

Preparing for Your Next Video Conference

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Video Conferencing is a powerful tool that allows us to connect, face-to-face, even when we are far apart. The effectiveness of online meetings can be greatly improved with just a little preparation.

Even if everyone is adequately prepared for a meeting in the ways that are essential for an in-person meeting, the meeting can be derailed due to equipment problems, software issues, lack a familiarity with software, and limited understanding of best practices.

Take some time to review this checklist and be ready for your next video conference:

____ Hardware

If you have a newer computer, you likely have a webcam, speakers, and microphone built in. But seriously, check before your next meeting. You may find that you will be better off with some additional hardware. There are a number of inexpensive external cameras on the market that will give you better quality and flexibility. You can also find a wide variety of headsets and speakerphones to help with audio.

____ Software

If you are using a software-based video conferencing platform, make sure you download it long before your meeting. If you already have it, check for updates and install them. Most video conferencing services offer extensive online help. Take some time to read over their “getting-started” guides and other help materials.

____ Internet Connection

Although there are ways to get by with less, a 1.5Mbps connection is a minimum optimal speed. Do yourself a favor, bookmark <http://www.speedtest.net>. Check your internet connection before you start. Stability is key. Check a few times. If you are using Wi-Fi, check from the exact location you will be for the call. If at all possible, use a wired connection.

____ Video

You want to make a good impression. People on the other end of the call should see a clear, well-lit, image of your head and shoulders. Would you give your big presentation in a conference room with your chair so low that people could only see the top of your head? Too often there are people on a call with their camera adjusted so it doesn't show their whole face. Sometimes there are participants with backgrounds that are so distracting that no one can look. Just remember, what is behind you will impact the image your present in your meeting.

Audio

People need to be able to hear you, but only when you are talking. Your computer's built in microphone may be sufficient if you are in a quiet place. However, if you are doing this on a regular basis, a headset may be a good investment.

Background noise can also be a huge problem. People on the other end can hear all those things going on around you. Best case, be in a quiet place. If you can't, mute your audio (just remember to unmute when you want to talk.) Because it is usually impossible to have 100% control of what might happen around you, always keep your microphone muted when you are not talking.

Lighting

If you have ever taken a photograph with the sun or a window behind your subject, you understand the problem with backlight. You do not want to present a silhouette to other participants. Make sure there is sufficient light on your face.

Testing

Many platforms allow you to test your video and audio before you start. If you are joining a conference for the first time, set up a call with someone else to ask them how everything looks and sounds. If you are using someone else's platform and don't have access to set up your own meeting, ask someone in that organization to set up a quick test call beforehand.