

VIDEO CONFERENCE LIKE A PRO WITH THESE BEST PRACTICES!

Let's face it, we have all been spending too much time staring at our computer screens lately. The situation is made worse with boring video conferences and the occasional faux pas by one of the participants.

Here are some tips to ensure that you always look like a pro in meetings and never become "that person" in a viral internet meme because of a virtual misstep.

We can't guarantee you'll be sharing the most dynamic content (although we have some tips for that as well), but we will make sure that you look and sound great while sharing it!

THE BASICS

These are table stakes for any video conference session and (hopefully) don't come as a surprise to you. Unfortunately, the frequency with which these still occur compels us to include them.

- **PUNCTUALITY:** Show up on time! Which means showing up early if you are the host or making sure your application is open and you have the correct info for the call if you are a guest. Punctuality shows you are dependable, respectful, organized and professional.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** Participate in the meeting as though you were sitting across from your boss or most important client. Your engagement (or lack thereof) reflects upon you and your organization, and your fellow participants will take cues from your appearance and behavior.
- **VISIBILITY:** If you are invited to a video conference, then plan on having your video on! Muting your video feed sends a clear message that you are either not interested in participating, working on something else, or unwilling to get presentable in time for the call; regardless, this is a bad message to send to your host and fellow participants.

CONNECTIVITY

A poor internet connection is the equivalent of showing up late for an in-person meeting (see note about punctuality above.) If you can't maintain a solid connection, you may as well not be there at all.

- **ETHERNET CONNECTION:** Wifi has become ubiquitous in homes and offices, but you lose download/upload speed and risk interference when using a wifi connection. For optimal speeds and best reliability, plug your device directly into your modem with a hardline ethernet cable. Good quality cables in 25'-50' lengths are available online for less than \$25.
- **COMPETING DEVICES:** If you are working in a busy office or from home with other family members streaming video or attending online classes, you will suffer from internet speed degradation. Think of your internet service as a water supply and each device as a faucet, the more you turn on at the same time reduces the pressure at each outlet. If you have an important meeting or online event, or plan on streaming shared videos or screen-sharing, make sure your kids have their devices offline and shut off those streaming movies until after the call.
- **POOR SERVICE:** In some cases, you just don't have good bandwidth coming into your office or home. You can check your current internet speed using [Speedtest by Ookla](#). Zoom recommends a minimum download speed of 1Mbps for group calls and upload/download speed of 2.5 Mbps or greater for group calls with 1080p resolution. In practice, we find that speeds below 20Mbps do not allow for reliable video sharing and group calls without signal degradation. Don't forget that speeds will be impacted by your connection (wifi vs ethernet cable) and competing devices, as well as by internet speed fluctuations throughout the day from your network provider. We recommend creating a free Ookla account to track history of your tests and to check it periodically to assess average speed. If you are consistently below the speed promised by your provider, you may be able to achieve higher speeds with a better modem or subscription package.

VIDEO IMAGE & APPEARANCE

Since we are talking about video conferencing, we should definitely talk about how you can look your best on camera. Unlike a large meeting, where you may blend in with the crowd or at least know when the focus is on you, video calls

have a camera pointed at you 100% of the time, and since participants can customize their own view of each call, you never know when someone is looking at you. As a result, you always want to assume that you are being watched and look & act accordingly.

