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TEACHING TIP OF THE WEEK

Online Teaching Strategies

Tip of the week: Zoom fatigue is real: how to avoid it.

Google searches for “**Zoom fatigue**” have [spiked](#) since COVID-19 required us to move to remote teaching and learning. Here are a few tips to help you avoid falling into the common habits that lead to Zoom fatigue.

Zoom fatigue is the term used to describe the exhaustion people experience from long periods and frequent video conferencing.

Video conferencing places [higher cognitive demands](#) on participants than does in-person interaction. This is because each participant has to not only coordinate the call but also maintain eye contact (or at least create the illusion of engagement) while still trying to make compelling arguments and process other participants’ words and ideas. This is made even more difficult because when we are participating in video conferences we tend to be more influenced by heuristic cues such as the speaker’s perceived likability rather than by the quality of arguments presented in the meeting. Further, [inattention blindness](#) is a well documented phenomenon that shows how we fail to process [unexpected stimuli](#) over video. Feeling the pressure of all of these requirements and stimuli combined can be mentally exhausting.

In-person meetings serve as familiar [rituals](#) that we have been forced to replace with a new kind of interaction. In live, in-person conversations, for example, silence or reasonable pauses in speaking are both meaningful and important in creating a natural give-and-take rhythm between people. But in a video call, silence generates anxiety about the technology. Even a [1.2-second delay](#) in responding online makes people view the person talking as less friendly and less focused. Eye contact in person-to-person interactions is a [key factor](#) influencing how we perceive the other person and how much we trust them, but sustained eye contact can be difficult with the inevitability of lower fidelity video and multiple camera angles in today’s world of Zoom. And, when people are frequently turning their microphones on and off, connections lag and background noise breaks through, resulting in meetings that rarely flow as smoothly as we would

like. These challenges tax our systems and increase [cognitive load](#), which can lead to poor understanding, retention, and learning.

What can you do to minimize the challenges of Zoom fatigue? Here are a few ideas:

- Block out some time for a break before and after long Zoom calls and classes. There is nothing as exhausting as jumping from call to call or class to class without breaks. Be sure to schedule breaks during long meetings. Try to get some fresh air during these breaks, even if you just go outside for a few minutes. At the very least, change your scenery, shift your gaze to further distances, and don't use the time to answer emails and texts!
- Use *speaker view* as your default Zoom [layout](#). *Gallery view* requires [continuous partial attention](#), which is more likely to lead to exhaustion. Think of it as avoiding forcing your brain to try to decode facial expressions of a crowd looking at you directly, as well as constantly gazing at your own face, which is distracting for most people.
- Consider using phone calls for informal communication. Haas's own Juliana Schroeder has shown how your [voice](#) is perhaps the best way to convey your intelligence. In this sense, using the phone is a good way to communicate away from your screen.
- If you are feeling stress and anxiety that is of a continuous nature, please seek out [campus mental health resources](#).

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The Online Teaching Tip of the Week is a series produced for Haas Faculty by the Associate Dean for Learning Strategies' Online Teaching Tips Team.