Zoom works well enough for broadcasting a talk or lecture, but there's a world of other software products that help to elevate the online experience. Crucially, they can be cost-effective, says Moss.

Whova, for example, is an app through which questions can be put to speakers. It's especially helpful for engaging the online audience, but Moss advises that in-person attendees be asked to pose questions in the same way. That way, the two audiences are brought together and can see each other's questions. "You need to give the online people the same opportunity to speak," she says. "It's also nice because there's a record of the questions that were asked."

Spice up online networking

Perhaps the biggest argument in favour of in-person events is the opportunity to network and meet people face-to-face. It's hard to replicate that experience with large, multi-person conference calls; a select few people usually end up monopolizing a stilted conversation. But there are more sophisticated apps that seek to make online networking more enjoyable. "We used a relatively cheap tool called SpatialChat, which is basically a virtual room. Your photo is in a circle, and you move it around to other people's circle to meet them," says Carden. "That cost us £2,000 [US$2,500] for a 200-person licence over the course of 2 days."

Tasker, too, is a fan of products such as SpatialChat. "They give you an avatar, and the sound from a conversation falls off as you move away from a group, so you can have a real conversation-like experience," she says. "Everyone always says how online conferences suck because there's no networking component, but it can be solved."

SpatialChat isn't the only game in town. Gather is another popular platform, in which the user experience resembles a pixelated video game. Gather also features collaborative whiteboards for users to sketch out ideas together in real time. If that sounds too complicated, there are less flashy, text-based options such as Discord and Slack.

All in all, organizing a hybrid conference takes extra time and can be stressful. Carden says that putting on a hybrid conference was "nightmarish and traumatic to organize. It felt like spinning plates to me." But the end result was worth the effort. "It's fabulous when it all comes together," he says.

Benjamin Plackett is a freelance writer based in Dubbo, Australia.

Woo your audience as you would a blind date.

WHY LECTURES ARE LIKE BLIND DATES

How I learnt to woo the audience after attending a public-speaking class. **By Nicholas A. Coles**

About a year ago, a friend outside academia attended a talk I gave on the science of emotions, a topic I research at Stanford University in California. I thought the talk went really well. My friend, who works in insurance, disagreed. She said that academics are experts at making interesting stuff boring and inaccessible — and that we should all be required to take a public-speaking class.

So, a few months later, I enrolled in a public-speaking course taught by James Wagstaffe and Bruce Bean, authors of *Romancing the Room: How to Engage Your Audience, Court Your Crowd, and Speak Successfully in Public* (2002). Their book compares communication to a romantic relationship; it starts by getting someone's attention on a blind date and flourishes when you are attentive to their interests, respond to their feedback and avoid monotony. Since completing the class, I've continued giving research talks and have received

event guide

much-more-positive feedback. For example, a senior faculty member said my most recent talk was the best they'd seen in a long time, and over the next few days, I received nearly a dozen similar messages from other faculty members and graduate students.

The noticeable improvement in feedback inspired me to continue working on my public-speaking skills. It's a lifelong journey, but here are the four most useful things I've learnt.

Your voice is an instrument. Learn to play it

Too often, scientific talks hit the same note, at the same pace, for 45 minutes straight. The best way to get better at playing the instrument of the voice is to practise. For example, practise speaking the following sentence: 'Why did you blame him?'

If you emphasize a different word, the meaning of the sentence can change. That is the power of inflection in speech. Whisper and shout the sentence (volume); speak it slowly and then quickly (rate). Add and remove pauses, and say it in a deeper and higher voice (pitch). Practise these changes in your voice; they not only alter the meaning of your words, they teach you how to speak in a more engaging manner.

Don't cram in material

Adding information to a presentation is like adding salt to food. Not enough and it comes out bland, but too much creates something unpalatable. Unfortunately, many presenters seem to dump in the whole spice rack. They cram in too much material and overwhelm their audience, who then struggle to retain anything from the presentation.

> ## "People typically complain when talks go on for too long — not for being too short."

When we work on our talks, we should remind ourselves of two things. First, people typically complain when talks go on for too long — not for being too short. Ending early makes it feel like time flew by and leaves more time for questions and discussion. Second, your audience probably do not care as much about the details as you do. If they do care about the details, they'll simply ask in the Q&A or through e-mail or social media.

When I am preparing a talk, I now spend a lot more time outlining. I constantly ask myself, 'What are the most essential details?' When I have the urge to add in a note about, for example, how I handled outliers in my data, I ask myself: how probable is it that this audience will care? If it's less than 25%, I omit the detail. I err on the side of exclusion — because I know that I'll leave plenty of time for questions and discussion.

Ask about the setting

Research your audience and tailor your material to fit their interests and skills. For example, I might talk about how I modelled data at a conference, but I probably wouldn't do so at a first-year undergraduate psychology seminar.

Also, remember to ask about the room. Before my last talk, I asked for a full description of the space. (What's the size? Layout? Capacity?) I wanted to visualize the space while I practised. I wanted to think about how loud my voice needed to be, what people would be able to see and how I might move around. By the time I arrived, the setting felt familiar and comfortable. Rather than worrying about the room, I was able to better focus on engaging the audience.

Prepare two conclusion statements

Research talks often end with a conclusion slide and then a Q&A session. But this can mean the last thing the audience hears is a sub-par question or an awkward, "No more questions?" To ensure that things end on a high note, you can prepare a second conclusion for after the Q&A. For example, in a recent talk on emotion, my first conclusion focused on my research findings. After the Q&A, my second conclusion reminded them why I care about this work: we cannot hope to understand the human condition if we cannot understand emotion.

Two conclusions are not the norm, so it helps to let the talk coordinator and audience know ahead of time. I simply tell them that we have, for example, ten minutes for questions and that I will reserve the last minute for a closing remark. That last minute is the encore. I get to end on a high point, thank the audience and clearly signal the end of the talk.

These four tips have served me well thus far. We researchers study interesting and important things — but we often lack training in how to speak about this work effectively. Nonetheless, there's room for optimism. There is a simple way we can increase the impact of our scientific endeavours: by working on our public-speaking skills.

Nicholas A. Coles is a research scientist at Stanford University, California, USA, and director of the Psychological Science Accelerator, a collaborative network of psychology labs spanning 84 countries.