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|  | Video Conferencing  Do’s and Don’ts |

The latest video conferencing and online teaching technologies can give participants a near real life experience of being in the same room with everybody else, no matter where they physically are. This is especially so with mobile apps for smartphones and tablets because you are now free to meet from wherever you are without any hassle.

With this power, you have to be careful to set the proper tone for your conference participation. Use this checklist to perfect your online meeting environment no matter where you are.

Before viewing the checklist, some of you are thinking, “Who cares if I look a little weird during online classes?” More and more employers are doing their initial employee interviews via video conferencing. Whether you get your dream job may depend on how you look on camera. With that serious thought, let’s begin our checklist.

# You as a Conference Participant

* Be aware that in a video conference you are on camera at all times even when you can’t see yourself – speak directly to the camera and treat the others as if they were in the room with you. It’s always best to show your camera’s view, i.e. ***your*** image, on your display.
* Simulate eye contact. You don’t have to maintain direct eye contact and please don’t stare. A trick for simulating eye contact on a desktop or laptop is to drag the video feeds to the top of your computer screen right underneath your webcam. That way, as you look at your attendees on screen your eyes are looking just below the webcam and simulating eye contact. On mobile devices, the screen is much smaller, so if you’re looking at the presentation, you’re likely to simulate eye contact too. But, for good measure, periodically look into the camera as you speak.
* Speak in a normal tone. Don’t shout or whisper.
* Don’t make distracting sounds.
* Don’t wear “noisy” jewelry. Even a metal band on your watch banging on the table as you move will drive participants crazy if you are near a microphone.
* Keep body movements minimal, even when sitting down.
* Move and gesture slowly and naturally.
* Dress appropriately. Don’t dress in bright colors, stripes, plaids, reds, or even all white. If this is for a job interview, dress well top to bottom. You don’t want to be caught wearing a coat and tie and then stand up and you are wearing shorts (don’t laugh, this has actually happened).
* If you wear eyeglasses, ensure there is no glare from them. Moving your head or camera can help.

# Webcam Placement

* Confirm that your individual webcam is showing a flattering image of you (remember, display your webcam image on your display). For a beginning placement, try straight on with your face medium distance from the webcam, and then adjust.
* If there is a room webcam showing the audience that you are in, verify that it is showing a flattering image of yourself.
* Verify that thebackground shown by the webcam is neutral, both in color and in items. Having your private pot farm in view would not be good.
* It’s a good idea to sit with your back to a wall and have a light source in front of you.
* Don’tmeet in the dark – try to use at least two light sources. Your main light source should provide adequate light to illuminate your room. To light you, use at least one other light source that is near and in front of you plus a little to one side to provide depth.
* Don’tplace your webcam in front of a window. The incoming light will overpower your webcam and your screen will be totally black.
* Do all this webcam verification ***before the conference starts***.

# Audio

* Before dialing into the conference, ***always*** go to Easy Setup or the like on your video/audio conferencing tool to ensure your microphone and speakers are working. Don’t assume your conferencing tool will automatically turn them on or even use the proper speakers and microphones.
* Don’t forget to mute your microphone when you are not speaking – classroom noise can be distracting. Furthermore, some systems will automatically switch to display the image of the speaker when sound is detected. Even background noise can cause this switch.
* Try towear a headset. Whether you attend from a mobile device, a laptop, or desktop, a headset will help you hear and be heard well in web conferences. Ear buds work for meetings on the go, but a USB headset plugged into a laptop or desktop will give you the best sound quality for online meetings.
* Don’t accidentally cover the microphone.
* Do work with another user to ensure your microphone is “useful.” You may have to invest in a quality headset.
* Turn off your instant messaging app when you’re in a conference. For example, it is bad when everybody hears the chimes for an incoming message and then they hear you start typing. Everybody knows you are no longer paying attention to the conference. A few people doing this and you no longer have a conference.
* Turn off your cell phone ringer for the same reason.

# Participant’s Environment

* Set up in a professional, quiet space
* Write a polite note or create a sign to hang on your doorknob when you are in video meetings to avoid interruptions. Unlike meetings in conference rooms, it’s hard for people around you to tell that you’re engaged in an online meeting.

# You as the Conference Leader

* Read every item in *You as a Conference Participant*.
* Reserve your conference time in advance.
* Do prepare in advance for the meeting.
* Arrive at the conference room early and ensure the camera is pointing to your upper body or a full length view. Ensure you are not standing in front of the camera with a lower camera position and it is projecting your derriere (unless you are quite proud of your derriere).
* Walk the room and check the video, both transmission and receiving, from various points in the room.
* Walk the room and check the audio, both talking and listening, from various points in the room.
* Be courteous to other participants (wait for the person to finish speaking before jumping in).
* Make the session animated.
* Be yourself and have fun!
* Don’t carry on side conversations with your room audience. It is discourteous to your remote listeners and can make them wonder what they are missing.
* Don’t pace widely or fast. You will literally make people seasick.
* Don’t walk constantly in and out of the camera’s view.
* Do have a laptop or some other display device showing the conference as the participants are seeing it. This will prevent many bad habits.
* If you show participants entering the room, ensure the room camera catches their upper body or a full length view as they walk into the room. ***Do not have a low camera view*** (think about it!).
* Have distinct, well-advertised start and end times. Start and end on the dot. Bring the video/audio bridge down at the end of the conference. ***Do not have*** the webcam or audio on outside the published times. You don’t want remote participants to hear offhand or even undiplomatic remarks.
* Ensure participants arrive before the meeting, not after the meeting has started. Have planned breaks when everybody walks out. You absolutely do not want random people entering and leaving at random times, blocking the camera. Random leavings will give the remote audience an impression that everybody is leaving and don’t care.
* Speak in crisp, conversational tones and pay close attention.

# International

* Be culturally sensitive. For example, in some societies is it impolite to walk out of an ongoing meeting, no matter the reason. In others, people should not lean back in chairs. If the moderator doesn’t know the rules, then the moderator must learn them and enforce them.

# Miscellaneous

* Do quell video interview jitters by practicing. Remember, this may be the only chance you have with that employer. Practice! If need be, make a video of yourself and critique your performance.
* Don’t ever forget the video camera's powerful reach. Like your e-mail, you never know how many people will read it and the Internet never forgets. Your less than stellar video performance can become the fodder of “what not to do videos” on various websites.

# Final Thoughts

I know some of you are thinking this is a big list or “gee, all of this is obvious.” Before becoming a college professor, I was high level engineer in high tech. I lived, breathed, and ate video and telephone conferences, sometimes 2-3 times a day. I did some of these stupid things; but I can honestly tell you that I have been in conferences where each of the don’ts occurred and watched meetings fail because the conference leader didn’t perform the do’s. It wasn’t uncommon to have participants fall asleep and hear snoring. In another, one person really had to go to the restroom while wearing an unmuted headset. The sound effects were quite “illuminating.” Remember, you don’t want to be “that guy”—the one that is used as a bad example.