

How to Look and Sound Your Best on Zoom Calls



By now, you've Zoomed with them all: The guy who looks like an unmade bed and never looks at the camera. "Backlight person" who thinks you can see their amazing backyard, but all you see is their dark silhouette against the blinding light coming through the window. The would-be influencer who stares straight into her webcam, pushes out her chin and slightly clocks her shoulders until she's ready for her close-up. The bald guy (whose head you know like the back of your hand) who, unfortunately, never looks up at the camera. The "check out my awesome green screen background" person. And of course, the motion sickness-inducing "selfie rover."

Leaving how you should comport yourself in an online meeting for another time, here are a few simple things you can do to look and sound your best during Zoom meetings.

Camera position

Place your laptop on a stack of books or a shelf so that the webcam lens is level with the middle of your forehead. You want to be looking slightly up at the camera. This is tough if

you must work on your laptop during your online meetings. It's the main reason to consider an external webcam.

No light

If there's a window, face it and let nature do your lighting. If you can position yourself so that you are at a 45-degree angle to the window, you'll look even better. Overhead lights are not your friends. Turn them off. Or remove the bulbs directly above your head.

One light

Nighttime or no window? That's OK. Place a lamp 45 degrees in front of you to your right or left side. If you look too yellow, get a "cooler" bulb that's 5,600K or higher. Look too blue? Get a "warmer" bulb about 2,700 to 3,300K. There are any number of lighting solutions available. My wife moves her laptop all over our apartment all the time. I got her a \$50 cube light kit with a suction cup attachment. It was a game changer for her.

Green screen

If you are using a green screen, a single light source directly in front and slightly above you (right on top of the camera) is the quickest, most foolproof way to help your software cut a usable key. That's geek speak for, "properly separate you from the background so you can be superimposed on the virtual background of your choice." If you have the space, place the green screen far enough behind you so that your shadow falls on the floor, not on the green screen. This is a balancing act between how much light falls on you and how much falls on the green screen. Grab an app called Green Screener if you want to become a world class green screen user.

In-home video studio

In a perfect world, you would set up your online meeting space

with classic three-point lighting. If you have time, money and space, consider a key light, fill light and backlight. Just Google this classic lighting technique. It is “best practices.”

Computer mic and speakers

The microphone and speakers in your laptop are tools of last resort. If you must use them, you already know you need to be in a quiet room, preferably carpeted with enough clutter to keep the echo to a minimum.

Headphones and earbuds

For most people, a good pair of noise-canceling headphones is an excellent investment. Gaming headphones are built for streaming, but high-end earbuds like Apple’s AirPods Pro or Samsung’s Galaxy Buds Live work well. I am also a fan of good, old-fashioned, wired earbuds. It’s a personal choice. All that matters is that they sound good to you.

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Shelly Palmer

@shellypalmer Shelly Palmer is CEO of The Palmer Group, a strategic advisory, technology solutions and business development practice focused at the nexus of media and marketing with a special emphasis on machine learning and data-driven decision-making.

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