

Virtual Meeting (Video Conferencing) Best Practices from a Photographer's POV

Part 1 Introduction (Length 5:27)

Text Slide #2

Hi there! My name is Kathryn Hollinrake. I've been a professional photographer for over twenty-five years, and when the pandemic started, like everyone else I suddenly found myself going to virtual meetings instead of in-person ones.

I was faced with many of the same issues others were, and are, with the caveat that as a professional photographer of, mostly people, often in the realm of business portraiture, I had a head start because making someone look good in a frame is my thing. I also have some experience in front of the camera. So while I had to create a brand new set-up specific to video calls for myself, once I got it sorted out I realized I may be able to help non-photographers a lot by sharing some tips.

Because honestly, what I was seeing in conference calls at the beginning, and still, now, made me realize that it's really not obvious to many people what to do to make sure they are showing up professionally.

One of my first video call set-up clients is a really close friend who I was delighted to be able to reunite with via Zoom after not seeing her for weeks. Her set-up was terrible. Her face was way over-exposed, and her background was distracting.

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When we started talking about making it better she was hesitant, thinking it would be too hard. At the end of the process she told me that if she had still been working full time she doubted would have taken on improving her set-up because she wouldn't have thought she'd have the time or the energy. But now that her set-up is done she is so happy she did it and it wasn't that difficult at all! In fact, and this is true, she loves her new virtual background so much (it's a lovely, stylish, open loft space)

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that she often starts her meetings a bit early so she can enjoy being in "her loft". She said to me "I feel like a whole new person when I go to my new condo before my meetings start, so I sign in early and just hang out there a bit..." The point is that thanks to her

improved set-up she now feels confident about video calls and actually looks forward to them.

Why does it matter?

I think it's fairly certain that video calls are not going away. And in them, you are making an impression whether you want to or not, so you may as well make it a good one. And turning off your video is not going to serve you in that regard. This is not the time to sit at the end of the table and hope nobody notices you, by being the name only participant.

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Not only is this a missed opportunity for you but your camera-off lack of engagement does nothing to support the presenter. It's just supportive and polite to turn on your camera. No presenter thrives on talking to a bunch of black rectangles.

If you're the person who is comfortable presenting and showing up in meetings your challenge now is to keep your momentum going from a remote location, and if you typically like to stay a little more in the background now's your chance to practice showing up confidently from the comfort of your own home.

Feeling confident about your set-up is going to support your feeling confident as a presenter and as a participant.

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I work with people all the time who hate having their pictures taken, and I imagine some may view having to show up on video with similar trepidation. But it doesn't take much to get your set-up looking good, so you can feel good about it and yourself.

I have long wondered why some very accomplished and professional people post extremely low grade videos of themselves...I'm sure you've seen them, and I guess the thought was that it's better to jump on the video bandwagon ASAP than get bogged down and delayed by daunting technical considerations. I totally get that.

Now with video calling, you might be thinking that you're conferencing with a bunch of people who are all in the same boat...nobody is a pro photographer or videographer, so people will understand that your presentation is amateurish and won't care or judge. First of all, I'd assert that's not correct...we can't help it...we are judgement making machines (as an instructor once told me many years ago) and secondly, as we transition to what is likely a long term model of working remotely more often, it will be less and less acceptable to keep playing that card.

You may think your boss or team members aren't noticing your Zoom technique but they are. People tell me.

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It is truly not that hard to step up your presentation and just as I have been campaigning for a long time to encourage people to make sure their still profile photos accurately reflect their professional standards, I'm now doing the same with video conferencing. It can only support and enhance your professional journey to show up looking the part whether in a still photo or a video call.

My goal is to make this as accessible as possible. I get that for many having to work on their video conference presentation is not a welcome item on their to-do list, and for many spending a bunch of money on expensive gear is not practical or desirable. This is not for people who are launching into new careers as YouTubers, but for everyone who wants to show up in their virtual meetings as professionally as they show up to their actual meetings. This is not about spending a ton of time on complicated set-ups, it's about you continuing to do your actual jobs and looking professional while doing them. I want to help you get online and look professional with limited cost and effort! So let's get started.

Here's what I am going to cover over this set of short videos

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I am most interested in, and qualified to talk about the aesthetics of video call presentation, so I'm going to spend a fair bit of time on Backgrounds, Lighting, and Framing (and eye line), followed by some thoughts on Posture and demeanour, Wardrobe and Hair and Make-up, and then I'll touch quite briefly on gear.

The goal is to create a set-up that's easy to repeat, consistent, professional, and on brand, or at least not way off brand!

Part 2 Backgrounds (Length 22:42)

I'm going to start with backgrounds because I think they are one of the most important elements in your set-up. I want you to pay attention to your backdrop, think about it and really be intentional about it. People often treat the background part of the video call set-up as an afterthought, but I think that's a mistake and a missed opportunity so we are going to spend some time on them. They matter, they can help you show up really well, or completely detract from your presentation. Your background may dictate where you set up, and to some extent even what you wear. I could go on about backgrounds forever, because I really do think they are that important.

In my case, again, as for many people, I don't have a perfect, lovely, tidy little spot in my home that is conducive to video calls, so I had to set one up. I asked myself...what kind of space do I want to appear to be in? What's appropriate for me, specifically, will often not be the same as what's appropriate for someone else. What will look on brand and authentic?

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Do I have a suitable background physically in my home? Or do I need to create it? And if I need to create it what are my options? Do I want a virtual background...ie a digital image that replaces your real background?... or a physical backdrop of some type, like a backdrop on a stand?

Most importantly the background should be clean and tidy and simple or at least not distracting. You want the focus to be on you,

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not the background, but the background is still very important because you want it to support your professional brand.

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In terms of do's and don'ts here are a few things to keep in mind:

If you are using a room in your home or wherever, remember that most webcams are wide angle, so you will need to declutter and tidy every part of the room that's showing up on camera which will likely be from one wall to the other. This is a great reason not to be in a large room. Having clutter sticking out of shelves or on the floor even at the edges of your frame does not look good.

Avoid showing overly personal spaces like your bedroom, unless you can set up so that nobody sees your bed.

Whether your background is real or virtual, there should be a relatively empty or at least clean space behind your head. You want to keep objects in your background away from your head... so if there is a shelf behind you remove objects on it that could look like they are growing out of your head,

Slide #13 Time stamp 2:17

if there are plants behind you make sure they are off to the side or at edges of the room, not behind your head, or poking out over your shoulder!

Clip Slide #14 Time stamp 2:22

Same with pictures on the wall.

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Slide #16 Time stamp 2:29

If you have a door behind you

Slide #17 Time stamp 2:34

close it unless the sight line is particularly nice and not distracting. That includes closet doors, which may seem obvious but apparently this is still happening out there!

Slide #18 Time stamp 2:37

If there are other people or animals around, close the door between you and them if you can.

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And if there's a window or open door in your background

Slide #20 Time stamp 2:45

make sure it's not crazy bright compared to everything else in your frame. If it is, close the door, blinds or curtains, or point your camera in a different direction.

Virtual backgrounds:

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Now I'm going to talk a bit about virtual backgrounds, specifically.

Here's the great thing about virtual backgrounds: they are one quick and cheap or even free way to hide your private space from your fellow meeting attendees. You can even introduce corporate branding into your background image if you want.

Clip Slide #22 Time stamp 3:15

New slide branded virtual background

And they do give you the most flexibility and opportunity to be creative, by far, in terms of what your background is going to be. You can also easily change the background depending on who you're meeting with.

