#What It Takes
To Give a Top Notch Presentation via Webcam

You're presenting at an online conference and you want to nail it. You're an expert who knows your material, so presenting isn't a problem. But how can you be sure the whole **online video** part works?

Use these tips to get ready for any live video presentation. You'll look and sound your best, and it will build your reputation as a go-to presenter for the growing slate of online conferences.

The Look

Camera

Use a USB webcam. Compared to your laptop's built-in camera, your image will look better, and it allows you to adjust the positioning.

Position just above eye level. If you have a desktop monitor, you can snap it to the top edge. This is a neutral shot that should feel more like seeing you face-to-face. If you are using a laptop or phone, raise it up on a shelf or stack of books.

Look close to the webcam. It will feel to viewers like you're talking to them. Reduce the size of your presentation / video-conference window and move it close to the top of the screen.

The Room
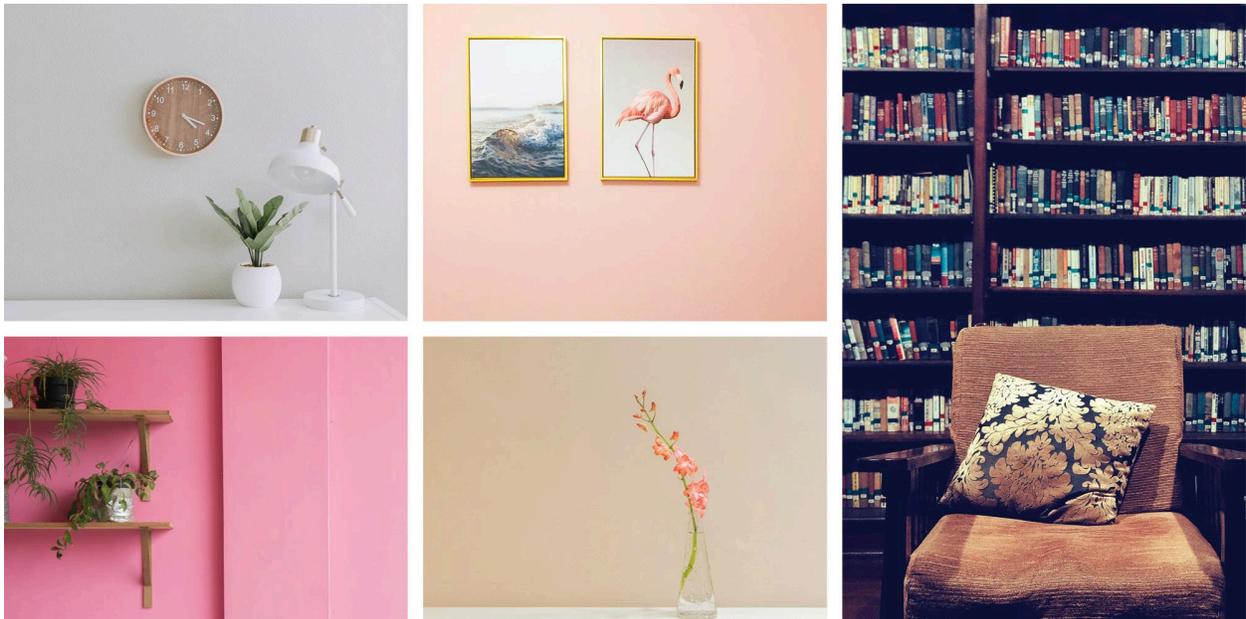
Keep your backdrop simple. You want people to focus on you, not your fascinating book collection. Choose a nicely painted wall with only one or two elements. A bookcase could work if it's a bit further back, so as not to be legible.

Be careful about backlighting. If there is daylight streaming in behind you, your camera might adjust and you'll end up underexposed. A window in the backdrop could work, but only if you're careful.

Lighting

Daylight is your friend. Try to get daylight, but not direct sunlight, by setting up adjacent to or facing a window. This will give you a really bright, flattering light and the backdrop will likely fade out nicely.

