

A Guide To Better-Looking (and Sounding) Zoom Meetings

If you've ever been in a Zoom meeting, you already know there's a wide range of video and audio quality from one participant to the next. Just having the app, a webcam and a mic is enough to get you going, but looking and sounding your best can take a bit more effort.

Here's a few tips to help you get the most out of Zoom.

Pick A Quiet Location

Find a spot where you're comfortable, but also one that's relatively quiet and well-lit. Avoid noisy fans, traffic sounds or machine motors and be sure to turn off background music or the TV.

If you share your home with others, consider hanging a sign outside your space asking for quiet.

Use A Headset Microphone

Even in a quiet space, the distance between you and the microphone built into your webcam or laptop can introduce noise you don't want; tapping on the keyboard, rustling papers, fingers drumming on surfaces, outdoor noises coming through your windows. The microphones built into webcams and laptops can also have a "tinny" quality, like you're inside a metal box.

Consider using a headset/microphone combo for your meeting audio: they're designed to filter out background noises in favor of your voice, and the earpieces will help you focus on incoming audio. Depending on the design of the device, move the microphone up above the tip of your nose or off to one side of your mouth to cut down on breath noises and keep your audio from overdriving.

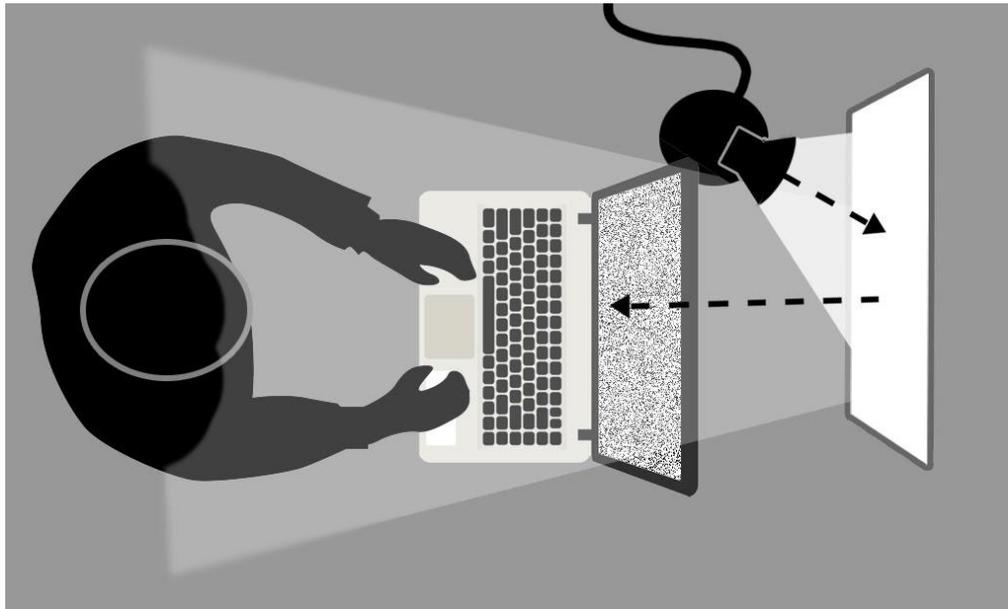


Use Good Lighting

The average webcam doesn't handle dark images well, so pick a spot with adequate lighting. Windows are a great source of natural light, but not if they're behind you; all that light pouring into the lens will make you look like a mere silhouette. Instead, turn more towards the window and let the sunlight illuminate your face. A thin curtain can make for a gentler glow, or you may try turning at an angle to the window.

Alternatively, you can place a lamp behind your PC or laptop to provide lighting. Be sure to use a shade to soften the light, both for the sake of your eyes and also to avoid looking "washed out." If you have a directional lamp, point it away from you and set up a white sheet of paper or

posterboard to “bounce” the light back at yourself. This will cut down on glare and spread out the light for a more pleasing look.

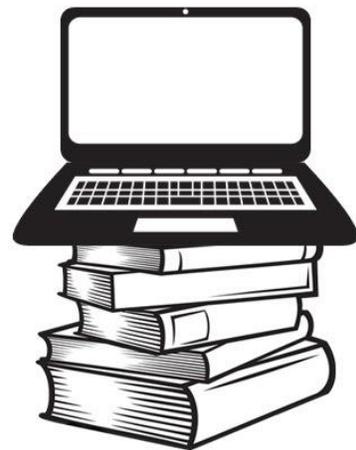


Place Your Camera At Eye Level

No one looks good in an “up the nose” shot, so try to set your camera at eye level.

If your webcam sits on top of your PC monitor, you may be in good shape already, but if you’re using the camera installed in your laptop, it may be too low in relation to your face. Try setting the laptop on a stack of books or similar objects to raise it up.

If you plan to show slides or share other content, keep in mind this elevation could make it more awkward to use the keyboard. Consider using a mouse to advance your slides instead of the built-in trackpad.



Look Behind You

Be aware of your background. Make sure it’s tidy, uncomplicated and non-distracting. Look out for glass or polished surfaces that might reflect your laptop screen. If there are windows in the distance, make sure the light coming from them doesn’t create “streaks” across your camera lens. It might be easiest just to use a bare wall as your background.

If you're using a shared space, try to avoid locations where others might wander into camera view, and give your housemates fair warning that you'll be "on the air" for a while.

If you're joining someone else's meeting, Zoom will show you a preview of your camera image before you share it with anyone else. Take advantage of this feature to straighten your hair and clothes, remove objects you don't want seen, etc.

Virtual Backgrounds

Zoom has a "Virtual Backgrounds" feature but depending on your computer it may or may not be helpful. You need a decent processor and graphics card to use the feature without an actual greenscreen, and even then you may find the effect unconvincing or distracting. Stack the deck in your favor by using a blank wall as your background, so Zoom has less work to do.

If you have an actual greenscreen, it should produce better results. Set up the screen far enough behind you to avoid shadows and check the "I have a green screen" box under your "Virtual Background" settings. Your background doesn't necessarily have to be green, but since green is not a "human" color, removing it is less likely to erase things you want to keep, like parts of your face or body.

Manually pick the color of the background if the detected color is not accurate.



What To Wear

Dress comfortably and appropriately for the event. Choose something solid colored and avoid fabrics with small or distracting patterns that may draw attention away from what you're saying. Keep in mind that pure white can create issues for your camera, depending on the light source.

Look Into The Camera

Your instinct will be to look at the video image of other people in the call, or of yourself, while you're talking. Don't. To everyone else, it'll seem like you're looking away from them. Instead, try to look directly into the camera to create the illusion of eye contact. With a laptop, it can be

hard to tell where the camera is, so consider locating it ahead of time and then “marking” it by putting a post-it note next to the lens. Then focus on the post-it note when you speak. If it helps to have a face to look at, add a smiley face.



Make A Test Recording

Zoom lets you record to your desktop, so take advantage of this feature to test everything ahead of time. Make a practice run and play it back to make sure your audio is clean and clear, your image looks the way you want, and you’re keeping “eye contact” with the camera.

The more you practice, the easier it will be to do the real thing. Even if you’re used to talking to a large audience, it can be strange delivering a presentation into a camera, so spend some time getting comfortable with the experience.

Enable HD and “Touch Up” Your Appearance

With a meeting started, click on the “Video Settings” menu option and choose “Enable HD” to get the best quality image out of your camera. If you like, try the “Touch up my appearance” option to see what it does. It should smooth out things like wrinkles and blemishes, but it does so by slightly blurring the image, so you may decide it’s more hindrance than help. Keep in mind Zoom will “remember” these settings the next time you launch the application.