow your participants to unmute very intentionally during discussion time.
- ✓ **Engaging Audience**: Making quality eye contact; be sure to raise your screen/camera to eye level. Look at the camera, not the screen, so your audience/students can have the greatest sense of connection. If you are using a

second monitor, some teachers comment that at one point, when everyone is moving together, the whole screen of Zoom rectangles might look like a flock of birds flying together. Those are the best moments.

- ✓ **Using music**. Music is a great addition to online classes, but be aware of a few factors. A lot of music is copyrighted, and so posting it without permission is not respectful. YouTube will flag such video and take it down. So, yes, you can use music, but strive to use music for which you have permission. Music online services that are designed for this purpose are called "royalty-free" music subscriber services (for example, Adobe and TunePocket provide this service). Also, be aware that music can come across as "choppy" on Zoom since Zoom is what is called a "medium of delay." You may need to turn on the feature on Zoom called "Use Original Sound" or even use a "mixer" app. You can also use the "share computer sound" feature on Zoom to play music, but (in addition to the copyright issues) be aware that it can be hard to get the right volume so that you can "talk over" the music. The sound puzzle on Zoom can be tricky but experimentation can bring big rewards and make your classes engaging and fun.
- ✓ **Remember the "flat screen" experience of your viewers.** Being mindful of the two-dimensional presentation of online classes is important. This means you are aware at all times that your audience is experiencing you and your teaching as "flat" onscreen. You may need to find ways for you and the teachings to come alive onscreen. Your set, your costume help. But you may also need to slow down even more and describe what you are doing more. Using playfulness, poetry, and imagery as you present can be helpful and engaging. Referring to your space (the "plant" side of the room, the "chair" side; "I will be your mirror.") as you teach is also a way to bring people with you.
- ✓ **Your energy is key.** Above all else, remember the number one rule for everyone teaching online/through video: Your energy makes a big difference! Smile, relax, and be confident. Trust your offering is good and has value.

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THANK YOU!