Or create a key light. With artificial lighting, you want to create a single, broad illumination in front of you. Try bouncing a big lamp off the wall behind your computer, to create a diffuse light.
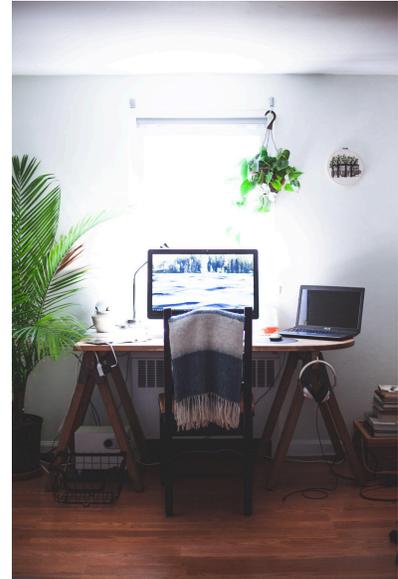
For Panels

A camera designed for video conferencing can automatically zoom and pan to focus on individuals, or go wide to see a full panel.

The Sound

Headphones

Wear earbud headphones. This ensures there is no risk of echo (from the sound coming out of your speakers bouncing back into the mic). It can also **help you focus** on the conference, by blocking out sound from your surroundings.

Microphone

A USB microphone will give your audio added warmth and presence compared to a tiny webcam mic. If you will present frequently, or you have an interest in podcasting or video, this could be a good investment.

Quiet on set!

A stable seat is a silent seat. Don't use an office chair on wheels, or a seat that spins distractingly.

Cut down room echo. An area rug, carpeting, drapes or wall hangings, even a bookcase, should all help.

Listen to your surroundings. There might be noises that you've learned to ignore, but are less than ideal for a presentation: fan noise, passing traffic, kitchen sounds, dogs barking, etc.

For Panels & Workshops

Video conferencing microphone will have echo cancellation, so that everyone can listen without headphones.

Distance learning rooms are set up with microphones at each desk. This allows free-flow of discussion between remote locations, with the microphones muted when someone doesn't have the floor.

The Setup

Keep your options open

What's your plan B? In coordination with the conference organizers, test and get ready two different video streaming services (e.g. both Zoom and Hangouts Meet). Be ready to switch between them if you run into technical difficulties during a live event.

Get your phone. Make sure the conference organizers can reach you by phone, so they can coordinate technical difficulties as quickly as possible.

Prep your computer

Test your network connection. Do you have 1.5-2.5 Mbps of bandwidth on speedtest.net? A wired connection is often stronger than WiFi if you need more bandwidth.

Close all your apps. Close anything you don't need for the presentation, including extra browser tabs. You'll want to free up the resources for your computer, but also, you want to avoid any distracting notification sounds. On a Mac, you can sign into a Guest Account, which is an easy way to make sure nothing is running that you don't want running.

For Workshops & Live Audiences

You might test a WiFi connection before the conference and find it is fine. But with a live audience, the WiFi may become congested, and you'll find the connection is no longer adequate. A wired connection is more important in this scenario.

The Attitude

Dress up

Dress for comfort and to impress. Choose something that you feel good in. Follow common advice for appearing on camera: solid colours that compliment your skin tone are great—especially navy blue, natural colours, pastels and mid-range colours. Avoid patterns, highly vivid colours, deep blacks and bright whites, as these may not look as nice on camera as in person.

Get in the headspace

"Arrive" at your desk 30 minutes ahead of show time. Close your apps and notifications. Don't think about that email you could be writing, even though your computer is right in front of you. Just focus on the talk ahead.

Talk to a friend

Talking to a human is worlds better than talking to a camera. If you can bring in a small audience of colleagues or friends, it can help you feel more natural, instead of focusing on the blinking red light of your camera. You will express more personality, give a more engaging presentation and it can even boost interaction on the other end of the broadcast too.

Thanks for reading

Thanks for reading our tips on presenting at an online conference. If you'd like to know more about organizing an online conference, download our toolkit, *Moving Ideas Without Moving People*.

Presented by the University of Alberta's Sustainability Council and the Kule Institute for Advanced Study.