



12 Tips for Better Live-Online Learning

Keep Learners Engaged and Willingly Accountable

By **Matthew Murdoch**

Co-author of *The Webinar Manifesto*
and *The Learning Explosion*

FranklinCovey



Live-Online Training Works—If You Do It Right

Virtual learning used to be a more flexible and affordable alternative to in-person classes. Then the whole world went virtual, practically overnight.



People who were skeptical about live-online training have been forced to embrace it. At the same time, many seasoned presenters and facilitators are learning that what works in a regular classroom doesn't always work in a virtual classroom.

This guide will share some of the best practices we learned while delivering more than 30,000 live-online work sessions over the past decade.



Foster accountability to improve the learning experience and drive behavior change.

We know based on research as well as feedback from our clients that when Live-Online training is done right, it can be just as effective as an in-person class.

The key to transformative learning is accountability. When learners feel accountable—to the instructor, their fellow participants, and themselves—they're more focused and more invested in the learning experience.

To inspire learning that lasts, you need to start holding learners accountable from the very first moment of your time together.



Create Accountability in Three Ways

In a regular classroom, where people are physically present, attendees signal their level of engagement through nonverbal cues.



If you want to change people's behavior, you need to do more than get their bodies in front of a computer.

Positive cues from attendees include:

- Raising their hands
- Nodding their heads
- Laughing at the instructor's joke

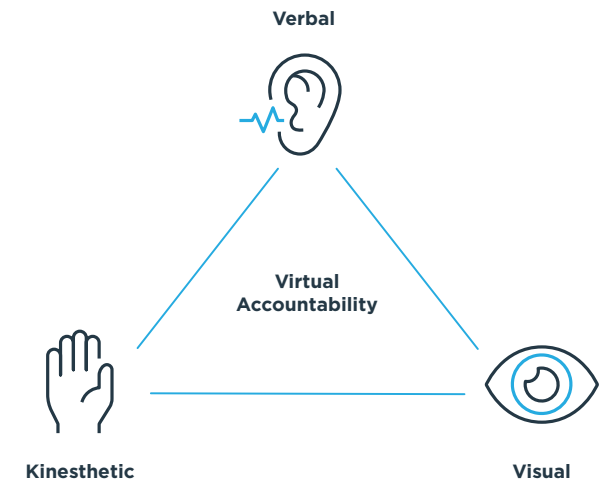
Negative cues include:

- Bobbing their head
- Trying to stay awake
- Using their cell phones

In other words, in a physical setting, participants are nonverbally accountable because their body language is visible to others. It's much easier to slip across the line from appropriate classroom behavior to inappropriate classroom behavior in a virtual environment, because these clues can easily go unnoticed. That means you, as the facilitator, will need to make a conscious effort to create a sense of accountability.

If you want participants to have a meaningful learning experience—one that will actually change their behavior—then you need to do more than get their bodies in front of a computer. You must get them to actively engage in the virtual classroom experience. That process of engagement is what we call “virtually accountability.” It has three dimensions: verbal, visual, and kinesthetic.

Virtual Accountability Model



Verbal Accountability: Hear Them Speak

In a regular classroom, where people are physically present, attendees signal their level of engagement through nonverbal cues.



With appropriate conditioning, learners will feel accountable to respond to the verbal cues you give them.

To create impactful learning experiences, you need to invite participants onto the stage and give them speaking parts. If you condition your learners appropriately, they'll feel accountable to respond to the various verbal cues and directions you give them.

The following activities signal, "It's your turn to participate":

1. Set the stage. At the beginning of the session, let participants know they'll be expected to contribute verbally and that they should not mute their microphones.

Say something like:

I'll be calling on you throughout the session, sometimes by name, to answer questions out loud. Please feel free to speak up if you have a comment or question.

2. Ask real questions. Hypothetical or expected questions kill participation. Just as in face-to-face training, if you want good discussion, ask open-ended questions that will stimulate conversations and draw in multiple participants. And once you throw a question out there, let them kick it around for a while.

3. Call on people by name. Nothing engages and reengages people like the mention of their name. This is the cocktail party effect—people will always hear their own name, even if their attention is focused on something else. We've also found that people in a virtual-classroom environment are much less likely to get embarrassed when called on, and most people—including the introverted types who don't usually speak up in a regular classroom—are willing to contribute.
4. Hang 10 (or 15 or 20). The first time you ask a question, slowly count to 10 without saying a word. You'll feel uncomfortable at first and may even wonder if your audience is still there. But giving participants time to think allows them to make connections between the concepts you're teaching and their own experiences. And by doing this one thing, you're conditioning them to know you're serious about verbal accountability.
5. Hear the herd. Instead of holding a brief Q&A at the end of the work session, build in frequent opportunities for verbal interaction. We recommend some form of verbal interaction at least every two to three minutes. If this seems overwhelming, enlist a copilot to help manage the logistics and monitor the chat pod so you can respond to questions and comments in real time.



In a virtual classroom, most people—including the introverts who don't usually speak up in a regular classroom—are willing to contribute.

Visual Accountability: Open Their Eyes

We've all seen action movies where the hero has to defuse a bomb based on verbal directions from an expert who isn't physically present.



Learners are going to expect a slide deck filled with text. Instead, show them vivid images.

The hero describes what they're seeing, and the expert, after asking a few precise questions, tells them which wire to cut. This is an example of visual accountability. If the hero doesn't accurately report what they're seeing and experiencing, there will be a major disaster.