HOWEVER

When I first started writing this presentation I was obsessed with virtual backgrounds -- which are digital images that replace your actual background. But that was before I finally pretty much gave up on them for a couple of reasons, the biggest one being that not all of the platforms even supported virtual backgrounds, and then once they started to catch up to Zoom, which supported them from the start, there were still distracting technical issues. The bottom line is that there is no one platform that does a perfect job of virtual backgrounds such that viewers don't notice anything unrealistic or distracting.

How well virtual backgrounds work varies based on the parameters of the software, the actual background you're trying to hide, your lighting, the age of your webcam and computer or device, and of course your choice of virtual background image.

Let me show you what I mean.

At first, while they didn't all support virtual backgrounds I think all the platform developers realized pretty quickly that people wanted to be able to somehow hide their personal spaces, and messes, so a number of them introduced a simple solution, a blur filter that would mask you out and just blur the background around you.

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I'm sure this feature will continue to be updated and improved but as it stands the masking tends not to be perfectly accurate especially as you move, and the blur is really heavy, so it looks super distracting and unnatural and I don't recommend using it. In this test frame from a Teams call you can see examples of the weird masking errors adding bits of I don't know what sticking out of me, and the overly blurred background.

Another thing I just heard during a networking session with marketing professionals...one person had been advised by a coach that virtual backgrounds, due to their obviousness, may provide an unintended psychological cue to viewers that the speaker has something to hide, and isn't being authentic.

Nevertheless for many people virtual backgrounds will continue to be the most accessible option so let's talk about what works and doesn't work. The idea is supposed to be that you can, with the click of a button, replace whatever your actual background is with an image or video of your choice, ostensibly without your having to go to the trouble of thinking about what's actually in your background. But as I was saying, the platforms really vary in their capabilities.

Clip Slide #24 Time stamp 5:33

In this clip recorded on Zoom you can see an example of masking errors in action. I'm sure you've seen these. The masking has made a helmet out of my curly hair, and when I move it can't follow me accurately. These disturbing glitches hugely distract from my presentation.

While Zoom, in particular, does not excel at automatically masking out a cluttered background it does excel relative to other platforms at masking out a green screen.

What is the deal with greens screens?

Green screens if you don't already know this are just fabric (or some kind of material, even paper) dyed a very consistent deep saturated green that is not typically naturally occurring in skin or clothing. They facilitate easy selection of the area you want to replace with a background photo or looped video because the software can readily identify all the areas that are that precise green colour and remove *only* them. There are blue screens, too. Same idea. Theoretically you could use any big, flat plain piece of fabric, in a solid colour, such as a bed sheet, for example, or a plain wall, but the subtler the difference between the colours and tones on you and your clothes and that sheet or wall, the more trouble the software will have correctly selecting and separating you, and it might end up removing any parts of you that match the sheet. So for example if you use a white sheet or wall, the software might replace your teeth and eye whites with your background too.

Clip Slide #25 Time stamp 6:50 (these were done with my old laptop's internal camera so please excuse the poor quality)

Just as you avoid wearing anything the colour of your real-to-be-replaced background, you need to avoid wearing green in front of a green screen.

Clip Slide #26 stamp 6:58

Back to Zoom

Slide #27 Time stamp 7:10

-- in my experience it does the best job of any of them at virtual backgrounds, if you use a green screen because it is designed to work with them. It has an "I have a green screen" button as well as a colour picker that allows you to precisely specify the colour in your actual background that you want to replace.

And it does work really quite well especially if you have a newer computer.

Clip Slide #28 Time stamp 7:25

If you use a green screen to try to “help” Skype or Teams, though, they weirdly can’t handle the green screen,

Slide #29 Time stamp 7:31

similarly to Zoom if you **don’t** click the “I have a green screen” button which I’m pretty sure is exclusive to Zoom.

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And just a final note on the colour picker in Zoom...while you could use it if you have a plain background other than a green screen, you do need to be careful, again, that nothing in the foreground is the same colour as the colour you picked to replace.

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With green screens keep in mind that for best results the material should be as smooth as possible, and relatively uniformly lit at least to the extent that you aren’t throwing a noticeable shadow on it. Also, the brighter your lighting, the better the green screen virtual background thing will work. It seems to me that the more well lit you are the better the masking. Darker backgrounds seem to work better, too, which is unfortunate given the general and understandable preference for brighter ones.

There are some very large and very expensive green screens but we are not making feature films here, so we don’t need anything fancy. Here’s one that pops open to a somewhat rigid shape.

Slide #32 Time stamp 8:28

You definitely won’t have any trouble with wrinkles and they just need a small, light stand. In fact if you are in a really small room you may even be able to get away with forgoing the stand and leaning the background against the wall behind you if the wall is close behind you.

And this is the one I have.

Slide #33 Time stamp 8:44

It's a Westcott X-Drop, 5x7 foot green screen from Vistek in Toronto, which was about \$50. I have my own stands, but thanks to the pandemic and the demands for cheap stands you can get really cheap, small stands. I'll show you one on a later slide. When I make calls from my family room I don't even use a stand, I just use little A clamps or clothes pegs to clip the green screen to the curtains.

Slide #34 Time stamp 9:03

This green screen is jersey material so it doesn't wrinkle easily and is easy to stuff away out of sight when you're not using it.

One great thing about a virtual background is that once you get it sorted out you're ready or almost ready (maybe you just have to throw up your green screen and turn on a light) every time you have a call. You can have one virtual backdrop or a few different ones for different occasions, depending on who you will be conferencing with, and you don't have to tidy up every time you have a call. Just remember not to change your background once a meeting has started.

Where can you get virtual backgrounds?

Text Slide #35 Time stamp 9:39

These days there are many more on offer than there were at the beginning of the pandemic, lots of free ones and more you can buy for not very much.

Some time ago I saw a set of free Liberal Party branded Zoom backgrounds for supporters to use. I imagine other parties may have done the same. And I'm sure lots of corporations are doing this. The take-away is that virtual backgrounds do lend themselves well to branding.

Some of the video conferencing platforms provide a few free backgrounds for your use, but in most cases it wouldn't appear they put a lot of thought into what a good virtual background should accomplish. Many of them, along with the growing pile of free zoom backgrounds on offer from everyone from real estate companies, to movie studios, interior design studios, NASA, aquariums, sports organizations, etc., etc., ...just Google "free Zoom backgrounds" ... are spectacularly distracting and inappropriate for business communications.

Slide #36 Time stamp 10:15

Slide #37 Time stamp 10:21

Slide #38 Time stamp 10:28

They are exactly what you don't want...a background that is more interesting than you. ☺
Not only that but they are often so busy there will absolutely be something poking out from behind your head.

Slide #39 Time code 17:19

Slide #40 Time code 17:23

As fun as they are, don't get distracted in your search...for most people, you want a background that is reasonably simple, not distracting, and appropriate to and supportive of your professional brand.

And please remember to look for royalty free photographs so you are not infringing on a photographer's copyright.

A few more examples of what not to do:

Having any kind of frame...door, window, whatever right around your head never looks good, virtual or real.

Slide #41 Time stamp 11:05

Slide #42 Time stamp 11:08

Ideally what you want directly behind your head is space.

If you have the capability, one possibility is to find a free image of a nice interior

Slide #43 Time stamp 11:19

and crop it so there's less to look at, and some of the interior decorating overload is removed... and then blur it a bit as well. As important as I think backgrounds are, they are supposed to be backgrounds...not the main attraction.

