

How to Look Better on Zoom (and Other Video-Calling Apps)

HARRY GUINNESS

More professional (and personal) interactions are happening via Zoom and other video-calling apps, and [it doesn't look like that'll be changing anytime soon](#). The same as an in-person meeting or date, it's important to look your best on video calls. Here's how to work it for your webcam.

Find Better Lighting

In a professional broadcast studio, the cameras aren't what make people look good—it's the lighting. It doesn't matter how much money the producers throw at expensive lenses, they can't make anyone presentable if the lighting is terrible. The same is true at home.

Now, we're not advocating that you invest your life savings in a 10,000-lumen studio lighting setup. However, you can pick a spot in your home for video calls that has good lighting.

You want to avoid overhead lights because they cast weird shadows and highlights on your face. They also tend to throw off the overall balance.

An example of bad lighting. Don't look at my shiny forehead!

Backlighting is bad, too. You'll appear dark and shadowy against a too-bright background. Compensating with a light in front of you doesn't help much, either.





Backlighting isn't a strong look for me—or anyone.

What you're looking for is a spot with nice, even frontlighting. The easiest place to find it is in front of a big window.



In front of a window, things look a lot better.

This is one of the best [“photography hacks”](#) to look good, whether you're taking a selfie or doing a professional presentation. Just find the biggest, brightest window in your home and set up in front of it. You'll look better than anyone else on the call!

RELATED: [*How to Take Better Photos in Your Home \(No Flash Needed\)*](#)

Raise Your Camera

Nobody's best angle is looking up from below their chin, but that's probably where your laptop's webcam is. Computer manufacturers prioritize minor things, like practicality and price, over your on-camera appearance.

To look your best, you want your webcam to be at (or just above) eye-level. That's how people normally see you in person, and it's what they subconsciously expect.



Look at how much better my jawline looks with the camera at eye-level.

To get your camera up to eye-level, you can invest in a laptop stand or go old-school and stack some books underneath it. If you're using your smartphone, prop it against whatever you have on hand or [get a small tripod](#).

You might also want to get an external keyboard and mouse if you're going to need your computer while you're on a call.

Look at the Camera (and Dim Your Screen)

Eye contact is hugely important in Western culture. We're suspicious of people who can't maintain it or constantly look away. Unfortunately, the way video calls are set up, it's impossible to make real eye contact. If you look at someone's eyes onscreen, that person sees you looking down.



Look at this friendly guy; he wouldn't sell you a timeshare.

While you won't be able to maintain it all the time, if you're presenting or talking a lot, you want to create the illusion that you're looking at your audience. So, do look directly at your webcam as much as possible. It's hard to do this with all the distractions onscreen, but here are a few things you can do:

- **Hide or minimize the preview of you:** I use mine as a mirror, and I know I'm not alone. It's easy to find yourself checking your hair.
- **Dim your screen:** Unless you absolutely need to see everyone, try this. It's more useful to create the illusion that you're looking at people than to actually look at anyone.

Test Your Internet Connection



Video chats require a reasonably fast, very stable internet connection. It doesn't matter how good you look on your webcam if all your Wi-Fi can send is a pixelated splodge.

Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, and all the other video-calling apps dynamically adjust the quality of the video you send and receive to maintain the connection. This means that even if you've got a slow connection, you'll still be able to connect, you just won't look very good.

[Zoom's minimum system requirements](#) give you a good idea of the necessary specs:

- **For one-on-one calls:** 1.8 Mbps up/down is required to send and receive 1080p HD video.
- **For group calls:** 2.5 Mbps up/down is required to receive 1080p HD video, and 3.0 Mbps up/down is required to send 1080p HD video.

To [check the speed of your internet connection](#), head over to [Speedtest](#). If you're getting anything less than 3.0 Mbps, you're not going to be able to send high-quality video. Even if your connection is 3.5 or 4.0 Mbps, it will likely drop low enough to cause you issues sometimes.

If you have a fast internet connection, that's wonderful! If not, there are some steps you can take to speed it up for a call. First, ask anyone else who's using the network to stop (take a break from the Netflix, kids!). Use a device with wired Ethernet.

If these tips still don't get you a fast enough connection, there are some [other tips you can try](#).

RELATED: [How to Speed Up Your Internet Connection](#)

Use Your Best Camera



A better camera makes you look better.

The [webcam on a lot of laptops](#) is, well, mediocre—especially when you compare them to the front-facing cameras on modern smartphones. The 12MP TrueDepth camera on the iPhone 11 is worlds better than the [720p FaceTime camera](#) on a brand-new, 16-inch MacBook Pro. If you [use an iPhone as your webcam](#), you're guaranteed to get better-looking video than you will on your MacBook.

Of course, it's easiest to just use your laptop, especially for professional calls. If you have the option, though, it's worth the few moments it takes to prop up your smartphone at eye-level and plug it in to charge. Not only will you look better on your call, but you'll also be free to use your computer, if necessary.

If you really want to look incredible, and you have a DSLR camera, you can kick things up even further and use it as a webcam. There's [a bit of setup involved](#), and not all cameras are capable of it, but the payoff is huge.