In a virtual classroom situation, visual accountability probably won't save anyone's life, but it's a powerful tool for keeping learners engaged and helping them remember what they're learning.

Here are four ways to keep learners visually engaged and accountable:

- 1. Map it.** It's as easy to get lost in a training session as it is in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Provide a visual map of what's going to happen, where we are now, and where we've been. Just as the best maps have a clearly defined route, they also have clearly defined reference points. If possible, try not to use bullet points as your road map.
- 2. Paint it.** It's amazing what the human imagination can conjure up. That's why we almost always enjoy the book more than the movie—the images we invent in our minds are much more lucid and relevant to our life experiences. Great storytelling is the key to painting internal pictures. It's also a good way to switch up the virtual classroom experience. Instead of loading up one more chart, graph, or YouTube clip, why not paint that chart, graph, or video inside the learner's head by telling a story?
- 3. Burn it.** Learners are going to expect a slide deck filled with text and bullet points. Instead, show them vivid images that teach the concept through graphics rather than text. Since most people are visual learners, it will not only capture their attention but also burn the concept into their memory.
- 4. Shun it.** If you want people to attend your training and have a memorable experience, you must shun all of the following: ugly email invitations, ugly marketing, ugly graphics, ugly tweets and posts, ugly presentations, ugly handouts, and ugly virtual classroom experiences. Enlist the help of your friends in marketing, advertising, and graphic design who have already mastered this skill.

Human beings are hardwired to remember and retain stories, not to remember and retain bullet points on a slide deck.



Kinesthetic Accountability: Move Their Bones

An object in motion stays in motion. An object at rest stays at rest. Newton's First Law of Motion applies to your Live-Online participants. If you're not careful, you'll lose any energy they had—unless you get them moving.



Learners are going to expect a slide deck filled with text. Instead, show them vivid images.

Kinesthesia is the study of movement. People need to move. And research shows that movement can help them learn new things. Get them moving physically, and they'll also get moving mentally.

Here are three things you can do to engage your learners at a kinesthetic level:

- 1. Play.** Sometimes the best way to learn a new concept is to actually get up from your desk and do it. In a virtual training session, it can be helpful to provide an offline assignment—something your learners can do right now, for just a minute or two, by venturing into the real world. Emphasize that they'll need to report back on what they discovered. And don't let the offline activity last too long, or you risk losing your audience.
- 2. Push.** Use surveys, polls, chat, and interactive whiteboards to encourage people to push their ideas onto the screen. Don't ever feel like you're overusing these tools. If anything, we've found that presenters don't use them enough! People love to share their opinions, and when you give them a way to do so, they stay engaged.
- 3. Pull.** Ask participants to download or access content from a different source. The idea is to have them pull material from your training into another environment—real or virtual. You may want learners to do some quick research, look up a definition, or find an answer to a question and then report back to the group.



Newton's First Law of Motion applies to your Live-Online participants. You'll lose any energy they had—unless you get them moving.

12 Tips for Virtual Accountability Checklist

To facilitate effective behavior change and learning you must hold learners virtually accountable—verbally, visually, and kinesthetically. Use this checklist as resource to get started.

→ Verbal Accountability

- 1. I have set up clear verbal expectations and asked people not to mute their microphones.
- 2. I'm asking open-ended questions that are relevant to my learners' real-life situations.
- 3. I'm calling on people by name.
- 4. I counted to 10 (or even higher) after asking the first question.
- 5. I've built frequent verbal interactivity into the outline.

→ Visual Accountability

- 6. I have a visual roadmap to orient learners during the session.
- 7. I use stories to engage learners' imaginations.
- 8. I use many different kinds of visual stimuli.
- 9. My instructional and promotional materials are visually appealing.

→ Kinesthetic Accountability

- 10. I may assign a short offline activity.
- 11. I frequently use tools like surveys, polls, chat, and virtual whiteboards to get learners physically engaged.
- 12. I can ask learners to find information from an external source that relates to a concept I'm teaching.

Use Virtual Accountability to Inspire Lasting Change

While creating verbal, visual, and kinesthetic accountability may seem like a lot more work than just lecturing for two hours, you'll be rewarded with active participation and positive learner feedback. Remember, your learners have many interesting distractions they can turn to if you don't hold their attention.

Most importantly, the more engaged participants are during the Live-Online experience, the more likely they are to remember and apply what you're teaching. When you encourage accountability from the very first moment, they'll feel emotionally invested in the concepts they're learning—and that kind of investment can lead to lasting change and growth.

This guide is based on concepts found in The Webinar Manifesto and The Learning Explosion, which were written to help captivate your audience, push the limits of your technology, and transform Live-Online design and delivery. Matt Murdoch, who co-authored both books, led the team that designed and implemented FranklinCovey's Live-Online solutions—delivering industry-leading learning solutions around the world. He currently serves as VP of marketing in FranklinCovey's enterprise division.

FranklinCovey has spent a decade perfecting our approach to virtual delivery, bringing Live-Online training sessions to more than 600,000 people around the world. Our world-class learning solutions—delivered Live-Online, On Demand, or Live In-Person—are designed to build exceptional leadership skills throughout your organization.

To get started, email us at solutions@franklincovey.co.uk, visit franklincovey.co.uk,

Or call us at:

01295-274-100