Slide #44 Time stamp 11:23

Slide #45 Time stamp 11:26

Slide #46 Time stamp 11:29

Here's another one.

Slide #47 Time stamp 11:34 It's lovely but there's just too much going on and a chandelier sitting on top of my head slide #48 Time stamp 11:38 ...you will find that there's often something right in the middle of images not shot especially to be backgrounds.

Here's the same image cropped and blurred a bit.

Slide #49 Time stamp 11:47

It's still a bit busy but it's less distracting than it was before.

Slide #50 Time stamp 11:51

Text Slide #51 Time stamp 11:55

Even easier than Googling, try Unsplash.com. It is filled with decent quality free photography to be used however you like. Although again, there are lots of stunning images so avoid those ones. ☺ Another site with free images is WallpaperAccess.com which has a few nice rooms in their zoom background section.

And if you are OK with spending a small amount of money there's Shutterstock where I think you can get a two image pack for about \$50. In my opinion it's totally worth the small expense. You will spend far less time looking on this well-organized, searchable website for really excellent and appropriate background images than you will searching for excellent free ones

Slide #52 Time stamp 12:33

and you can customize them right within their super user friendly web interface...you don't even need to have image editing software...

Slide #53 Time stamp 12:38

so you can alter them with cropping, and subtly blurring them, even changing the colour in the interface before you acquire them.

Slide #54 Time stamp 12:46

In fact you can even get pre-blurred background images from Shutterstock so you don't have to do it yourself.

A couple more do's and don'ts with regard to virtual background images: do choose something that makes sense for who you are and where you are. So no palm trees and swimming pools if you live in Toronto. Try to choose something that looks as if it could actually be behind you, so an indoor environment, generally.

Slide #55 Time stamp 13:10

Unsplash has a few really nice wood panel walls if you want to go minimalist.

Try to choose an image that makes sense visually, so for example if you are softly lit by a small daylight balanced lamp, choose a background image that is also daylight balanced as opposed to a super warm, contrasty, highly colour saturated background.

Slide #56 Time stamp 13:25

Slide #57 Time stamp 13:32

And really, really important, as I suggested earlier, make sure your background photo is not sharper than your web cam's recording of you. That's a glaring giveaway that your set-up is not real and may be to some extent inauthentic.

Here's this example again showing the colour mismatch and the too-sharp background.

What's puzzling to me is the number of free and included virtual backgrounds available that reflect the mistakes people want not to be making! Like showing the ceiling because your camera angle is too low.

Slide #58 Time stamp 13:56 This one's free from Microsoft Teams. More on this camera angle issue later.

Oh, and don't have people in your virtual background because how weird will it look for them not to be moving when you are?

If you are motivated to make a bit more of an effort in the name of maintaining authenticity, have a look around your own home. You may have a nice window that would make a great background, but it's not in the right place; it might be behind you, for example, so you'd be backlit (unless you light yourself...more on that later). Or there may be a nice visually appealing spot in your home like a corner of your living room or something that doesn't happen to be, and can't be made to be behind where you will be sitting to do your video calls.

Slide #59 Time stamp 14:37

You can very easily create your own virtual background by snapping a shot of that window or nook, or room with your phone camera and uploading that to use as your virtual background. This way you could, if you wanted, use the beautiful light from your lovely windows as your light source, AND have them as your background.

Slide #60 Time stamp 15:00

One more idea...if you don't have a space anywhere in your home that is conducive to making your own virtual background, borrow one from someone else. I actually got this window shot from a friend's cottage. So for example, now that we are out and about visiting people in their homes again, or if we're not, then when we are, if your best friend

has a lovely window, or living room that matches your taste and sensibilities, ask them if you can snap a shot and use it as a background. Or if you or someone you know has a beautiful office somewhere, take a picture of that with their permission.

Keep in mind that your phone pics will be plenty high res, and if they're not quite sharp that's actually a bonus.

Slide #61 Time stamp 15:27

Just try to hold the camera straight when you shoot to mimic a view that would be visually appropriate behind you, so don't tilt the camera up or down too much; look straight at the room to avoid distorted perspective that will look weird and wrong when you are sitting in front of the picture...you don't want horizontal or vertical lines, like the edge of a door for example, that don't line up with the edge of your frame.

This isn't an extreme example and the background is a bit busy but hopefully you get the idea.

Text Slide #62 Time stamp 15:50

It's very easy to find image size requirements online. There's no need to go into detail here, but just as an example, for Zoom they want a GIF or Jpeg or even video. Minimum dimensions are 960 pixels, x maximum 1920 pixels with a maximum file size of 5 Mb.

For most web cams the aspect ratio is 16:9 which is a wide horizontal movie format. But you may be able to change the ratio to 4:3. Just note that if you use a more square background image, the top and bottom will get cut off to make it fit into a 16:9 Zoom frame when necessary.

To be safe, assume you'll need the wide horizontal 16x9 format. If the ratio changes in a Zoom grid you'll be covered. It seems as if some Zoom grids are 16x9 and some are closer to 4x3.

I've gone on way longer than I meant to about virtual backgrounds so I will skip the detailed comparison between platforms, as they are kind of moving targets anyway, due to continuing development and upgrades, but I will just add that in some cases where a platform doesn't natively support virtual backgrounds, virtual background functionality can often be added by use of a third party virtual webcam app.

Text Slide #63 Time stamp 16:52

Examples would be Many Cam, Snap Camera, Chroma Cam, XSplit VCam, CamMask and SparkoCam Virtual Web Cam, etc. These are designed to enhance live streams and video

calls by facilitating things like virtual backgrounds, picture in picture, desktop sharing and other special effects, filters etc. A virtual web cam app basically replaces your web cam with an augmented camera display that acts as your camera's web cam (thanks to Brian White of the YouTube Channel VideoZeus for that phrasing).

But again cross platform compatibility may be limited and seems to change unexpectedly. Most of these apps are pretty gimmicky overall, providing silly filters and limited controls for adjusting colour, contrast, exposure etc. The one feature I do use with an app for Apple called iGlasses is the zoom in and out. Zooming in is another way to get rid of distracting stuff around you...not with a virtual background but with real backgrounds which we'll get onto in a second.

Unless you really need to zoom in, if you can't already, or really need the other features, these apps are probably best avoided, especially if you are having to switch platforms from meeting to meeting. Also, I should just note that overall, there are more apps available and more support for apps for PC's than for Macs. Just something to keep in mind.

Even if you get a virtual background all set up, remember you'll have to set it up in each individual platform. And always make sure you have a non-virtual one ready to go in case of unexpected incompatibility or technical issues. Recently a friend of mine got all set up on Zoom, making sure well ahead of time that everything looked and sounded perfect for a very important job interview, and discovered right before it was to start that the meeting wasn't on Zoom it was on Teams. Her third party app, which allowed her to Zoom in didn't work on Teams, at least not without a lot of fiddling around, so she had to ditch the whole set-up leaving her flustered and her confidence undermined. Which brings me to my ultimate recommendation: if you can, maybe consider not using virtual backgrounds. In my opinion, while they can work, they're not worth the headaches, and mismatched cross platform reliability.

While you can choose to use a slightly different set-up depending on which platform your meeting is going to be on, I suggest it may be more efficient and work better for you to create one set-up and stick with it. Meaning virtual backgrounds would be out.

But don't despair, many of the points I made about virtual backgrounds apply to any background.

