

# BEING PRESENT, SUPPORTING PRESENCE: IDEAS FOR ONLINE TEACHING AND FACILITATION

Speaker Notes

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## 1. [Title slide] – Jody

- Hello everyone! We've put the materials for this session online in Google Drive [link deleted]
- In that folder you'll find a handout with takeaways and references, and a document we'll be using during the session today for those who want to put their reflections in a shared space
- If time permits, we will have optional breakout rooms near the end today, so if you want to prepare yourself to participate in those, you can do so, and if you don't want to be in a breakout today, know that we'll give you ample warning to opt out of that part!
- We have turned on Live Transcript to support accessibility, which may mean you are seeing subtitles. If you don't want those, choose "Live Transcript," then "Hide Subtitles."
- While we're looking at the interface, I invite you to take a moment with me to become acquainted with our space. On your next inhale, take a look at the top edge of your zoom window. As you breathe out, the bottom. Looking at each side, take a breath in, and out. Now raise your gaze to the physical space you are in, and take another breath cycle, be in that space. Now look back at zoom, and take another breath cycle, as you see if you can be in both the zoom and in your physical space.
- A note on cameras for today – we understand that for many people, having a camera on is not conducive to learning, so we fully welcome people to turn cameras off unless we are doing a specific activity, and even then, we honor your judgment!
- It's ok to use the chat, but we may wait for a pause to address questions or even save them until the end due to time.

## 2. Introduction

- You heard a little about us in our bios. As far as our contemplative practices, we are both drawing on meditation and yoga practices, training and experience with the restorative justice method called the Circle Process, and on lessons learned from colleagues and fellow practitioners. Rebecca is also a trained coach and Jody has taken a long course from the folks at Sustained Dialogue in that method of facilitation.
- We don't currently teach library instruction, but we know many of our colleagues use presencing activities in classes.
- We originally experienced many of these activities outside of work, and have been pleasantly surprised at how they can adapt to committees, project teams, and other workplace events.

### 3. [Tree/face]

- We want to acknowledge that many of the practices and traditions we draw from are rooted in a wide variety of cultures and traditions, and express gratitude for the many teachers we know to thank, and the ones we don't know and may have gone un-credited or even been forgotten.
- We also wish to note that we have worked in predominantly white academic libraries, so our experiences are shaped by that. We hope that folks from different backgrounds than ours will share freely in the reflections and discussions to round out the perspectives heard here today.

### 4. Definitions of Presence

- There are as many ways to define “being present” as there are teachers. For example, one by one of our teachers, Rhonda Magee is: “paying attention with kindness and an open friendliness, to what arises.”<sup>1</sup>
- Other definitions include embodiment. For example, Thich Nhat Hanh writes, “When you are concentrated – mind and body together – you produce your true presence.”

### 5. [Preparing for Presence]

- Before any event actually happens, a first step is to think about the goals and intentions for the class or meeting. Classes may have learning objectives, and meetings often have agendas, but what kinds of presencing activities –if any--might support these? Not every event is necessarily better with a deliberate presencing activity – it just might not support the objectives or the group might not be ready.
- Even if the *event* doesn't lend itself to an intentional presencing activity, we can prepare ourselves as the person teaching or facilitating.
  - If you have a meditation or centering practice, think about how you might adapt that to fit the time you have before the event. There are some in the handout as well.
- Consider whether there are ancestor(s) or teacher(s) you want to bring along in order to remind you that your presence may include past, present, and future generations. (Ruth King, 2021)<sup>2</sup>
- You might also have some personal behavioral practices you're working on, like practicing active listening or being curious.
- You might consider blocking time on your calendar before and maybe after the event to be sure there is space, maybe even adding notes to remind yourself of your intentions.

### 6. Potential Presence Planning Pitfalls

- Another element to preparation is to be on the lookout for habits that might get in the way of presencing
- Being intentional is important, but for myself, being overprepared can lead to getting stuck in my notes and my scripts and my plans.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://resources.soundstrue.com/transcript/rhonda-magee-we-are-embodied-and-embedded-bringing-mindfulness-to-our-current-place-and-position/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ruthking.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-Meditating-With-Race.RuthKing.pdf>

- Perfectionism can even affect the ability of the group to feel like there is room for their presence to matter.
- During the event, stay flexible and adaptive so that the group (and you!) can pivot or adapt plans
- Finally, it's important for me to think about different backgrounds from my own.
  - Are my go-to practices and activities all from people who share much of my background, or are they drawing from the same tradition? Is there an opportunity to diversify the lineages of my activities?
  - Think ahead about whether people from different identity groups, different abilities, or different personalities might experience activities differently.
- We'll talk more about some of these considerations toward the end of this session as well.

