



Designing virtual
meeting rooms
in an active
and secure way



1. Introduction

Virtual meeting rooms occupy a central role in university operations and study conditions. The digital setting offers workrooms and study spaces in new formats. Designing virtual meeting rooms in an active and secure manner is important for moderators in online meetings, conferences or other events. This folder provides general information and guidance to help you plan online meetings as safely as possible.



2. Preparation and prevention



As an event manager and organiser, you can make different arrangements before events to create a discussion atmosphere of respect, appreciation, acknowledgement and mutual encouragement. As appreciative communication does not happen by chance, both you and the participants are jointly responsible for the very specific conditions under which appreciative communication takes place. In order to design a meeting room as free from disruptions as possible in which all participants are treated respectfully, it is important to consider which framework conditions, technical settings and role distributions are necessary already at the planning stage of a digital event.

3. Event settings and moderation



The following questions for reflection aim to help you prepare the framework conditions of your online event in a structured manner. It is highly recommended that the organising team takes some time to jointly work out what kind of interaction you want to promote in the meeting/event and which formats can be used to achieve this.

Good preparation pays off.

Interaction formats and their technical implementation:



- Who should speak and when?
 - Input provider, invited discussants, organisers, auditors, etc.
- Which participants should be able to interact?
 - Presenters – audience
 - Presenters with one another
 - Participants with one another (e.g. private chat feature, break-out rooms)
- Which technical tools should be used to facilitate dialogue?
 - Chat feature (Public chat? Should participants also be able to write to each other directly? → Please note: It might occur that individuals receive discriminatory direct messages via the private chat feature.)
 - Direct oral contributions via Raise Hand feature
 - Other features (e.g. feedback feature, whiteboard, etc.)
- How and when should these tools be used?
- Please note: Each additional communication room (e.g. chat features, break-out rooms, etc.) should be moderated and may need a person in charge of it.
- Who moderates the different interaction rooms, takes up questions from the chat and moderates oral contributions?

You should inform all presenters about the procedure of the online meeting or event in advance. Instruct participants right at the beginning of an event when and how, that is via which tools, they can actively take part in the conversation or interaction.

The role of the moderator:

Presenters and invited discussants should be informed about the distribution of responsibilities in advance.



- **Clarifying the role of the moderator:**

- Which tasks should the moderator take on?
- Which tasks do organisers take on?
- Who is responsible for which communication room (main room, break-out rooms, chats, etc.)?

Online events with a large number of participants:

- Regarding larger digital events, it is recommended to form a team of moderators that communicates internally via chat. For example: One person can moderate the main room, while another can take up questions from the chat. Depending on the topic, break-out rooms can also be moderated by additional persons.
- Should you expect, for example, disruptions due to the event topic, it is recommended that the moderation team also communicates with each other via a joint channel outside the virtual meeting room.
- In case of technical difficulties or other disruptions, the team of moderators can get in touch with one another, for example, by exchanging phone numbers.
- Regarding larger digital events, at least one person should be responsible only for the technical organisation, such as muting the microphones or answering technical enquiries by the participants.
- If the event is being recorded, it is necessary to obtain consent from the presenters and to inform all participants about the recording in advance.

Inform about the rules:

In all online meetings or events, it is suggested to inform the participants about the rules for communication and the usage of available technical equipment at the beginning of the event:

- **Transparency of the HOW:** Inform all participants at the beginning of the event when, how and whether they can participate.
- **Transparency of the WHY:** It is recommended to explain settings and decisions regarding the procedure or technical presets that were made in advance.
 - For example: Why did we, as the organising team, decide to only enable the public chat and to completely turn off the private chat feature?



4. Dealing with discriminatory oral contributions

There is no one-size fits-all formula against discrimination. Discrimination takes on very different forms, be it overt, covert, intentional or unintentional.

To resolve a situation of discrimination, it is crucial that you, as the event organiser, obtain information about the **legal framework**¹. Consider what scope of actions you have at your disposal and which actions you allow or do not allow others to take for understandable reasons (e.g. the private chat feature is disabled).

The following **reflection exercise** can help you see clearly at what point you want to engage in a discussion as the event organiser or moderator.



¹ See the website of the Equal Opportunities Working Party (AKGL): [Discrimination, sexual harassment and harassment \(univie.ac.at\)](https://www.univie.ac.at/akgl/) (in German).

Red line²

- **Yellow traffic light** (= I am attentive, but no changes are needed in the situation)
- **Red card** (= you need to change the format of the discussion)
- **Exit/emergency exit** (= it is necessary to terminate the session)

First step: Imagine the event you planned and write down which symbols you would use to classify different situations.

Second step: In collaboration with the organising team or colleagues, discuss how you would act in any given situation. How do you want to communicate “yellow traffic light” or “red card” warnings? Which action would you take at level 3 “exit”? Which decisions can you make individually, as event organiser?

Obtain information: You can find information about the guidelines of the University of Vienna in the Teaching Manual: **Code of Conduct**.



Emergency strategy: Verbal 3-step technique

- 1. State clearly what is happening at the moment.**
This helps the entire group and all auditors to clearly classify the situation.
- 2. Articulate how a given situation makes you feel.**
For example: This statement harms, enrages and poisons our mutual discussion.
- 3. Give clear instructions.** For example: Please stop this immediately. I am turning off the whiteboard/presentation now. I am blocking your participation.

² Commissioned by ZARA Training, this method was developed by Karin Bischof and Lukas Gottschamel (March 2021) and made available for this guideline by kind permission.

5. Dealing with disruptions and actions within the scope of criminal law during video conferences



Discrimination and disruptions do not occur only through oral contributions, but can also manifest in other actions. For example, some participants play music or make noise in order to drown out the speaker's voice, they alter or disfigure the presentation or flood the chat with nonsense. Such disruptive intrusion into a group's virtual meeting room is often referred to as Zoombombing. This term refers to the video conferencing tool Zoom, but Zoombombing can happen in any system.

By default, only the presenters can share their screens in the Zoom of the University of Vienna. In addition, data transfer via the chat is disabled and generally not possible in other video conferencing systems as well.

In order to make your virtual meeting room more secure, you can additionally set the following presets under the Settings menu:

- Do not make the **URL of the meeting** public. Do not post the URL on a website. Send the URL only by e-mail or share it, for example, within your course. You can also ask the registered participants not to forward the URL of the meeting.

- If possible, protect the video conference with a password or give **only the course participants** access.
- You can use the **digital waiting room** to give only certain participants access to the course.
- **Disable** the **Allow participants to join before host** option. The meeting starts only when the host joins.
- **Disable attendee features** that participants do not need:
 - private chat
 - annotation and whiteboard

Should disruptive or discriminatory incidents still occur: **Do not panic.**

You can swiftly take remedial measures:

- 1. Mute** all participants. With many video conferencing systems, such as Zoom for example, it is also possible to **pause the entire meeting**.
2. Apply the verbal 3-step strategy and act accordingly. This enables all participants to classify the incident as a disruption.
- 3. Remove** the participant causing disruptions from the meeting.
4. Inform the Threat Management team about the incident.
5. Document the incident by recording the meeting and taking screenshots of the chat thereafter. Inform your participants about it: "For documentation purposes, I will now start recording the meeting."
6. Note the names of all participants.

[No fear of disruptions during video conferences \(univie.ac.at\)](#) (in German)



Imprint:

Gender Equality and Diversity Unit in cooperation with the Vienna University Computer Center, Corporate Communications, Conference and Event Management service units and the Threat Management of the University of Vienna.

ZARA Civil Courage and Anti-Racism Work developed the “red line” method. Vienna, March 2022