

ZOOM MEETING PROTOCOLS

Newcomers to videoconferencing often make the mistake of focussing on their ability to see other participants in the meeting, while failing to appreciate that they themselves are visible to all other participants. Consequently, their behaviour is sometimes distracting for other users of this visual medium. Videoconferencing sometimes requires us to adapt our behaviour. So, here are my tips for a successful videoconference:

1. Wipe the lens of your camera BEFORE the meeting commences (fingerprints on a camera lens can create a misty, ghostly image). Wiping it DURING the meeting may alarm other participants (LOL).
2. Like all other participants in the meeting, you will be able to see a small image of yourself on the screen. By moving your chair or adjusting the computer screen or the camera, place yourself in the centre of that image. This placement is important. Speaking to someone when only half of that person's face is visible is very distracting (if you doubt this, just try it).
3. Position yourself at a distance from the camera which creates a clear head and shoulders shot of you. For a desktop PC, this distance is usually about 1 metre, for a laptop SLIGHTLY less, and for a tablet or smartphone SLIGHTLY less again. Try not to cut the top of your head off. Maintaining this distance is important - no-one wants to speak to the top of your head or the bottom of your chin (or worse still, the inside of your nose).
4. The ideal height for the camera is head height or a fraction higher. Shooting from below the chin is not flattering. If you are using a laptop, tablet or smartphone, it may help to raise it to ensure that the view of your face is from above, not below. And if you are sensitive about your appearance on camera, there is a setting called "touch up my appearance" (I kid you not)
5. Ensure that your face is lit by a bright light (as bright as is comfortable for you). It will not be too bright for the camera. However, a diffuse light (such as a table lamp with shade) is better than a desk lamp pointing straight at your face. In daytime, natural light coming from an uncovered window is the best form of light. Positioning the light source slightly to one side of your face will help to avoid reflections in your spectacles.
6. Conversely, make sure that there is no bright light coming from behind you. This will be distracting for other participants and may conceal your face.
7. Avoid excessive movement. Remember that you are visible, so no applying make-up, shaving or any of the other things you might do while in a telephone conversation (LOL).
8. Turn off background noises (e.g. music, talkback radio) and avoid making extraneous sounds that can be picked up by the microphone (e.g. tapping pens, drumming fingers).
9. If you must cough, sneeze or blow your nose, TURN AWAY FROM THE CAMERA (otherwise you will not be very popular).
10. For external noises over which you have no control (e.g. your next-door neighbour using a mower or power blower) the best option would be to mute your microphone (via the button at the bottom left of your screen), but remember to unmute it when it is your turn to speak.

11. Be aware of your surroundings. Open doors with other family members moving in the background will distract other participants.
12. If you are interrupted for more than a few seconds and need to leave the meeting, mute your microphone and turn off your camera (MAKE SURE YOU DO BOTH). The black screen in place of your picture will indicate to other participants that you have temporarily left the meeting. To re-join, simply unmute the microphone and turn on the camera.
13. In a large meeting, it could be very confusing if several participants attempt to talk at the same time, so I recommend a procedure whereby participants are invited by the chairperson to speak or, if not invited, they simply raise their hands until noticed by the chairperson. The alternative is for the chairperson to mute all microphones and turn them on one by one when a participant is invited to speak, which could be cumbersome.
14. Videoconferencing is not like a normal face-to-face meeting in the sense that you cannot turn to your neighbour and have a side conversation. If you wish to communicate with another participant, use the chat facility. To access this, press the chat button which is located at the bottom of the screen (or the top of the screen on an iPad).