- **WEBCAMS:** Modern computers, tablets and even smartphones have excellent webcams for use during calls and should work great for most purposes. If you want the absolute best video capture or if your device is older, consider purchasing an external camera designed for video conferencing. There are a number of options available, with and without built-in lighting and microphones. We typically supply dedicated camera and sound system kits for our event clients, ensuring that they have a professional but easy to use setup that is optimized for video conferencing.
- **CAMERA POSITION:** One reason to think about an external camera is position and appearance. If you are using a laptop or tablet and are looking down at your device, the image can be somewhat less than flattering (especially if you haven't trimmed your nose hairs!) To optimize appearance, we recommend positioning your laptop at or above eye level using a stand or stack of books. For tablets or smartphones, there are inexpensive tripod mounts available, some of which include adjustable lighting.
- **LIGHTING:** Speaking of lighting, the key to high quality video is good lighting! Make sure that the brightest light in the room is in front of (not behind) you and avoid sitting in front of windows unless you are sure that you have enough spot lighting on your face to overcome the dreaded silhouette effect.
- **BACKGROUNDS:** We could do a whole article just on setting up the perfect background for your video calls. The rapid increase in online meetings has really upped the game in setting up an attractive (but not distracting) background. Avoid windows (see above), wide open views to the rest of your office or house (unless you are sure that no one will walk by and that the area is clean and attractive), and televisions or computer screens with moving images, cluttered bookshelves. Additionally, always assume that everything in your camera's view is visible to the public and don't have anything displayed that might be distracting or potentially offensive to others.

- **VIRTUAL BACKGROUNDS:** If you elect to use a virtual background, please take the time to test the quality and appearance on your device ahead of an actual call. To avoid distracting edge blurs and get the cleanest look, we suggest using a green screen behind you. Inexpensive versions are available online, or you can create your own with a (non-wrinkled) bedsheet or event by painting a solid wall. To avoid light spill that causes edge blurs, it is important to light the green screen or backdrop separately from the source you are using to light your face. This is another advantage of dedicated light/camera for your calls.
- **SHARING:** To share content on a call, you can choose “Share Screen” in Zoom (or the equivalent when utilizing other applications.) In the pop-up box, choose what you’d like to share in the “basic” tab. As always, assume that any and all content open on your device will be visible to the participants. To avoid any embarrassment, we recommend closing all non-relevant applications and webpages and sharing only the specific window that contains the desired content, rather than sharing the entire desktop. Be sure to select “share computer sound” and “optimize screen share for video clip” to provide the best audio & video feed when sharing videos during a call. As stated earlier, you will need a faster internet speed to share HD videos effectively.

AUDIO QUALITY

Sound quality on the call is also important, especially if you are the host or are speaking for any significant amount of time. The microphone on your laptop or tablet will likely be okay for general calls, but for important meetings or presentations you will want to consider an external device.

- **EXTERNAL DEVICES:** There are multiple alternatives to the built-in microphone on your computer, tablet or smartphone. USB or Bluetooth speakerphones from companies like Jabra provide excellent sound capture, especially for settings where an omnidirectional microphone is needed, such as having multiple participants in the same room sharing a device. Quality microphones with shock mounts and noise suppressors are also readily available. These were originally marketed to podcasters and vloggers but have become increasingly popular for video conferencing setups. Lastly, earbuds & headsets (wired and wireless) can provide good audio inputs for a call if you don’t mind the look. We recommend



ditching the headphones for important calls and using an external microphone if possible.

- **OBSTRUCTIONS:** If you elect to use your built-in audio device, locate it and ensure that there are no obstructions between you and the microphone. Similarly, if you are using headphones with a microphone on the cable, be careful to avoid movements that can block your voice or create distortion.
- **MUTING:** The mute button is your best friend on calls, use it liberally. We recommend keeping yourself muted at all times unless actively speaking. Once you get used to doing this, it becomes habitual to click “unmute” when speaking and then “mute” upon finishing your statement or presentation. As a result, you will experience that embarrassing moment when the dog starts barking or your kids start screaming at each other in the next room.
- **SHARING:** Be sure to select “share computer sound” in Zoom (or the equivalent when utilizing other applications) to provide the best audio feed when sharing videos during a call. You can also select “music or computer sound only” in the advanced sharing tab in Zoom to share just your audio. This is helpful when sharing music or other sound files from third-party applications like Spotify. Pro Tip: be sure to adjust the audio volume in the app to avoid blasting the sound to participants...it is best to do this ahead of the call with a helper or by logging on with a second device to assess the volume that other participants will hear.

If you’re looking to take your next meeting or event to a whole new level, [contact one of our experts](#) today for a free consultation and discover how we create genuinely engaging and memorable experiences for your guests.

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