

Going online with older adults: Hands on guide

The following guidelines are based on the field work conducted within the project [ACCESS](#), an EU project coordinated by Ass. Prof. Claudia Müller and Katerina Katka Cerna from [IT for the ageing society group](#).

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Before sessions

- Previous experience?
 - Which messengers/video tools are people used to?
 - Zoom ID and Zoom link - explain the difference and inquire how people are used to doing it;
 - And how are they used to deliver them the login information - if messenger, or email or even maybe SMS ?
- Common vocabulary is necessary (though develops mutually through the courses) - possible to send out as PDF/papers in advance?
- Print Screens of different devices, Mac/laptops
- Establish a messenger for communication
- Do people use laptops/phones?
 - It seemed to be easier from a laptop, because of screen sharing and the size of buttons. But only IF people have functional laptops.
 - if they are more used to using their phones, it is better with them. On the phones it is ok to only Zoom, but doing anything else
- Especially at the beginning, we had to have “fluid structure” of the session, because the onboarding took a long time (so we had to be flexible with what tasks we will do first and what next, depending on the fluctuating number of older adults).
- Gather phone numbers and emails in advance

During sessions

- **Joining Zoom room**
 - One of the most key moments in our Zoom session was joining the session - especially at the beginning, it was also one of the hardest points. We often had to use phone calls, because to navigate the older adults how to join the zoom room was sometimes impossible in the actual environment
 - Make sure you know which device the participants are using
- **Develop joined rules**
 - Like any online space, it is good to have practices on which everyone agrees on, so that communication can take place. For example, make decisions

together about who can take the word at which point, when to ask questions etc.

- **Finding chat**
 - Has been quite demanding, especially on the phones, where the chat is “hidden”
- **Verbal navigation**
 - The best strategy is to ask older adults to describe what they see. For this it is useful to have a common vocabulary built, otherwise it is difficult to know what exactly they see.
 - *Where are the older adults looking?* This might sometimes be confusing, since your own screen is the only one that is mirrored; the other ones are (possibly not)
- **Un/muting**
 - Another necessary thing was muting and unmuting - in a one-channel environment it was crucial to support them in being able to do this.
 - Older adults did not always communicate troubles to us (silence does not mean it is okay); you might want to check their faces time to time
 - The different digital ecologies cause problems not only when joining session, but also when for example explaining interfaces
- **“I am out”**
 - One of the most scary things for the older adults was being “out” - losing the sight of the main Zoom room:
 - The digital ecology does not involve only which devices one has - but also how to navigate in the individual ecology of a single device
 - This does not happen on a backdrop of silence, but in the other “chaos” of the workshop - for example, this event happened several times at the same time, when another participant was trying to fix their dysfunctional microphone and the moderators were focusing on that, as well as one of them
- **Breakout rooms**
 - If the group is bigger than 5 people or so, it can get a bit boring for everyone to be in one room; dividing people into smaller groups
- **Restarting laptop**
 - Teach the older adults how to restart PC, sometimes that is the only thing that can fix for example audio problems
- **Breaking connection**
 - It happened on a regular basis, that people would drop out and come back after a long time; or even new participants would join even 40 minutes in. When a new person joins, it is good to go through a brief gradual checklist with them:
 - Can you hear us?
 - Can you see us?
 - Give feedback on if we hear or see them
 - If problems:



- Which device are you using?

- **Coordination**
 - Internal coordination, we needed a Telegram chat, as well as a chat with the participants.
 - We had different roles:
 - Coordinator (pacing of the session, overseeing)
 - Moderator (leading the session)
 - Trouble-shooters (providing individual support to older adults)
 - At the beginning, it was necessary to have a lot of people with this role, but eventually we needed less and less of them.
 - An idea is that these different roles can be taken up by the older adults too.

After sessions

- Send out a summary (if topics covered)
- Keep the conversation flowing even in between the sessions
 - Social-based
 - Wishing merry christmas etc.
 - Task-based
 - Give out tasks to talk about during the next session

Final tips

- Patience, patience, patience!
- Things do not happen at once, but everything develops gradually in a mutual relationship. For example, the more you will engage with the vocabulary through describing the interfaces, the more the older adults will become comfortable and skilled in describing them.
- It might happen that what older adults managed during the last session, it will not be possible for them to do it again.