

Top 10 Tips for a Video Call



Face to face meetings are the most natural way to communicate. But if that's inconvenient, then video conferencing has a lot going for it over phone calls. People pay more attention when they can see the people they're talking to.

Unfortunately, for all the benefits, video conferencing is incredibly easy to mess up. "Everyone thinks they know what they're doing but they've never been trained to do it," says Paul J. Bailo, author of *The Essential Digital Interview Handbook*.

Here are some tips for looking like a pro:

1. Image Quality is Largely Dictated by the Webcam

There are many webcams that can provide the professional video quality that makes Teams or Zoom's high-definition and high-quality video quality really shine. For this, a camera with 720p (1280x720) resolution will suffice. To avoid choppy video, get one that can deliver at least 20 frames per second under this resolution. If you're willing to spend the money, get one that shoots up to 30 frames per second.

To counter sudden movements and lighting changes, get a camera that has highly-reactive auto-focus and lighting-correction capabilities. It can be embarrassing to have to manually set the focus of your camera while participants are watching your fingers fiddle around the lens.

2. Make Sure to Have a Stable Internet Connection

The most important aspect of video conferencing happens to be a stable as well as fast internet connectivity. Once the connection is slow, it will affect the conference adversely with visual disruptions and inconsistent audio.

When you are using your laptop, make sure to adopt a LAN cable that will help guarantee a stable internet connection. Go for a secure connectivity along with advanced encryption and password protection in case your only choice is wireless connectivity.

3. Get the Right Lights

Overhead lighting is the worst kind of lighting for video conferences because it makes shadows under your eyes. Unfortunately, that's what most people have by default. You may not care about the lighting if you're doing a quick snow-day check-in with the team you've worked with for four years. But for high-stakes situations when you need to look your best, Bailo recommends using three natural, soft light sources: two behind your web cam (one on the left, one on the right) and one right behind you. Ring lights are another way to enhance natural lighting on your face.

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4. Watch Your Angle

Are you using a web cam clipped to the top of your monitor? Chances are it's not capturing you from the ideal perspective. If it's angled down too much, you'll put your fellow meeting-goers in the position of towering over you. You want the lens to be right at eye level. A tripod can get you there and hold the camera steady.

If you're using the built-in camera on your laptop, it may be too low—and looking up your nose. While it's not ideal, you can put hardcover books under your laptop until the angle's right. You want the camera to capture the triangle of your forehead to your left shoulder and right shoulder in the frame.

5. Look Presentable

Even if only your face and shoulders are in the frame, you never know if you'll need to stand up for some reason. So, look decent from head to toe. Put some flattering, solid colors near your face, just like television news anchors do. Check your teeth for remnants of lunch. Make sure the temperature is such that you won't be sweating, and won't need to start taking off layers, which is disconcerting for all watching.

Less obvious? "Make sure you've got the right chair," Bailo says. Fidgeting is fine on audio but deadly when you can see someone moving like a hyperactive school boy in the corner of your screen.

6. Look Behind You

The people you're interacting with will be treated to the view of whatever is behind you through the whole meeting. Junk and clutter are bad enough. Your bed with dirty laundry on it is unprofessional. Or worse, you may have something sitting there that's part of the scenery to you but jarring to everyone else.

7. Minimize Distractions

Bailo suggests making an "On Air" sign for your office door when you're live in order to keep other people from walking in. If you're working at home and the people, you're concerned about those who are too young to read and obey such a sign, then you need to hire a babysitter or ship them off elsewhere. Pets too. A barking dog can ruin a conversation, as can a cat that runs across your keyboard. "First impressions count when it comes to video conferencing," says O'Connor. "If you wouldn't want it in a live meeting you shouldn't have it on a video conference."

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8. Other Software Will Compete for Resources

During a meeting, other applications have a way of intruding and asking for attention from your CPU or broadband connection. While downloading information through a broadband connection, the application doing the downloading is competing with Zoom. The same occurs when you use CPU-intensive applications: they steal precious ticks from your processor.

When streaming 30 frames per second, your camera is taking 30 pictures of you each and every second, then sending them to the processor with instructions to forward the images through Zoom. Zoom uses your processor to send the images to your network card, which transmits the data to its destination. This process requires the energy of your CPU. To engage in the smoothest possible meetings, close any applications you don't need to use for the meeting itself. It's that simple.

9. Minimize Distractions

The kind of microphone you use will affect the other participants' ability to hear you. Preferably, you should use a headset, desktop or clip-on microphone, rather than the camera's built-in microphone, because you don't always stay close to the camera's microphone. Pick something you can keep close to you if you want people to hear you properly.

You should pick a microphone with an ample frequency range. If you're buying a professional studio-quality microphone, get something with a low impedance. 600 ohms (Ω) or below is best, since it compensates for long cables without compromising on audio quality. Be sure to ask if the microphones are at all susceptible to radio frequency interference (RFI). You don't want a nearby cell phone to create deafening noises during your meetings!

To set up a standing microphone properly, point it away from any speakers. Headset microphones should sit an inch or so away from your face and a few centimeters away from the corner of your lips. Clip-on microphones should sit at the upper side of the chest. For reference, think about the level where shirt pockets are usually stitched. For best results with mobile phones, use a Bluetooth microphone, a wired headset, or a clip-on microphone that has noise-cancelling features and a wide pick-up frequency range.

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10. Be Prepared

Video is closer to a face-to-face meeting than it is to a conference call, yet most people treat it like a conference call. So, they're trying to look at their notes, or are squinting at their computer screens. This is much like holding a piece of paper in front of your face in a live meeting. "You come across as not listening," says O'Connor. Know your main points and look up, so you can interact normally and score the benefits of seeing people and being seen