

Mechanics of Virtual Storytelling

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Storytellers are normally energized by an audience sitting right in front of them. In virtual storytelling, the teller needs to create that energy. It's a new world where we are "mermaids out of water" or "frogs that need to be kissed". But with practice and endurance, we learn that our stories and our ability to create images is still our treasure easily shared.

Background

What's behind you is worthy of some attention. An uncluttered, friendly, simple background will keep the audience attention on the storyteller. Stand or sit in front of a blank wall or curtain with a plant or simple piece of art. Try not to use a plain white wall, a little color or texture can be engaging and reflect the light in a positive way. Because your story is more important than the environment, be careful to give the environment little cause for distraction. If you decide to use backgrounds provided by Zoom or other sources, be careful; often when you move or gesture you partially disappear in the scene behind you.

Lighting

Be sure to position light in front of you, not directly behind you. Don't stand or sit in front of a window. A desk or floor lamp in front of you is often better than an overhead light. Sometimes back lighting highlights the teller, experiment so that there is no glare especially if you wear glasses. Check the lighting and add or subtract as needed. As with every other aspect, find a way to test this; arrange for a trial run with someone who can give you feedback.

Personal Appearance

Your clothing should be a different color than the background so that you won't get lost in the scene. Solid, clear colors are flattering. Like the background, your clothing can steal the show if you let it. Dress like the audience and the occasion are important you. Some storytellers like to put on a vest or shawl to signal the beginning of story time.

Positioning

Stand or sit in a place where you fill most of the monitor. If you stand, be sure there is enough room to use gestures or slight movement. If you sit, uncross your legs and push down through your feet. Don't sit in a chair that swivels or a sofa that sinks. Drop your shoulders, open your chest, and breathe slowly and deeply to project and to perform. Positioning your monitor is worth the effort (sometimes you may need to raise it above desk/table level). Experiment until the storyteller can make eye contact needed for a good telling.

Location

Be sure that your telling location is free from background noises (phones, dogs, traffic etc.) Put your cell phone on MUTE. You'll have better reception if you close all other windows during the videoconferencing activities. Be creative with your "studio", it should be comfortable as well as inviting.

Voice

Be sure the audience can hear you. Adjust your microphone volume so that you are more than just audible. Remember that whispering or lowering character voice can easily sacrifice the ability of the audience to hear your important lines.

Gestures

Movements that support your story will draw the young audience in. Strong, natural gestures are engaging but be sure they fit on your screen. Caution, adjusting your clothing, fixing your hair or other movements unrelated to the story can be distracting. If you use props, introduce them only to enhance story meaning, then place them out of camera range until needed.

Practice

As with any storytelling, practice is essential. You can simply turn on your camera and practice your program. Always time your trial run. The more you practice and perform, the easier it gets to see yourself on camera.

Plan with your Teacher/Ask for Teacher Feedback

After you communicate with your teacher about the platform for sharing stories, discuss your program format. If you decide to enter a blank screen or use any of the techniques demonstrated in this workshop, let the teacher know your intent and rationale. Keep all communications with the teacher brief and concise because her/his time is valuable now than ever. After the first story time, ask for teacher feedback.

Resources:

- [American Sign Language Signing Savvy www.signingsavvy.com](http://www.signingsavvy.com)
- Common Sense Media: <https://wideopenschool.org/>
- [Making Zoom Video Calls Look More Professional: View Video Series](#) (Jessica Robinson, Capture Video)
- [Gallery View vs. Speaker View on Zoom: View Tips for Videoconferencing](#)
- Zoom Tutorials