Photo fabric backgrounds

Text Slide #64 Time stamp 19:16

So while I was all over virtual backgrounds initially, as I said, I finally realized there was a far less technical solution I've been using a variation of for years in my still photography that is simple and easily deployed, although a bit more expensive, and that is photo fabric

backgrounds which can be used anywhere you can fit them, and which don't care what platform you are using so your set-up may not ever have to change.

Slide #65 Time stamp 19:34

Clip Slide #66 Time stamp 19:40

The same rules apply to whatever background you use in terms of not being too busy or having things appearing to poke out from behind your head or shoulder.

I have designed a small collection of backgrounds based on the concept of creating the appearance of an at-home space that looks reasonably nice but not eye-catching, and with uninterrupted space for your head. I use one of these almost exclusively now.

Slide #67 Time stamp 19:55

They are totally portable small fabric backgrounds that hang from a stand and cross pole.

Slide #68 Time stamp 20:03

They allow you to easily hide your private space, your mess, or whatever, like a green screen does, but with these there is no mucking around with virtual camera settings or worrying about not wearing green clothes or white clothes, etc., and they are even smaller than most green screens so they fit even more easily into small, possibly cluttered spaces, like some home offices or closets. 😊

I have actually developed a little kit that people can buy, that includes a 3.5x5 foot background...the smallest possible size that would fill the frame of most web cams, with many people's set-ups, if you put the background right behind your chair...along with a stand and light.

Slide #68 (Repeat) Time stamp 20:30

Slide #69 Time stamp 20:40

Slide #70 Time code 20:43

The fabric is a relatively wrinkle resistant material with a thin rubber backing that helps cut down on shine-through, and back-lighting if you have light coming from behind you.

Slide #71 Time code 20:53

The disadvantage compared to virtual backgrounds is that you would probably have only one or two, so there is less flexibility to change your background depending on who you are meeting with.

I do plan to add more designs to reflect more corporate as well as home environments. And I can also create custom designs, or use customer supplied images following the guidelines I gave earlier for virtual background shots, as long as they are shot at a high enough resolution, so no small, shaky cell phone snaps!

If virtual and photo fabric backgrounds all seem too difficult, another option would be a simple collapsible gray backdrop like the pop-up green screen I showed you earlier.

Slide #72 Time stamp 21:23

Or, in a pinch a nice, even a nice wrinkle free piece of fabric could do the job.

Slide #73 Time stamp 21:29

I happened to have a super affordable end-of-roll piece of gray upholstery fabric I had bought years ago at a fabric store. Hung right behind me from a pole and stand it looks clean and tidy and I've even had a compliment on it from a creative director! Keep in mind that thin fabrics may sag so thicker fabric may work better and don't skimp on the number of clamps along the top. You want to keep the fabric taught.

One caveat, be careful with bright or heavily saturated colours which might confuse your webcam's auto-colour balance, distract viewers and be unflattering next to your skin. Neutrals like beige and gray will probably work best especially with older cameras.

Finally, again, whether you use a virtual or physical background make sure your background supports your brand, or at least doesn't undermine it, and does not distract people away from you. People's focus should be on you and your face, not what's behind you. I like the way Canadian branding expert Tamara Glick puts it when she writes and this is a quotation: "make sure your surroundings are intentional and support your goals." Whatever background you choose, make sure you look good in front of it and stand out from it.

Part 3 Lighting (Length 6:23)

I am going to say way less about lighting than I did about backgrounds but not because it's not important. It is very important and besides a distracting background nothing will detract from your video call as much as terrible, or no lighting, which I am still seeing all the time.

Slide #75 Time stamp 0:27

The most important thing is to have flattering light coming towards you on your face, not coming from behind you or from straight above, or only from the side, or from below.

Windows are obviously are a really great natural light source, as long as sunlight is not streaming in directly onto your face. You'll hear photographers referring to beautiful north light. In our hemisphere they are referring to the indirect light that comes though north facing windows when the sun is shining from the south...so it's never direct light; it's very soft, non-directional daylight. This is what we want.

Something to keep in mind is that web cams tend to be manufactured to be very sensitive to low light levels. So bright light can overwhelm their sensors; too much light can be a bad thing! If you sit really close to your window light source you may find yourself looking over-exposed -- too bright and washed out. So a couple of recommendations: either sit a little further away from the window, or put something between that window and you to cut down the light a little bit. For example, if you don't have translucent blinds or sheer curtains, you could put literally anything between you and the window to cut down the light a bit.

Slide #76 Time stamp 1:26 Here I'm using printer paper and sticky tape.

Slide #77 Time stamp 1:33 And in this example I taped together a couple of pieces of printer paper and attached them to a floor lamp which I placed between the window and me, to cut down the light a bit.

Here's one more reason you may want to block part of your window light if it's a big picture window...glasses glare. I have to give a shout out to photographer Gia Goodrich in the US for this quick fix.

Slide #78 Time stamp 1:46

Just gobo, that is cover up the bottom part of the window until you block the part of it that's reflecting in your glasses. You'll find it's the part straight across from you that's in your glasses, so if you cover that up and leave the higher part uncovered you will still get lovely light on your face, but not in your glasses.

Of course the other issue with window light is that it is inconsistent, unreliable and not always available. Window light will change with the weather and the time of day, but as long as the light remains indirect your web camera's auto exposure will probably take care of adjusting for light level and colour shifts. If the sun tends to swing around and become direct at some point you may want to take that into account and set-up somewhere else, so you don't have to limit meetings to a certain portion of the day. One more way to increase consistency is to combine an artificial light, like an electric lamp with the window light, which I typically do.

Outside of daylight hours, you will need some kind of artificial light.

While you don't need anything fancy I don't agree with those who suggest that ANY light will do. Many of the small indoor desk lamps we have in our homes are incandescent,

meaning their light is very warm and yellow...so they make your skin look orangey, and they have small harsh bulbs which make for harsh shadows, good for lighting a book, not good for lighting your face.

Slide #79 Time stamp 2:51

You will look way better if your light source is both soft, and daylight balanced.

Slide #80 Time stamp 3:05

For some lamps you can simply buy a replacement bulb in a daylight colour balance. There are SO many lights available online purporting to be for video calls and streaming from super cheap models to high end ones meant for serious video production. Most people are probably going to want the cheapest option that does a decent job so I set out to find something that would fit my criteria, and found this Beigaon LED Desk Lamp on Amazon.

Slide #81 Time stamp 3:31

Slide #80 (Repeat) Time stamp 3:42

You can see how much softer the shadows are on the face and on the background and how much nicer the colour is. The biggest selling point for me was the shape and orientation of the light head. This is the only one I found that had a long, soft light bulb perpendicular to a flexible stem, very conducive to easily adjustable, very flattering light that will spread across your face. I actually wish it had a small, weighted base like a normal desk lamp but for some people the clamp will work great. I clamp mine to a piece of foam core which I can position behind my laptop wherever I want or where it fits.

Slide #82 Time stamp 3:59

Slide #83 Time stamp 4:03

If you have a larger monitor like the one on my iMac Pro you can just hang the light over the edge of the top of your monitor.

It has 3 lighting modes (warm, daylight and cool), the important one being the daylight setting. We don't really need the others. And it has 10 brightness settings which are actually really handy as the amount of artificial light I need changes depending on how much daylight I have.

And it is cheap...less than \$30 online last time I checked.

As I was saying, this and any other light can also be used in combination with daylight during the day especially on cloudy, dull days, to enhance the light on your face.