## 7. We'd like to pause now to ask:

What are some of the ways you prepare yourself to Be Present? What tendencies do you watch out for that might get in the way? Please feel free to just reflect or write silently, but also feel free to share with all of us using this Google Doc [Rebecca paste in chat] <https://tinyurl.com/CPIG-PRESENCE> and scroll down to Prompt #1.

After 30-60 seconds of silence, Jody will express appreciation for people's reflections in their own spaces as well as what people are putting in the Google Doc; "take a few moments to finish up your thought, and then Rebecca will continue with our content for today.

## 8. Circle process – Rebecca

- As Jody mentioned earlier, the practice of circle is one we have both used.
- A definition that I think captures the essential elements of the practice is "A circle is a gathering that is characterized by thoughtful preparation, powerful questions, and an egalitarian structure." (Autrey & Ho, n.d.)
- Circle originates from Indigenous practices, where it's sometimes called a "talking circle" because participants are seated in a circle and a talking piece is passed around to indicate who can speak. You're hearing from everyone and the facilitator participates just like everyone else.
- Circle follows a standard structure of a beginning (with an opening, introductions, and check-in), a middle where you're going around the circle one or more times speaking about the topic, and an end with closing and check-out.
- Typically Circle refers to the entire gathering and how it's conducted, but you can also bring in just a few elements of this practice.

## 9. Using elements of circle

- One way to do this is to use circle order for sharing responses to a discussion question or reflective prompt.
  - During circle, if you're not the one talking, you're listening mindfully and not planning what you'll say when it's your turn. This gives space for each person's contribution.
  - "Anyone can start"

- Passing is always ok, as is taking some time to pause before speaking when it's your turn. As a facilitator, it's helpful for you to model these behaviors.
- When creating reflection questions to use in circle, you want to offer open-ended prompts that invite flexibility in how much or how little people can share, and in how vulnerable they can be with their answers.
- Circle is normally an in-person practice, but it can be modified for online settings. One thing we've found helpful is posting a list of names in the chat to be the "circle order". We like to ask attendees say "passing to [the next person's name]" to make it clear that they're finished speaking and not just pausing. If you're using Zoom, you can click and drag videos in Gallery View to create a custom video order, and the host can even deploy the order to all participants and save it for future use!
- Now, using the structure of a typical circle, we're going to talk about ideas for bringing more presence to the opening, middle, and closing of classes or events.

## 10. Opening with Presence

The beginning of a class or meeting is important for setting the tone. If you are trying to help attendees be more present, do that from the start!

You'll want to consider your objectives and intentions to think about what the group needs. For example, if you're teaching a class, what is going to prepare your students to be in a mindset to learn? Keep in mind that you will need to be able to "get to work" after the ceremony; probably don't want to start with something very emotionally charged.

Although you will plan to do certain activities, part of being present is being responsive to what is happening in the moment, so you might need to adjust your plans based on how people are doing, recent events on campus, in the world, etc.

## 11. Opening ceremony ideas

Here are some ideas for opening with presence.

- You could observe a moment of silence or do a brief meditation. Another option is the practice Jody led us through at the beginning to get situated to the physical and virtual space.
- You could read a poem. Jody and I are on a project team centered around Black poetry, and we begin each of our meetings with a poem.
- We'll do another activity at the end of our presentation to demonstrate another way to connect to others with presence.

Even though we're no longer at the beginning of this event, I'd like to read a poem to give us a chance to experience what that's like. Feel free to sit back, maybe close your eyes if that feels comfortable to you, and just listen and notice what arises.

## 12. Keeping Quiet by Pablo Neruda (translation by Alastair Reid)

<https://www.bu.edu/quantum/zen/readings/keepingQuietNeruda.html>

I'll invite you to take a few moments to share in the chat any words or phrases from the poem that resonated with you, or any other thoughts or feelings that arose as you listened.

