

Zoom/Video Meeting Etiquette

16 tips and best practices for online video conference meetings

There was a time when those of us who worked in offices thought that the coronavirus pandemic would mean an end to office meetings.

Office meetings continue despite social distancing thanks to video conference tools such as Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and others. Talking face-to-face (or face-to-screen) is still often necessary and beneficial.

With this new era of video conferencing and online meetings, we have found that there are a new set of guidelines to follow - things that we might not have needed to discuss prior to our remote working situation.

Working from home can be challenging. SON IT and HR have collaborated to come up with these suggestions which will help you stay productive, connected, and comfortable while we face this new era of office work.

1. Use the video option when possible

This lets people see you and confirm who is speaking. This is particularly important if you're the one hosting the meeting or a speaker, and slightly less so if you're an attendee. It shows that you are engaged in the conversation and are an active participant – whether speaking or simply listening.

2. Dress appropriately

Times can be tough for those working from home, and wearing sweatpants or staying in pajamas all day can seem inviting. It is crucial, however, to remain professional and dress appropriately. If you're in a position where you can put on something that is professional-looking, similar to what you would typically wear to work, it's probably a good idea. You might also find it makes you feel a little more normal during unsettling times.

3. Stage your video area

Keep in mind that people aren't just seeing you, they're also seeing whatever the camera is pointed at behind you. Make sure that the camera isn't facing something that you wouldn't want co-workers to see. Consider using a virtual background (screen) so you can work from anywhere in your home, and not worry about what is in the background. Use of a virtual background can reduce video quality so, if that is important, just ensure that your actual background is "clean" and presentable/tasteful, but also should not be a completely bare wall or have a window with heavy light coming through. A background with a bookcase or a credenza with items hanging on the wall above it would be ideal.

4. Pay attention to lighting

Video quality is dramatically affected by lighting. Proper lighting makes all the difference. Whenever possible, ensure the lighting behind your camera is brighter than the lighting behind you. For example, position yourself facing a window rather than having a window behind you with light pouring in. If necessary consider placing an extra lamp somewhere behind your camera to highlight your face.

5. Try to look into the camera

If you're presenting or speaking to a group, looking into the camera will give the appearance of eye contact with whoever you're talking to. Be aware of this particularly if you have multiple screens. If you are reading a document or presenting material ensure that content on the same screen as your camera.

6. Do your own tech support before you begin a meeting

Make sure you do a test run at some point and that you're aware of your audio and video settings before you start. Most video conference services allow you to see a test of what your camera is recording before you start broadcasting it to everyone else, so have it arranged the way you want it. Zoom, for instance, has a feature that lets you test your settings before your meetings begin: just go to zoom.us/test.

7. Stay on mute if you're not talking

Essential video/audio meeting etiquette! Background noise can be distracting. If you aren't sharing anything at the moment, you should remain on mute until talking or presenting.

8. Don't eat during the meeting

It can be distracting to watch other people eat. Try to hold off on eating if you can, or if not, consider turning off the video and audio until you are done eating.

9. Don't do other private things while on a meeting

We have all heard the stories about people being caught using the bathroom while on a video conference, thinking they were muted or had their video off. While on a call or participating in a meeting, try to remain focused and ensure that your audio and video are both turned off before moving on to your next task, or tending to private matters.

10. Stay focused

Try to stay on task and prevent meetings from going longer than they need to. Keep unnecessary conversations to a minimum. It can get very hard to be productive when several people are all talking at once, and even more so when overlapping audio and shuffling video screens are involved.

11. Only invite people who need to be there

Is there someone who should be looped into the info being shared, but won't actually have anything to contribute themselves? Would it be possible to loop them in via an email instead? Save them, and yourself, time and energy by not including people who aren't necessary.

12. Determine whether you should hold a meeting or a webinar

Most video conference tools allow you to set up some members as audience-only, meaning that only certain people can participate with video and audio. If you're hosting a presentation to a large group rather than a discussion, a webinar might be the better format than allowing everyone to chime in.

13. The host should be the last one to leave

If the host closes the meeting, the meeting ends. To make sure no one gets cut off or loses a last-minute point, the host should remain in the meeting until everyone else closes out of the meeting.

14. Make private meetings private

If you share details of how to log into the meeting on a public platform, you might get some unwelcome visitors. Only share passwords with people you want to be there or with people who *need* to be there.

15. Record only when necessary

Many meetings record by default. Most do not need to be and, in some cases, may reduce participation and candor depending on the topic of conversation. Consider whether or not a recording would have value or if sensitive topics might be discussed and disable recording when appropriate. **IMPORTANT** - In the SON's Zoom instance, meeting recording should never be enabled when any PII (Personally Identifiable Information) or HIPAA protected information might be discussed.

16. Learn what you can do to manage participants

There are a lot of features on these platforms, such as screen sharing, locking the meeting to current participants, removing participants or placing them on hold, transferring files and managing chat options. It might be useful to learn what you can do and how to do it before a meeting starts.

If you need assistance implementing any of the tips above, please contact the SON IT Help Desk.

Email SON-HelpDesk@jhu.edu or call 410-614-8800.