Another newer but more expensive option would be the Lumecube,

Slide #84 Time stamp 4:39

the advantage of this light being that you need no desktop space at all for it if you buy the suction mount option...you just attach it to your laptop or monitor. The light and mount came in at just under \$200 on Amazon last time I checked. Alternatively they offer a small desktop light stand to give you more flexibility in terms of placement.

Slide #79 Time stamp 4:54

You may need to go with this extendable light stand if you are a glasses wearer, so you can position the light high enough not to reflect in your glasses (which it likely will if the light comes straight at you).

Of course the light is adjustable for colour and brightness and it looks to be fairly flattering thanks to the frosted lens and additional white diffuser.

Ring lights have become incredibly popular, but beware the super distracting reflections that can occur in your glasses if you use the small ones, in particular. The whole point of ring lights, initially was that they allowed for super even lighting because the light would be mounted around the camera lens. The ring light I'd recommend, and I have, would be a large circumference one, like this one.

Slide #86 Time stamp 5:35

Slide #87 Time stamp 3:43

It's a cheap model so the colour accuracy is not perfect but it's OK and fairly flattering. Even with the large circumference model glasses wearers may need to raise it up on the stand so it's shining down on you and not straight at. A larger light like this would also be what you'd want if you were going to be standing up, and maybe stepping back from your camera to present something.

Slide #88 Time stamp 5:52

My final lighting tip is to be willing to move. Be flexible and open minded ...if you are sitting on a couch you may need to move it over a bit, or move where on the couch you are sitting, or put a chair and maybe table somewhere it wouldn't normally be, for the best set-up.

Part 4 Framing (and eye-line) (Length 5:55)

As with lighting boo boos I am still seeing a lot of framing issues.

As I think I mentioned earlier, we can think of a video call as being like a portrait. As a photographer I find framing is second nature to me but it's clearly something some people struggle with. And it makes such a big difference to your looking good, or not, and professional, or not, and frankly credible, or less so.

Again, I am going to suggest being flexible if you need to. If possible and necessary be prepared to move your computer. I have a desktop that is not in a good place for video calls so I use a laptop that I can position wherever I want.

My recommendation is that you position yourself in front of your web cam so that there is a wee bit of room above your head, and you can see your full head and some shoulders, like a head and shoulders portrait.

Slide #90 Time stamp 0:47

We want to mimic what it would be like to be seeing and speaking with a person IRL, in terms of the amount of their field of view you'd fill...it should look and feel natural and comfortable.

Slide #91 Time stamp 1:07 These are screen grabs from a panel discussion by three experts in their fields. Too much head room, face too large in the frame, and a shelf in the background sticking right out from behind the presenter's head, and the lighting in all three was non-existent. This compromised their credibility, and my ability to hear their messages.

If your face is too close to the camera you may come across as kind of in the viewers face. The other problem with sitting too close to your camera is distortion. The wide angle lens of most web cams will distort your face so that your nose looks longer than it is and your head looks smaller.

Just from a practical point of view you do want to be close enough to be able to see chat windows, screen shares, etc. and be positioned to be able to type if you need to.

Here again is the one place some of those third party apps or webcam specific controls can actually help, by way of their zoom in and out feature. A little zoom in can help you look the right size in the frame and facilitate your sitting a comfortable distance from the camera.

On that note I'm just going to throw this tip in here...make sure you have your reading glasses, or whatever eye wear you need to be able to clearly see both the screen and the chat window. I was on one call recently during which I sent several private messages to a

colleague and I'm sure she had her contact lenses in, which are for distance, so she never responded. I'm sure couldn't see any of my messages, or probably anyone's faces either! And she really couldn't participate fully in the conference, meaning her professional performance was compromised.

Another thing: rotate your device so you are horizontal as most chat windows seem to accommodate horizontal frames better than vertical. Furthermore vertical or portrait oriented cameras such as a tablets and cell phones, seem to encourage one of the most common mistakes I see, which is a huge amount of head room or space above the head, creating a totally unbalanced composition.

Slide #92 Time stamp 2:41

When the extra head room includes a view of the ceiling because the phone or whatever is sitting low on the table in front of you pointing up, it creates a perfect storm of distracting and unflattering. (We shouldn't be able to see up your nose. ☺) General rule, if you can see your ceiling light fixture in your frame the angle is wrong. Tilt down.

The most flattering camera angle will be straight at you, or even looking down on you, if you need to hide those extra chins. There are a bunch of different ways to get your webcam level with your eyes -- boxes, piles of books, laptop stands etc.

Slide #93 Time stamp 3:12

Slide #94 Time stamp 3:18

but ideally you likely want to be able type comfortably (to contribute to chats), and look straight ahead at your camera and at the participants on your screen as much as possible.

Slide #95 Time stamp 3:38

Slide #96 Time stamp 3:45

So my recommendation is to use a stand-alone bluetooth or wired USB keyboard, and put both your laptop and your webcam if you have a separate external webcam, at eye level and the keyboard at typing level.

Yes, you will have to look down to type, but the rest of the time your eyes will be looking straight ahead, which is the most flattering angle and will make you look the most engaged. The closer your eye level is to your web cam the more it will appear to your fellow call attendees that you are looking at them. So remember to look straight at the lens periodically when speaking to really engage your viewers.

If you are only presenting, that is, not needing to look at people's faces on your screen, then the height of the laptop doesn't matter, only the height of the camera, so in this case you could use an external web cam on a mount and leave the laptop on the table.

Actually, after I first put together this presentation a company called Plexicam came out with a great little invention that facilitates getting your camera angle right, if your monitor is big enough, or your laptop is raised. It mounts directly in front of your monitor so it's easy to look at your screen and appear to be looking directly at your viewer.

Clip Slide #97 Time stamp 4:35

Another thing about camera position and another reason to orient the camera so that it is shooting fairly straight at you, and is level, is what can happen to vertical and horizontal lines in your background if your camera is tilted. I mentioned this earlier. Straight lines created by doors, windows, cabinets, shelves etc. should ideally line up as well as possible with the edges of your frame.

Slide #98 Time stamp 4:59

It's distracting when architectural lines that should be straight up and down converge and distort behind you because of a tilted camera.

Slide #99 Time stamp 5:09

A couple more things...don't put your laptop on your lap or any other unstable surface...apart from the fact that your lap is too low, it's very distracting for viewers when you and your background move around in the frame.

And here's one more no-no that a friend just reminded me of...I don't see this often but he does: if you have two monitors, don't be looking at the one that doesn't have your camera on it. If you're not going to point your face towards your camera, as he says, why have your camera on at all? The whole point is "eye contact".

Part 5 Posture and Demeanour (Length 4:03)

During my first video call ever I made the mistake of sitting on a backless stool, which was incredibly uncomfortable. I spent the entire call trying not to slouch or fidget and my back was killing me. Now I use a chair that supports my back but isn't visually imposing; it's a kitchen chair, as opposed to a big, high-backed padded ergonomic desk chair which I find can look distracting, especially with a virtual background.

If you are doing multiple video calls per day and are sitting at a desk, and really need the relative comfort and back support that you wouldn't get from a low profile chair I get it. It might be a thought to really shake up your world and set up an adjustable work space

with a dual mode sitting/standing desk. You'd just need to ensure that your lighting moves with your camera, and your background works for whatever position you're in. With the photo fabric backdrops mentioned in Part 2 this would be easy; you'd just have to raise and lower the stand accordingly.