### 13. Check-in round using circle

Another thing you can do at the beginning of a meeting or class is to do a brief check-in round using circle. This works well with a question or prompt that elicits fairly short answers, like "How's your day going?" or asking people to share something that's been bringing them joy recently. A good prompt will allow people to answer in a variety of ways depending on what they feel comfortable sharing, without specifically asking them to speak about difficult topics.

### 14. Technology Use

Another thing you might consider including at the beginning of your event are reminders or tips on using the technology. You don't want to assume that everyone knows or remembers how to use specific software (even Zoom!), and going over these things can help to get the tech out of the way a bit so people can be more present. We've included some examples in the handout of reminders you could offer.

You may also want to set some norms around how the group will use technology. Establishing values and norms is a standard part of circle, and creating that shared understanding can help people show up with more presence.

### 15. Reconnecting with Presence [for Facilitators]

After your opening activities, it can be easy to get caught up in the flow of the class or meeting, so you may want to build in additional presencing activities throughout your event. This can help you reconnect with your intentions and goals, or simply take a moment to gather your thoughts. It provides a moment to check in with how you sense things are going (which is especially useful for large meetings or difficult discussions), and also models that silence and pausing for reflection is ok.

You might need to give yourself reminders in your notes to pause like this. It's tempting to use times when attendees are reflecting to mentally fast-forward to what you have to do next, so instead, be intentional about using that time to be present yourself. Also remember to give yourself some space at transition points, like when you begin sharing your screen – don't feel like you need to rush through that.

### 16. Supporting Attendees' Presence

You can also create opportunities for your students or attendees to practice presence by offering short breaks and including time for silent reflection. You can use circle to encourage mindful listening during discussions or sharing, and you can also bring in presencing activities specific to the content that you're teaching, for example, by mindfully exploring primary source documents.

Now I'm going to hand it back over to Jody to talk about activities to support presence at the end of a gathering.

### 17. [nature photo slide] – Jody

- Before I launch back in to content, I want to give everyone an opportunity for a little presence activity for one full minute. Feel free to follow my voice or just sit quietly.

- Become aware of where your body is feeling the pull of gravity – it might be in your seat, or in your feet (pause)
- On your next inhale, slowly allow the top of your head to reach up just a little higher toward the sky,
- On an exhale, drop that awareness down into your body and maybe imagine it seeping out through where you're feeling the weight of gravity
- Inhale, feeling yourself expand up and out
- Exhale, feeling yourself grounded down.
- Inhale, feeling yourself expand up
- Exhale, grounding down
- Now I invite you to return to our zoom space, and become aware again of your fellow humans as sharing that air and that gravity.

## 18. Closing Activities

- You may want to plan a closing activity for your group to renew its feeling of “paying attention with kindness and an open friendliness” after we’ve been doing some intense learning or tackling our meeting agenda
- This can also help you and others feel ready for whatever is next in your day.
- Sometimes you might make closing activities optional - Be sure you are clear when the official content is finished and it is no longer rude to drop off.
- If it’s an ongoing group, maybe designing and leading the closing activity rotates among group members

## 19. Closing Activity Ideas

- The slides lists some ideas for closing activities. You’ll find these on your handout, including a link to some YouTube Videos from a Chemistry professor who leads his class in an optional visualization of a chemical system.

## 20. Checkout Round using Circle

- I have a bit more to say about the idea of a checkout round. Similarly to an opening circle, a checkout round can bring presence in different ways.
- Questions could help individuals and the group be present with emotions
- Or help individuals or the group be present with what was learned
- The handout lists more example questions.
- As with all of this, you have options. People can become present writing silently, without sharing out. But if you want the group to gain more of a presence together – say, with an ongoing team meeting, you might want to have everyone share out – allowing people to pass of course. If time is tight or the group is large, maybe just a few people share out
- To the last point, stay open to changing your checkout round activity based on the time and also what you think the group may need.

## 21. Those were some of our ideas related to renewing presence toward the end of the meeting. We're going to pause for a few minutes for you to reflect on this prompt:

What closing activities have you used (or want to use) to help a group find presence?

Feel free to reflect in your own space, but we'd also welcome you to share in the Google Doc – scroll down to Prompt 2.

Thank you for your reflections, whether in the Google Doc or in your own space.

