

4 QUICK FIXES TO IMPROVE YOUR DESKTOP VIDEO CONFERENCE QUALITY

1

GET YOUR CAMERA TO EYE LEVEL

For face-to-face communication, eye contact matters. The same is true on video. Your camera placement can make it seem, as if you are looking down on someone, or not looking at them at all. Here are a few quick fixes to get the camera placement right:

- If using your laptop's onboard camera, use thick books, a yoga block, thin box, or laptop stand to lift your camera to eye level. (You may need to get an external keyboard to make this feasible.)
- If using a phone or tablet, either get a mount that fits onto a tripod or get a car mount and fix it at an appropriate height for your desk.
- External webcams typically provide better images than your onboard camera, just be sure to place it on the monitor you are facing. (If the clamps don't quite work, use duct tape to help get it to the right height/position.)



2

GET BETTER LIGHTING WITH WHAT YOU HAVE AROUND THE HOUSE

Shadows downgrade your appearance (from didn't-sleep-well to downright creepy). Worse, if your face is obscured while others are bright and inviting, you put yourself at a disadvantage in the hierarchy of connection. Here are some tips to use what you already have to improve your lighting:

- Diffused light is better. Bring lamps with paper shades close to your face while not showing on camera. You can also use a gooseneck lamp with cooking parchment taped over it to diffuse the light.
- Don't have a lamp with a paper shade? Bounce light off of a white wall, white curtain, or white sheet.
- If you have a window in your room, orient yourself to face it. (If it is behind you, your face will be dark and you will need a lot of light in front of you to overcome it.)



COLOR TEMPERATURE Consistency in color temperature helps your video. Here's a key for bulbs at the grocery store: Soft White (warm); Bright White (cool-white); Daylight (cool). Keep in mind your monitor is also a light source. That giant white spreadsheet is going to spill cool light across your face. Daylight from an open window is usually cool, but a Roman shade might make it warm.

3



DON'T RELY ON THE ONBOARD MIC

The microphone built into your laptop, webcam, or tablet will get you by, but it usually offers poor quality sound. Here are some ideas to get better audio:

- A microphone closer to your mouth will improve the sound. If you already own a pair of earbuds with a mic in the cable—use it.
- There are an array of USB microphones on the market at a variety of price points. Almost all of them are better than using the default mic on a laptop.
- The acoustics of your room can create a “boomy” sound. Carpet, drapes, pillows and other soft surfaces can reduce that feel—especially when placed near your audio source.

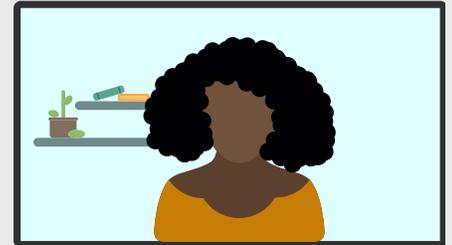


4

UPGRADE YOUR BACKGROUND WITHOUT GOING VIRTUAL

Virtual backgrounds get awkward since the video glitches when you move. (Also, no one believes you are in outer space right now.) Luckily, it isn't that hard to improve the background in your real world.

- Declutter the space behind you. Straighten up bookshelves, tidy end tables, and minimize what people see.
- If you have a wall behind you, get an abstract piece of art large enough to mostly fill your screen. (This doesn't have to be expensive.)
- If you do not have a wall behind you, consider hanging a curtain or putting up a room divider. (This prevents your unmade bed being the backdrop for your conference call.)
- To create a vibe different to the room you are in, look into vinyl backdrops for photography.
- Shining a light on whatever is behind you can add depth to your background. (Just make sure the background isn't brighter than your face.)



It is possible to connect with people on video as deeply as we do face-to-face. (It's the reason we get misty at series finales.) Optimizing yourself on video improves your connection with others. It's worth the effort.