

Not Another Zoom Meeting: Tips to Improve Your Virtual Persona

By Marsha Redmon

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The amount of time you spend 'on camera' while working has likely increased significantly in recent months, whether it's on Zoom,

Microsoft Teams, or other video platforms. That kind of scrutiny is stressful. Whether you work in professional development or recruiting at a law firm or at a law school, virtual meetings and virtual presentations

are a constant. The good news is there are simple tweaks you can make to your virtual persona and approach to virtual meetings and presenting to feel more comfortable and look more professional.

SIMPLE TWEAK 1: Camera Angle

A crucial first step to look more professional in virtual meetings is to check your camera angle. Make sure your webcam is not shooting up your neck (or your nose),

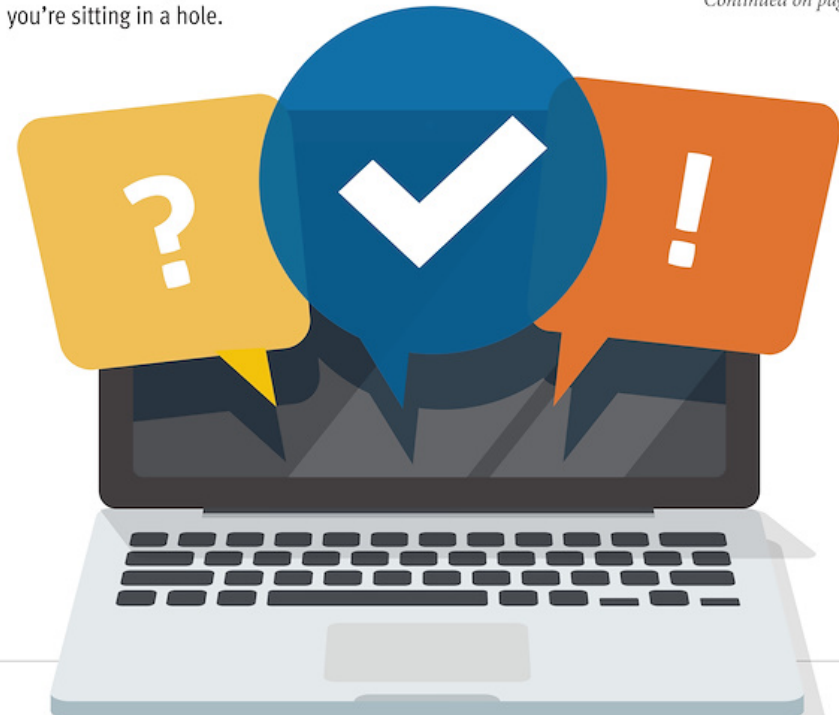
but instead is at eye level. Sit your laptop on a stack of books or board games to get the webcam at eye level. If you can see the ceiling in your shot, your laptop is too low.

The ideal distance from the camera is about an arm's length away. Another way to judge this is to check that you are seen on camera from the elbows or lower chest up. Also be sure to give yourself some head room, but not so much that you look like you're sitting in a hole.

SIMPLE TWEAK 2: Audio and Noise

Mute is your best friend because background noise is extremely disruptive. If you're the leader of a virtual meeting or presentation, choose the "mute all on entry" setting that most platforms have. Know how to quickly find and mute anyone who is making noise. Remember to mute yourself after you are finished talking. As

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an attendee, you also need to remember to mute yourself after you speak. I put a sticky note on my laptop screen when I start talking to remind myself to re-mute.

If you have pets or children who may make noise unexpectedly, consider using a headset with a microphone that covers both ears, or earbuds. It will minimize how much of that noise your colleagues will hear. I like having both my ears covered because I am easily distracted by background noise when I am presenting. For important presentations, consider letting your family or housemates know that, for a particular time, you need them to keep away and quiet. If possible, put a sign on your home office space and lock the door.

KEY TIP: If your wi-fi is unreliable or weak, the biggest impact will be on the quality of your voice. Consider calling in separately by mobile phone for the audio of an important meeting or presentation. Connect to the platform's video through your laptop. The bonus is that for an important virtual

presentation, if your wi-fi fails and you fall off of the platform, you will still be connected by voice if you called in separately. Note that if you are on Zoom with computer video and telephone audio, turn off your computer audio and speakers entirely, otherwise you may create a reverberating feedback loop that is disruptive for all participants.

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SIMPLE TWEAK 3: **Lighting and Background**

Another important tip for an effective and professional-looking presentation is your lighting. Filtered light on your face is flattering. To light yourself well, consider facing a window or using a desk lamp to bounce light off of a wall in front of you and

onto your face. If you look washed-out or too bright, it is too much light. Filter it with a sheet or sheer curtain.

Avoid sitting directly under an overhead light. This will create shadows on your face and make you look tired. Avoid having a window or other light behind you. This will make you ‘back-lit’ which makes you hard to see. When your audience cannot see your face clearly enough to be able to read your expression, it hurts your credibility and trustworthiness.

It is important to have an uncluttered background, if possible. Avoid any moving distractions like a ceiling fan or other movement. I recommend not using a virtual background. It is hard to make them work well because you need to light the wall behind you to be effective. These backgrounds can end up causing a distraction when you move, and a part of your body disappears!

SIMPLE TWEAK 4: **Eye Contact**

The only way to make eye contact virtually is to look directly at the webcam. Really. It is hard to do and uncomfortable. Imagining that you are talking to one friendly person can help. Another support is to put a note or sticky arrow near the webcam as a reminder of where to look. If you don't make eye contact, your audience can feel you are not confident, not interested or disengaged. If you need to look down at slides or notes, one way to make your lack of eye contact less noticeable, is to sit a little further away from the webcam. That extra bit of distance will make it less obvious you have shifted your eyes away from the webcam.

SIMPLE TWEAK 5: **Posture and Gestures**

The message you want to send with your posture and gestures should be one of still

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interest. Stay still and don't fidget or rock in your chair. Extraneous motion is distracting. Gesturing is good but be sure you are not too close to the camera. It's good to slow your gestures down and be less emphatic.

SIMPLE TWEAK 6: **Connect Through Energy and Voice**

While it may feel hard to connect with your audience through a webcam, it's important to connect with them through your energy and interest. A warm voice with vocal variety can energize you, and help you connect with your audience. The same way you use your voice on the phone to connect and be warm will work well for virtual meetings and presentations.

The bottom line is virtual presenting and meetings are with us to stay. I hope these tips help you right now to feel more comfortable and more confident virtually. I'm always happy to answer questions and welcome knowing what you find interesting around virtual presenting and meetings. ■



Resources Available to NALP Members

NALP is compiling a variety of member resources related to COVID-19 pandemic situation. General information and resources are being collected on the public COVID-19 page at www.nalp.org/covid-19. Information on scheduled members-only virtual town hall meetings and the recordings of past meetings

are available on the Virtual Town Hall page (member login required).

There are also a variety of webinars, articles and other pieces that are useful during the COVID-19 crisis, some of which will be published in future editions of the *NALP*

Bulletin and *PD Quarterly*. In addition, NALP created a new members-only NALPconnect community to share information, policies, and discussions on the pandemic response. Learn more about these resources and more at www.nalp.org/covid-19.