

Planning Your Video Call

Specify the time zone when you suggest/confirm a scheduled video call. (i.e. PT/MT/CT/ET/AT/NT) Remember that Saskatchewan doesn't turn clocks forward for Daylight Savings!

Ask the teacher about his/her students and expectations. What grade level are they? What do they already know? What do they expect to learn from you? How much time do they want you to speak and how much time should be devoted to Q&A?

Schedule a 5- to 10-minute test call using your agreed upon video conferencing platform (Zoom, Skype, etc.) and the same device, network, and physical location that you plan to use for your real call. (Changes in network, device or location can impact your call quality.) This test call is also an opportunity to meet one another and ask any additional questions you may have.

Use a hard-wired Internet connection whenever possible as this is usually faster and more stable than a wireless connection.

Plan to connect from a quiet space with lighting in front of you (above/behind your webcam) if possible. To avoid appearing as a silhouette, close the blinds and/or curtains if there is a window behind you. Remember to consider what the audience will see in the background while you are speaking.

Consider using a laptop or tablet to connect from your laboratory or another interesting space (if the wireless network will support a video call). Make sure to test this in advance!

Think of ways to personalize information—how does the topic relate to students' lives?

Plan for the Technology to Fail. Video calls can be interrupted or slowed down as a result of a poor connection, weather or other complications. If you lose the call, don't panic. You can always reconnect. Make sure you discuss this ahead of time so you have a plan in place (i.e. who will place the reconnection call if there should be a failure).

Know who to contact if you have technical issues. Many questions about Zoom can be answered 24/7 by visiting <http://support.zoom.us> or calling 1-888-799-9666. Additional contact information for Partners In Research staff can be found at <http://www.pirweb.org>.

During the Video Call

Visual aids are key for keeping the students engaged during a virtual presentation. Photos and color graphics look great on video and can help convey a difficult concept. You can also hold an object up in front of your webcam. Just be sure to avoid moving it constantly or it may appear blurry to the students. To show the object from many angles, move it in short stages, pausing to keep it still at key angles.

You can ask the students questions too! One good example is “Raise your hand if you...”

Look directly into the webcam on occasion during your talk and when answering a student question (as if it’s an audience member). This will make it appear as if you making eye contact with the viewer while speaking to them.

Position the video call window as close to your webcam as possible (often in the centre and close to the top of your screen). This makes you look near your webcam when you are looking at the video feed of the students.

Most importantly, be passionate and authentic! Don’t be afraid to include age-appropriate humour – the students enjoy seeing that you are real person too!

These virtual visits provide students with a break from their everyday routines, adding elements of anticipation, new discovery, and variety to their regular classroom programs. Thank you for taking the time to connect with them!