If you have a wheeled chair avoid spinning or moving around on it as it's distracting for viewers and the sound may be picked up by your mic.

Slide #101 Time stamp 1:12

It can actually help to have a desk or table in front of you on which to put stuff you may need during a conference call, like pad and paper, cell phone, coffee, water (liquids far from the computer of course!).

Slide #102 Time stamp 1:25

The other advantage of a table or desk is that leaning forward on it a bit can make for a flattering camera angle, and make you appear more engaged. We pose people for portraits like this all the time, neck slightly stretched forward, chin out just a bit: much more engaged and confident looking and helps define the jawline.

Some people make the opposite mistake by getting too comfortable.

Slide #103 Time stamp 1:39

You should be comfortable enough that you can pay full attention to the call, but not so comfortable that you look noticeably overly casual.

Slide #104 Time stamp 1:46

Sit reasonably, naturally still...don't fidget, and don't play with your hair. Or stare at yourself.

Slide #105 Time stamp 1:54

Stand if that works better for you, but again, make sure the camera and lighting is appropriately positioned.

Don't look at your phone or whatever might be going on around you.

Slide #106 Time stamp 2:02

Slide #107 Time stamp 2:05 I got the idea for this slide from seeing someone doing exactly this...watching TV during a conference.

Pay attention as if you are in a one on one conversation with the person speaking whether there are 2 or 20 of you.

Don't eat or fiddle,

Slide #108 Time stamp 2:17

or do things you would never do in person. Conduct yourself as if you are sitting across from your fellow call participants IRL.

As I mentioned previously you need to be able to see your screen clearly. So be prepared:

If you need reading glasses have them with you. If you have to lean forward to see the chat entries, test the lighting so you are not getting your light source reflecting into your glasses if possible. It's also distracting if the screen is reflected prominently in your glasses so all people can see is bright blue squares, and not your eyes. One way to solve this is to make sure the brightness of your screen is less than the brightness of your lighting.

Test out your set-up before the call and if necessary tilt your monitor up or down a bit, or change the position of the light so it's higher up, for example, not shining straight into your lenses. Sometimes you can also solve a reflection problem by just moving your face a bit, for example tilting your head down slightly. It might be hard to remember to do at first but once you get used to it it will be worth it for people to be able to see your eyes unobstructed. Or, if you are a contact lens wearer and your lenses allow you to see close-up maybe just decide to wear contacts for video calls.

And finally language: keep it professional. Remember that although you may be at home you are not hanging out with friends. Be positive, and as TV News Anchor and YouTuber Dominique Sachse says...don't rant or curse.

And one final tip, if you find it distracting seeing yourself on camera or this just adds to your feeling of self-consciousness, you can easily turn off self-view at least on Zoom. On some other platforms the self-view window is very small by default which helps.

Slide #109 Time stamp 3:39

Just remember your viewers can still see you.

Clip Slide#110 Time stamp 3:43

Part 6 Wardrobe (Length 9:14)

I think it was on Saturday Night Live that I first heard this saying from an actor channeling Ricardo Montalban's character on Fantasy Island many years ago: "It doesn't matter how you feel it's how you look".

Slide #112 Time stamp 0:15

When I checked online to confirm I was remembering correctly that this was his line I found the quotation attributed to a number of people. So it's a pretty established concept. We all know that looking good can help you feel good...

This is a good mantra in the time of video calls. Just as actors find it easier to become their characters with the transformative powers of wardrobe and make-up I think people are the same in life...you put on your wardrobe and make-up and you propel yourself into a ready-to-engage state of mind. Going through the process of getting ready can also give you the mental space to get into gear for your meeting. Ultimately you want to feel confident about your appearance and as you don't have the excuse that you had to run through the rain to get to your at-home meeting...well, you have no excuse! I think many people who weren't dressing for business while working from home at the beginning of the pandemic have discovered that it really served them to re-introduce the ritual of getting up and getting dressed to tackle the work day.

Obviously wardrobe is a personal thing so you are going to dress as who you are, but there are guidelines you might consider to help you show up well. As in the office IRL, people will notice what you wear, so you can't go wrong looking as if you respect yourself and respect your fellow meeting attendees.

Text Slide #113 Time stamp 1:31

As with the background you choose, you want to dress intentionally. I hear stories of executives showing up on calls in hoodies. I don't know what they are thinking but in some cases at least it's being noticed and not in a good way.

Slide #114 Time stamp 1:36

I have a set of wardrobe guidelines I send to clients before every corporate portrait shoot, and I've written blog posts that touch on this topic. I think some of the same guidelines apply for video calls, with maybe a little more leeway, as in this case you're not being frozen in time for an image you have to love for the next two years, unless you're being recorded. Another difference is that there's no need to dress non-seasonally; you can dress as you would to go to work, in the season that it is, although I guess again if you are being recorded and you're the "star of the show" maybe you do want to dress somewhat non-seasonally so you look "right" at any time the recording is viewed.

Remember that meeting in video and in person is not the same. In person you are part of a wide picture which includes your whole self and everything on you and around you whereas in a video call the viewer can't see anything except what you put in the frame, generally your head and shoulders, so your opportunity to make an impression is more limited, but it's also simpler.

Whatever you wear it should reflect your personal brand. You should look well put together. You should be comfortable, and you should wear something that makes you feel confident, so wear what makes you look and feel good.

Dress your part whatever that is, based on what's appropriate for your business...overly casual dress can undermine your brand, as can sloppiness, like wrinkled clothing,

Slide #115 Time stamp 2:56

PJ's and sweatshirts,

Slide #108 Time stamp 1:39:58

thin strap tops that don't cover bra straps,

Slide #117 Time stamp 1:59 etc.

If appropriate you can wear something as simple as a t-shirt, but make it a nice one. The one on the left here is a decent looking t-shirt; accessorized with a necklace it looks casual tidy, fine if that matches what you'd wear in person at work.

Slide #118 Time stamp 3:06

Cardigans almost never look really professional ...they rarely look good in business portraits...so unless it's a particularly nice or structured one I avoid cardigans.

Slide #119 Time stamp 3:14

I'd also suggest that dressing way up for a call in which it's obvious you are sitting alone in your living room may also look kind of odd and distracting.

Similarly distracting are clothes that are maybe a little too "going on a hot date date"...such as see-through blouses, off-shoulder tops,

Slide #120 Time stamp 3:35

Slide #121 Time stamp 3:39

And kind of sexy casual off one shoulder sweaters, which I've seen on video conference calls...

Slide #122 Time stamp 3:41

I will tell you that it's always amazing to me how wardrobe that works IRL can somehow not work well in a portrait, so I recommend you test out your outfit on your webcam first.

What are some more of the parts of my wardrobe guidelines that I think apply?

For portraits I advise people to stick predominantly to solid, neutral colours, and mid-tones (ie. not white or black, although a white or contrasting shirt can work underneath a suit jacket).

Slide #123 Time stamp 4:09

What I'll say about this is that web cams do even less well with dark and light extremes than professional portrait set-ups, and given that your lighting will probably be more limited than photo shoot lighting, and your camera won't have a fantastic dynamic range, you may want to avoid wearing white or black because they're both prone to losing detail if not correctly exposed... whites can burn out or become too light, and blacks can block up, lose all detail and look like a black hole.

For portraits I advise dressing appropriately to your skin and hair colour and the same goes for video calls. As an example, a black suit jacket can look very heavy on a person with fair skin and hair, like me.

