Zoom Video Conferencing

Putting Your Best Foot Forward

By JoAnn L. Hathaway

T he video communications platform Zoom was created nearly 10 years ago to let people collaborate when travel or other hurdles limited in-person meetings. While not the only player in the world of video communications, its usage rate has skyrocketed due to stay-at-home and distancing orders around the globe.

If you're a Zoom user or plan to be, this article will help you with setup, on-camera appearance, participant management, and online meeting etiquette.

Setup and appearance

Camera placement

The ideal distance between you and the camera is five feet. Using your laptop camera or webcam atop your monitor is too close and causes your face to appear distorted. Placing a separate webcam on a tripod well behind your monitor and slightly above eye level will help you look professional and put you in direct eye contact with other meeting attendees.

Adjust the zoom setting of your webcam so your head and shoulders are visible. Your face will look natural and you won't give the impression of invading the personal space of others in the video meeting.

Smartphone cameras and webcams are wide-angle. If you get too close, you'll look distorted and appear to have what has been called "wide-angle face."

Lighting

A window or main lighting source behind you shadows your face. Best practice is to avoid backlit video.

Ideally, your camera should be on a tripod in front of a window or between two soft lights. Your laptop or other technology should be between you and the lighting source.

Take the time to explore your camera's color settings. They won't automatically produce flattering results and may be worth changing.

Background

A cluttered background pulls attention away from you. It's best to go for a plain background; the fewer distractions in the video meeting the better. Comedians stand in front of a boring brick wall to ensure the focus is on them. Even a beautiful ocean scene can be distracting; attendees may tune you out and reminisce about a past or upcoming vacation! You want the focus on your face and what you're saying, not on what's behind you.

Zoom's Virtual Background feature allows you to display an image or video as your background during your meeting. This feature works best with a green screen and uniform lighting, which allows Zoom to detect the difference between you and your background.

You can also upload your own images or videos. There are no size restrictions when adding your own background, but cropping the image to match the aspect ratio of your camera before uploading it works best. Instructions for installing a virtual back-

ground can be found at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/210707503-Virtual-Background and sample virtual backgrounds are available at https://www.pocket-lint.com/apps/news/151711-best-zoom-backgrounds-fun-virtual-backgrounds-for-zoom-meetings.

In recent months, Zoom's default camera resolution has been lowered from high definition (HD) to standard definition. However, the HD setting is best for optimizing your appearance. To change back to HD in a meeting:

- Navigate to the lower left corner to make the Stop Video icon appear.
- Click the Up button to the right of the Stop Video icon.
- Click on Video Settings.
- Check the Enable HD box.

Sound

While the microphone on your laptop may be sufficient, a quality microphone makes a big difference. One tried-and-true microphone is the Blue Snowball, which typically sells for about $50. It has great pickup and plugs into any USB port.

Appearance

Dress to impress. Remote workers often mistakenly appear too casual, projecting an unintended image. Think strategically about your clothing. Wearing busy, patterned clothes can be distracting to viewers. Choose plain, solid colors, but avoid bright white or black clothing.

Zoom's Touch Up My Appearance option (https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115002595343-Touch-Up-My-Appearance) gives your video display a soft focus. This can help smooth out your skin tone and give you a more polished appearance.

Pre-meeting checks

Check your lighting and appearance by logging into a meeting before it goes live. This lets you adjust your space, lighting, background, and more before your meeting starts.

Participant management

Limit meetings to signed-in users

If someone who isn't signed into a Zoom account tries to join the meeting, they receive a notice indicating the meeting is open only to authorized attendees. They will then have the option to sign in with an authorized email address.

Lock the meeting

Locking a Zoom meeting while it's in progress prevents new participants from joining. With the meeting in progress, click Participants at the bottom of the window, then click the Lock Meeting button in the pop-up window.

Set a meeting password

This option requires attendees to enter a password before they can join the meeting.

Remove participants

In the Participants menu, hover over a participant's name and click Remove. They cannot rejoin without your permission.

Allow participants to rejoin

If you remove a person from a meeting, you can allow them to rejoin. In the settings under the Meetings tab, toggle on Allow Removed Participants to Rejoin.

Place participants on hold

You can put attendees on hold, temporarily disabling their video and audio connections. To activate, click on the user's video thumbnail and select Start Attendee on Hold. When you're ready to continue with the meeting, click Take Off Hold in the Participants list.

Disable video

As a host, you can turn off someone's video in the event of unwanted or inappropriate video actions.

Mute participants

To discourage unwanted noise, you can mute or unmute participants individually or all at once. To mute everyone, click Manage Participants and select Mute All. You can also enable Mute Upon Entry in your settings to keep noise at a minimum during large meetings.

Turn off file transfer

In-meeting file transfer allows people to share files through chat. Turn this off to keep the chat from getting unwanted content.

Turn off annotation

The host and attendees can mark up content via screen share using annotations. You can disable the annotation feature in Zoom to prevent people from entering unwelcomed annotations.

Disable private chat

Zoom has an in-meeting chat for everyone, but participants can also message each other privately. To prevent distractions and keep participants from receiving unwanted messages, you can restrict private chat.

Meeting etiquette and tips

Test…and then test more

Conduct a test meeting and determine your audio and video settings before you start. Zoom has a feature that lets you test your settings in advance of your meeting (zoom.us/test).

Get the Outlook add-in

Many people send a Zoom meeting request and follow up with login information. With the Microsoft Outlook Zoom add-in, the login information is included with the meeting request. There is also a Chrome extension that adds Zoom links and dial-in information into a Google Calendar meeting, and a Firefox extension for Zoom as well.

Add your headshot

Add a headshot to your Zoom profile so people can see your image when your video camera is off. In your Zoom account, find Add a Profile Image in your settings.

Turn off self-view

Many people find that staring at their own image is distracting. If this is true for you, use the Zoom setting to turn off self-view. Simply right click on your video square and choose Hide Myself. You can toggle back to Show Myself at your discretion. Another benefit of hiding your likeness is that it enables you to see more attendees on your screen.

Mute your microphone

To keep background noise to a minimum, mute your microphone when you're not speaking.

Be aware of background noise

When your microphone is not muted, avoid activities that could create additional noise, such as sorting papers.

Limit distractions

Make it easier to focus on the meeting by turning off notifications, closing apps, and muting your smartphone.

Avoid multitasking

Your discussion will be more productive if you don't reply to emails or text messages during the meeting. Wait until the meeting ends to work on other assignments.

Prepare materials in advance

Be prepared. If you're sharing content during the meeting, make sure you have the files or links ready to go before it begins.

Zoom YouTube

Tune in to the Zoom YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/user/Zoom Meetings for additional information on Zoom etiquette, tips, and much more.

Conclusion

For more resources on using Zoom and working remotely, visit the Practice Management Resource Center's Working Remotely page at https://www.michbar.org/pmrc/workingremotely. ∎

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