



# Top 10 Tips for Virtual Meetings:

## Creating connection and impact, even when you can't be present in person

Since the advent of COVID-19, our work life has changed dramatically. As we practice 'social distancing', meetings and conferences have been moved to online formats; businesses have encouraged people to work from home. Face-to-face meetings have become the exception rather than the rule.

This means that we are all engaging more and more through Skype, Zoom, GoToMeeting and other digital services. It's likely that online meetings are here to stay.

But for presenters and attendees, there are a number of challenges that are exclusive to the virtual space.

*How do we navigate this development?*

*How can we connect and engage with people through a digital platform?*

*How do we create impact when we are not there physically?*

I work to support people in just these scenarios. Helping people present on camera and virtually. So, what follows are my top 10 tips on how to present effectively remotely and avoid 'virtual insanity'.

### 1. Use the best technology

The main frustrations of any kind of remote meeting are often linked to the technical aspects. Wherever possible ensure that you are able to access the best, most reliable technology platforms available and connect with the most reliable WIFI or internet connection possible.

Check ahead of the interview to ensure all necessary downloads are done and software is up to date. If you're using unfamiliar software, take time before an important interview for a 'dry run' so you know where the various buttons are and how things work.

If earphones and microphone give you a clearer audio, do use them.



## 2. Lights!

Appearance on a screen matters. Lighting is critical to create an impactful and engaging image. Ideally you want to have lighting directly onto your face so people can see you and perceive your engagement and enthusiasm. Sunlight from a window in front of you, a desk light, or even a blogger's bespoke circular light, can work well. Ideally avoid back-lighting or side lighting. The clearer people can see you – and especially your eyes – the greater the impact.

## 3. Camera!

Most people use their laptop cameras to when in a virtual interview. If a laptop is on a desk, or on your lap, the camera can often be below your head, creating an image that gives a lot of 'chin focus' – which is not always flattering and can be distracting. Using a phone to film can also create distracting movement.

The best camera position is much higher than people think. Raise your camera to eye-level. This may mean putting your computer on top of a block or some books, or using a standing desk. Alternatively use a phone holder to get the correct angle. Make sure that the camera is stable.

Frame your face so that you are central to the screen, not too close, but not too far away. Think newsreader on TV. Check your framing BEFORE going live in an interview so that you can be sure you are happy with it.

## 4. (No Unwanted) Action!

Ensure that the surroundings and background of your shot are professional and not distracting. Clear the visible parts of your desk. Turn off other devices and, particularly if you are working from home, protect the space to ensure you are not interrupted or distracted (avoiding the hilarious BBC interviewee [problem](#)).

In the event you do receive an interruption from a child, a pet, or other unexpected guest, have a phrase ready to manage the situation. People generally have understanding for the challenges of conducting a business interview from home. Use the interruption as an opportunity to share your humanity.

Remember that the more comfortable you are, the more comfortable your viewers will be. You can simply smile and say something like, "I have a visitor." There's no need to apologise – maintain your confidence and the interruption might even allow you to build a stronger connection with your viewers!



## 5. Be present

As important as avoiding physical distractions is ensuring that there are no mental distractions. Give the meeting your full attention so you can really make the most of the session and create the best impact.

When you are presenting, focus on presenting. When you are listening, focus on listening.

To be as effective as possible, take a moment before the meeting to consciously be present. Avoid the temptation to multi-task during a meeting. Help yourself by closing any mail or chat apps and disabling any notifications. The last thing you want is a diary notice, an instant message or email notification popping up on screen while you are presenting.

It's also helpful to turn off any self-view in the online interview platform once you've confirmed your framing. It can be tempting to check your appearance while speaking, which can be distracting to both you and your audience.

## 6. Energy

The truth is that it can be harder to present virtually than in person. Online, we can't 'read' the body language of our audience in the same way we can with an in-person presentation. It can feel isolating, like we are speaking into a void.

A way to avoid this problem is to use your imagination.

Picture an individual in your audience to present to and keep focused on thinking about how your presentation is contributing to the meeting. Look at the other participants on screen. Make a conscious decision to present with the same energy and enthusiasm you would do in person.

You can also increase your energy prior to the interview by spending some time away from your screen in the sun, listening to music or moving your body.

And smile while you are presenting. This gives instant energy and warmth and those listening will appreciate it!



## 7. Eye contact, voice and body language

Your body language is as important when presenting on camera as it is in person. The more confident you appear and sound, the greater your impact. The key areas to focus on are eye-lines, body posture and voice.

**Eye-line:** When speaking look directly into the camera to connect with the audience. This creates the impression of making eye contact and is much more compelling as a viewer. Avoid looking at any images of yourself (ideally minimise or disable) as the audience can tell that they don't have your attention.

It can be helpful to place a visual reminder next to the camera lens of your laptop or phone (i.e. an arrow or "Look Here" sign).

**Sit or stand tall:** Sit up or stand up for the interview if you can make the camera eye-line work. This can help you maintain your energy and has the added benefit of allowing you to breathe more fully. Sitting up also avoids slouching or leaning away from the camera which can make you appear too casual or disinterested.

**Voice:** Speak up, even though you are alone. Put energy into your voice. This usually means increasing your volume by around 20% more than usual. Give some thought to varying the tone and speed as you present. Very often with long virtual presentations people fall into a rhythmic, repetitive cadence that can become boring. Think of your presentation in short chapters that have different energies and tones, and tell a story as you present.

## 8. Engage

Plan to interact with others in the meeting; especially if you have a longer presentation. Find ways of seeking input and feedback and signal clearly to the audience what you are doing and how you want to contribute.

This could be a simple question at the beginning of a presentation. *"Can I ask, what are the key things that you are concerned about or would like me to focus on?"*

You might want to stop after a section of your presentation to check in with everyone and allow for quick questions? *"Before I continue, are there any quick questions or comments on this section?"* Or break the presentation up into smaller sections and Q&A to make it more interactive.

For very long presentations consider pre-recording a video of you presenting your content as a 'pre-watch' before the meeting and keeping the meeting as an opportunity for engagement.



## 9. Slides

In virtual meetings, slides are often the central focus of the screen. To engage an audience, help them by keeping the visual content as varied and interesting as possible. Think about using variety and colour and images to tell your story. Avoid slides that are so text heavy the temptation is to 'read ahead' of the presenter. Do not put too much on a single slide. A rule of thumb is one thought per slide.

## 10. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse

Finally, for important virtual meetings, just as in big in-person meetings, preparation and rehearsal is your secret preparation weapon.

There is a power to speaking your presentation in rehearsal so the virtual meeting is not the first time you say the words out loud. Speaking is a physical action and you cannot prepare to speak just by reading through a deck or thinking through a presentation.

Rehearsal allows you to get used to the technology and make sure it works.

Rehearsal allows you to time your presentation and – if necessary – adjust it so that it works in the agenda.

Rehearsal allows you to 'feel' the presentation in your mouth so that when you deliver it for real, it is more comfortable and familiar.

Rehearsal allows you to prepare the content in advance, thus reducing your mental load when you are presenting for real.

Put simply, rehearsal means a better presentation.

**Presenting virtually IS different.** But presenting well in the virtual space is a skill that can be honed with practice. Understanding the medium is critical. With planning, rehearsal and a commitment to presenting with energy, you can connect with your audience and ensure that your impact is not diminished by distance.

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It's amazing the potential for what can be done when we connect intentionally.