Slide #124 Time stamp 4:40

In the context of the whole outfit there may be a nice balance of tone...maybe a dark jacket with light pants, but we don't see that in a head and shoulders crop. Do look to create some contrast between your top and your skin and hair so that your face stands out, and is nicely framed; mid-toned or coloured tops can work on almost anyone.

Slide #125 Time stamp 4:59

Some pattern is generally fine as long as it's not visually overwhelming.

Slide #126 Time stamp 5:02

These are overwhelming.

Slide #127 Time stamp 5:07

Again, a splash of colour can add some spark to a portrait and will help you to stand out in a zoom grid.

Slide #128 Time stamp 5:10

Adding a scarf, but not a bulky one, or an accessory like jewellery to a simple top is an easy way to dress it up so you look that much more well put together.

Slide #129 Time stamp 5:17

Another thing to avoid is very small patterns and stripes which can cause a moire effect. I'm sure you've seen this in photos and videos, where a sort of distracting wavy effect appears, which is caused by the camera imaging sensor's failure to resolve the small repetitive details.

Slide #130 Time stamp 5:23

Fabric with a noticeable sheen may best be avoided as well as it can be distracting when the light catches it in different spots as you move. I didn't find an example but I'm sure you know what I mean.

Whatever you wear make sure it is wrinkle free, as I've already mentioned. If it's something that should be pressed or ironed make sure it is. Even if it's a knit top if it has wrinkles from being folded steam it before you put it on. There's nothing less professional looking than a wrinkled top. Fabrics that drape can be more flattering and conducive to nice lines than stiff fabrics.

Slide #131 Time stamp 6:02

For feminine clothing higher cut necklines tend to work better. You want the bottom of your neckline to be included within the frame. And if you are wearing an open-necked buttoned shirt, it's generally best to make sure the top button you have done up is within the frame, so the v doesn't close below the edge of the frame.

Slide #132 Time stamp 6:09

Also, more for women and people identifying as women sometimes three quarter length or long sleeves may be more flattering than sleeveless tops and work better with portrait crops. Unless you have Kelly Ripa arms.

Caveat...even if you do have Kelly Ripa arms, watch out about wearing a sleeveless top if you have long hair. If the hair covers the straps you can look as if you have no top on at all.

Slide #133 Time stamp 6:37 This is not a perfect example, but I have seen a female executive with slightly longer hair on a video call who appeared not to be wearing a top at all because you couldn't see the straps.

Whatever you wear it should look good on you as I said, so flattering lines and shape.

Slide #134 Time stamp 6:57 Not like this

and fit you properly and comfortably, not too tight or loose. Remember, some clothing that works IRL may not work well on camera when you are only seeing part of the top...for example loose, baggy clothing, or bulky tops and scarves which can be offset by sleek skinny pants IRL, but in your video portrait we only see the baggy part.

Slide #135 Time stamp 7:14

Your lighting can also affect the look of your wardrobe...and can for example make a very loose fitting top, like a linen one, look more baggy and wrinkly on video or in a photo than it looks out in the world where you can move around and the fabric moves with you.

Slide #136 Time stamp 7:29

If you wear a jacket make sure you can comfortably do up the top button. For portraits I say this so we can make a nice v to frame the face, and so that the fabric sits flat. This is probably less critical with a conference call...maybe just leave jackets unbuttoned if they're a bit tight.

For portraits I advise avoiding clothing styles that are likely to date quickly because those images have to last, but that's not a concern with video calls unless your video call is being recorded for playback in the future. Of course, as I keep saying, remember you still want people's attention to be more on your face than on your clothes. So maybe just don't wear unusually eye-catching clothes.

Slide #137 Time stamp 8:01

Again, this is the most important thing: the focus should be on you and what you are saying. So dress accordingly to avoid distracting your viewers.

Slide #138 Time stamp 8:12

This includes wearing more understated jewellery (unless you are a jeweller!). Big dangly earrings for example can really draw attention away from your face and what you are saying.

Slide #139 Time stamp 8:30

Finally, keep in mind what your wardrobe will look like against your background. Since you know what your background is going to be you can select wardrobe that will look good against your background, or at least not bad! So if for example you have a slightly busy background you might wear a plain top.

If you have a plainer background you can get away with more pattern in your clothing.

Slide #140 Time stamp 8:40

If you have a light wall you may want to wear something a little darker so there's strong visual separation between you and your background, not like this.

Slide #141 Time stamp 8:49

You can even have a Zoom uniform or two. I have a few outfits on standby for corporate shoots, and a few for industrial shoots, and now for video calls as well. Particularly if your meetings are with different people, not always the same person or group, you can get away with very few options...because who will know?!

Part 7 Hair and Make-up and Grooming (Length 7:49)

For obvious reasons this section is going to apply more for women, those identifying as women, and those who do wear make-up. There are so many video tutorials on make-up for video calls, make-up for mature faces for video calls, for example HotandFlashy on YouTube, or Dominique Sachse etc., and I will leave it to the make-up artists and beauty influencers to really get into it. You don't really need me.

I also don't want to get into a philosophical discussion about whether make-up should be a thing for women. I do have a couple of thoughts to share, though.

On a basic level I would recommend that whatever you do before going to a real meeting you do before you show up to a virtual one. If you do wear make-up out in the world you should be wearing it for your calls. But don't overdo it. People shouldn't be noticing your make-up. It should just be subtly enhancing your features while you are in front of a camera with no possibility of retouching! Although honestly cheaper web cams and internal cameras can be kind of like softening filters themselves due to the low quality of their lenses. However, while your skin may look smoother, with that smoothing you may also lose definition.

Slide #143 Time stamp 1:19

In case you have a good camera, Zoom, seemingly alone, has a setting for “touching up” your appearance. In fact Zoom has both a “Touch up my appearance” button and an “Adjust for low light” button in Preferences, both of which help create a flattering image. Before I got my new web cam I didn’t use this because it made me look unrealistically smooth, but once I got my Zeiss lens camera, I ticked the box and slid the slider over a wee bit because nobody needs to see me that sharply!

Actually, as of writing this Zoom has a new “Beta” make-up filter that includes eyebrows, lip colour and facial hair you can dial up and down on sliders.

Slide #144 Time stamp 1:39 While I view this as pretty gimmicky I have to tell you, the eye brows work surprisingly well, if you choose the one that matches the shape of your actual brows. But my advice is to use actual eyebrow pencil or whatever, if you need it.

The lack of a touch-up filter can be daunting. An executive I know, of a certain age, shared with me that she loves and relies on Zoom’s touch up button, as much as I do, and was horrified by her own appearance when she had to switch unexpectedly to a platform that didn’t have that option. In that case there are a couple of things you can try. One would be putting a small piece of saran wrap over the lens to act as a softening filter. There are also third party apps mentioned in Part 2 including one called Snap Cam which has an array of user-designed filters you can select from including “retouching” options, but beware the issues of platform, software and hardware incompatibility that may arise (again, see Part 2). Ultimately you may just find it best to resort to a bit of make-up.

There is a reason people on TV, both men and women have traditionally worn make-up. Being on camera is not the same as real life. Whether you have TV studio quality lighting and high def resolution, or low light and limited resolution, you are being visually altered by the technology. You want to show up as well as possible in your frame, as the presenter, in a one on one, or as one in a grid of frames. In most cases I would suggest it will serve you to do a few touch-ups, unless you are one of those people who have perfect skin and naturally well-defined features, keeping in mind that the idea is to feel confident, not more self-conscious than you already are, so if make-up makes you feel weird, maybe don’t wear any. I have photographed high level female executives who wear not a stitch of make-up. And I am not going to suggest they should do otherwise.