## 22. Challenges

- At the beginning I mentioned that not every event is better with a deliberate presencing activity.
- Even when you do feel confident that presencing would support the class or meeting objectives, there can be challenges
- One challenge is simply time. Some tips are to
- Practice your activity with other people to see if it takes how much time you think;
- Also, have plans for what you'll do if the activity still takes longer than you think – maybe you planned two prompts and if you are running short on time, you'll only do one.
- Leave spaciousness for the unexpected! Maybe you only plan for 50 minutes of a 60-minute meeting, so that you have a buffer of ten minutes.

## 23. Vulnerability and emotions

- Another challenge can be the vulnerability and emotions that can arise when people are present.
- Especially if you have a group norm supporting openness, people may feel unwanted peer pressure to be “just as vulnerable” as others.
- Folks may also have individual circumstances that make being present difficult. They may have just suffered a loss, or may have a private identity they don't want to share in the workplace or in class.
- Be cautious about “active listening” techniques like probing questions, and allow people time to process and pay attention to what is arising.

## 24. Offering Autonomy

- For all these reasons, autonomy is an important consideration. How can you allow people flexibility and choice? Today we've given options like turning cameras off, and not requiring folks to share out.
- The options relate to your meeting or class goals.
- For an activity that's “nice to have” not “need to have,” you might offer people the opportunity to OPT IN to give maximum autonomy. For example, if playing a song, put the link in the chat and ask people to listen on their own devices if they wish.

- You can also give folks a way to OPT OUT, for example, if playing a song, sharing your system sound to play the YouTube Video, and inviting people to turn off their volume. Providing a transcript could provide an option with lower emotional valence as well as support accessibility.
- With the project team Rebecca mentioned earlier, our opening poem is relatively mandatory, because it's important for the group to be coming together around Black Poetry.

## 25. Q&A / Discussion

We have one or two more activities we could do today, if there's time, but first we want to pause for questions / to answer questions that came up in the chat. [Rebecca will read questions from chat if any have been submitted earlier]

If less than 5 minutes: Individual Reflection and Metta – Rebecca

We'd like to offer a quick closing reflection and then one final large-group activity together.

## 26. CLOSING REFLECTION

Thinking about an upcoming meeting or class you will be leading or attending, what activities might be supportive of that event? Feel free to reflect on your own, or scroll down in the Google Doc to Prompt #3.

<https://tinyurl.com/CPIG-PRESENCE> and scroll down to Prompt #3.

END SLIDE SHARING

### LARGE GROUP ACTIVITY

- We're putting the shared folder link in the chat one last time in case you want to save that, and we invite you to reach out to us if you have questions or comments after today.
- For our last large-group activity, cameras are not required, but if you don't mind turning your camera on, we could use a few more faces for this.

Pick another zoom rectangle – no one will know you're looking at them – and fully see that person as a human being. If you feel comfortable, you can silently offer them the following phrases

May you be happy and peaceful.

May you be healthy and strong.

May you be safe and protected.

May you live with ease.

If 7+ minutes: Metta + Breakouts

We'd like to do one final large-group activity and then for those who want to stay for a breakout room reflection, to go to breakout rooms for {5} minutes

END SLIDE SHARING

### LARGE GROUP ACTIVITY

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May you be happy and peaceful.

May you be healthy and strong.

May you be safe and protected.

May you live with ease.

Thank you for that. Now is the time to leave if you don't want to participate in breakout rooms today. We won't have time to share out in the big group, but after the breakouts, we'll return everyone to the main room in case you have further questions.

SHARE SLIDES AGAIN

## 27. SHARING IN BREAKOUT ROOMS

We'd like to offer some short breakouts for those who are interested, but if that's not something you're up for today, it is not rude to leave – but please do leave so that when we put folks into 3-person breakouts, folks don't show up to an empty room because those people left. Share in breakouts using circle

- We have created [Breakout Room instructions](#) in the same Google Doc we've been looking at, because we are not going to join the breakouts since there are so many. We're putting the link in the chat. <https://tinyurl.com/CPIG-PRESENCE>
- As you will see, you will make an alphabetical circle order, do introductions, then read the prompt and each respond in circle order.
- Some important reminders about circle are
  - give each speaker your full attention: "paying attention with kindness and an open friendliness, to what arises"
  - Anyone can pass without judgement
- The Prompts will be:
  - Introductions: Say your Name, pronouns if you wish, where you're calling from today (everyone goes)
  - Then: Think about an upcoming meeting or class you will be leading or attending. What activities might be supportive of bringing presence to that event?