

Six tips for looking great in a Zoom meeting

April 13 2020, by Jefferson Graham



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We all want the same things in life.

We want to look great, be safe, happy, and might I add, look great?

In our new normal of the COVID-19 era, many of us have turned to the

[webcam](#) and video meetings in place of school, work conferences, and many of us are spending our days on video conferences hosted by Zoom, Hangouts, Skype, FaceTime, WebEx and the like.

And many of you are probably looking into the picture window at yourself and saying, "really? I look that bad?"

It doesn't have to be that way. We checked in with Florida photographer Larry Becker, who just wrote a book about how to improve our appearance called "Great on Camera," for some insights.

Appearance

Start with the basics. Comb your hair, shave your face or apply your makeup and think strategically about your clothing. Wearing a really busy plaid or patterned outfit will make the viewers' eyes go numb. A plain, solid color will help bring out the best you. However, Becker says to steer clear of shirts that are bright white or dark black because they look like a "blob" on camera.

Lighting

Here's where most people fail in web conferences. They have what Becker calls "Shady Face," that is, half of their face is shaded or blocked in some way. He recommends having one steady lamp, directly by your face, for even, steady lighting. No sidelight or backlight, please, he adds. He suggests, as we have several times, to avoid sitting with your back to the window, as the camera will expose for the light and make you into a silhouette. Instead, flip it, and face the window, which will give you soft, people-pleasing light.

Background

You want people focusing on your face, not on what's behind you. Many people like to be photographed in front of a bookshelf, but Becker says sometimes the "trinkets" on the shelf will cause distractions. He likes it "plain and simple," like blank walls, or a wall with nothing but one piece of art hanging. Becker photographs himself in front of bricks, which he calls "boring" and thus non-distracting.

Perspective

Here's the biggest no-no. Get rid of what he calls "Wide-angle face." The cameras on smartphones and webcams are wide-angle, meaning they let you in a wide view. So if you get too close to it, you will look distorted. In other words, step back from the camera. "The closer you are to a wide-angle, the more distorted you are."

Eye Level

Don't have the webcam looking up at you, because that will turn you into "Look up my nostrils dude." Let's put it this way. The camera under the face is the oldest unflattering look in the books. It's what director James Whale did in the original 1931 "Frankenstein" movie to make the monster look more menacing. Some people recommend having the camera look down at you, but Becker doesn't buy it. "Eye to eye contact is the best connection," Look that camera directly, straight ahead. How to do that when the webcam is physically below your eye? Stack a bunch of books under your laptop until you see the webcam eye to eye.

Sound

While we just told you to step away and not be so close, don't be so far away that the microphone won't hear you. Remember to put the kids and other sound distractions in another room during your meeting, if you

can. And, this is a huge one: Don't forget to mute the microphone when listening. Otherwise, everybody gets to hear you typing away. For improved audio, Becker recommends using an accessory mic, which will make you sound way better. You can pick up a microphone that plugs into the USB port of your laptop for \$99 and up (we like the Rode NT-USB mic as a starter) or, even better, for \$20, he recommends a small lapel mic, the Movo LV1, that connects directly into the microphone jack of your laptop. In Zoom, you can go into general settings and adjust the audio, to pick your accessory mic instead of the mic from the webcam.

Finally, we wrote earlier this week about the great webcam shortage of 2020. Many people have discovered that if they're going to be on Zoom and other video conferences all day, they want to look their best. Laptop webcams are ultra low-resolution, and for \$100 to \$200, you can get way better specs, and more presentable with a separate webcam.

Sad to report that the situation hasn't gotten any better. Logitech, which dominates webcam manufacturing, is still sold out of all of its products. The Brio, which broadcasts in 4K resolution and normally sells for \$199, is sold out on Amazon except from third-party resellers, who are asking \$359 and up. On eBay, bids are starting in the \$275 to \$350 range.

What to do? Try one of the classified sites, like Craigslist, Letgo or Facebook Marketplace for a used, reasonably priced model, or pull that old DSLR out of the closet and connect it to the computer to use instead. This is way more complicated than using a webcam, but a software site like eCamm is compatible. YouTuber Adrian Salisbury has a tutorial on how-to here.

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