However, the same friend I referred to at the beginning of this presentation in Part 1 told me that when she started doing video calls she didn’t put on make-up and she didn’t like how she looked. Sounds obvious, right, for those of us who wear make-up? She is someone who sometimes wears make-up out in the world, and sometimes doesn’t. I think maybe we can get confused by being at home and not being fully in that business meeting head space. Or maybe we see our slightly ill-lit, slightly blurry selves on our screens and figure nobody can really see us that clearly anyway. Now my friend always wears make-up on video calls and it has changed her disposition. She feels great knowing she looks really good. And the difference is really noticeable.

If you are pale and slightly blotchy like me and you do want to make your features show up a little better here's what I do in 5 minutes. Again, there are a gazillion make-up for Zoom YouTube videos out there so if this isn't a fit for your face/style and you're looking for advice I'm sure you will be able to find a video that is.

First I apply a light BB Cream or tinted moisturizer. A bit of concealer for the darkest and blotchiest areas can smooth your skin out a lot, which can make you look healthier.

Slide #145 Time stamp 4:22

If you have naturally shiny skin, beyond a healthy glow, or the make-up makes you shiny, I strongly suggest a translucent powder to take down the shine. Shiny skin is very distracting on men and women on camera. I remember meeting a guy who was interviewed on camera regularly and he literally carried face powder in his pocket, all the time.

This is the one I use on corporate portrait shoots. It's called Make Up Forever Ultra HD Microfinishing Pressed Powder and is available at Sephora.

Slide #146 Time stamp 4:46

Here's another tip for very fair-haired women like me: I know for many women who don't want to wear a lot of make-up the eyebrows can be overlooked, but if your eyebrows are naturally almost invisible like mine just using a light eyebrow pencil to make them show up can bring your whole face to life.

Slide #147 Time stamp 5:04

And as my mother said when I was old enough to wear make-up but not doing so yet, a little blush really helps. This or a bit of bronzer to improve our pallor.

Slide #148 Time stamp 5:12

For eyes, I can't emphasize enough the benefit of a little eye liner and mascara if your eyelashes are barely visible like mine.

Slide #149 Time stamp 5:18

Adding some darkish liner above the top lashes can make all the difference. I've noticed over and over clients looking at themselves in still portraits and thinking they look tired with their normal make-up. I've seen this with myself. So after the shoot I Photoshop in

eyeliner which fixes the problem immediately. But you can't Photoshop a video! So wear mascara, and eyeliner on top to make yourself look a little more fresh and awake.

Slide 148 and 149 back and forth Time stamp 5:47 watch the eyes as I go back and forth from the before and after slide

Many women like very understated lipstick, too, which looks great IRL but fades on camera, so you can probably safely err on the side of slightly more lip colour than usual. Lip colour or not, at least make sure your lips are moisturized...this goes for men and women. Dry lips can be distracting, can limit your freedom of expression and just don't look healthy.

Slide #150 Time stamp 6:01

At the other extreme, of course, would be too much make-up which we also want to avoid, unless your day-to-day look is "too much make-up". The point is that people shouldn't be particularly aware of your make-up, to the extent that they are distracted by its looking overdone or inappropriate for the time and place. The goal is to look healthy and for our faces to read well on a screen.

I don't have a lot to say about hair, other than to suggest that you style your hair as if you are going to a meeting IRL, with the caveat that medium to long haired people may want to leave their hair down...and I say this to portrait clients all the time...because in a portrait, since people don't see the side or the back of your head it can look as if you just have really short hair from the front.

Slide #151 Time stamp 4:22 6:49 I know you've seen this look on me throughout this presentation and I can tell you that I tied it back or put it up to specifically to make sure you could see the backgrounds.

There is an advantage to nobody being able to see the back of your head, and that is that you can probably get away with only styling the front! Just be sure you don't turn your head, though!

Again, the idea is to look healthy and well put together, so there's no need for fancy hair. But do style it so you look groomed, and if you have long hair you like to have forward on one side and back on the other, for example, put it there and leave it there for the duration of the call. Beware the compulsion to move long hair repeatedly from one side to the other. As I said earlier, avoid playing with your hair. You don't see on camera professionals doing this, for good reason.

And now finally coming up in the next segment, a few technical tidbits:

Part 8 Camera, mic and internet connection (Length 9:49)

I am not going to go into a lot of detail about the tech because I don't think it has to be complicated or that expensive, not for our purposes, for video conferencing. So, before I go on, here's my helpful hint: If you want to know what the most current, best rated gear is for video calls, and many, many other things, allow me to point you to the website [Wirecutter.com](https://www.wirecutter.com).

Slide #153 Time stamp 0:32

I use it all the time. I'm going to read some of their exact words here: Wirecutter basically lists the best gear and gadgets for specific uses, for people who want to save the time and stress of figuring out what to buy. They test and compare all kinds of everyday items without being influenced by marketing or revenue. And they don't concentrate on high-end feature loaded products but rather products that "are high enough quality to warrant the price." So usually they'll list the best, if you want to spend the money, followed by the best budget option. They do a great job of staying up to date with their lists, too. And given the constant and speedy innovation around technology, it's nice to have them keeping on top of what's current.

They also write helpful articles like "How to pull off a professional video call from home" published April 2020, in which they shared their cumulative experience from five years of web video meetings, pre-Covid if you want to check that out.

Slide #154 Time stamp 1:29

I will start with a few thoughts on webcams. When I started doing video calls I, like probably almost everyone else, just used my laptop computer's internal camera. But it became apparent to me very quickly, and this is supported by the research I've been doing, that many internal cameras are not great, and some are downright terrible. I thought maybe it was a matter of my laptops being slightly older models but as I say, from what I've read it's widely acknowledged that internal cameras pale in comparison to external web cams, in terms of the colour, contrast, sharpness, autofocus and overall quality of the image.

I now have an iMac Pro that has an unusually good internal camera according to people in the know. Unfortunately for me this desktop computer is not well positioned for video calls so for them I use a laptop, also pretty current, but with a decidedly less excellent internal camera. So currently I am using a high-ish end Sony point and shoot that allows me to connect it to my laptop and select it as my camera via the preferences of whatever conferencing platform I'm using. Many DSLRs can be used as webcams with the help of softwares developed to facilitate that functionality.

Slide #155 Time stamp 2:13

But you don't need to do this. You can get a really decent webcam for around \$100 or even less. Just be careful...look for good ratings because a really cheap web cam will probably not have a very good lens and part of the reason to use an external web cam is for it to look better than your laptop internal webcam...unless you are using a desktop computer that doesn't have a webcam...while giving you the increased flexibility you may want to be able to get your eyeline where it needs to be as we discussed in an earlier section.

Another advantage of an external web cam is that if for some reason you want to point the camera at something other than yourself for a second, you can do so without having to move the whole computer. And, if you have different computers you use for video calls you can easily move your web cam to whichever one you're using.

Most external webcams are plug and play, with the option of downloading their brand specific or third-party software for fine tuning and adjustments if you want to have a little more control. Just note that if the webcam doesn't produce a good looking image prior to your having to make any adjustments, it's might not be worth buying. Don't expect the software to make a bad image look good. I recommend looking to get a decent webcam, and make sure you have enough daylight balanced light on your face so you don't need to adjust much, if at all.

As I mentioned in an earlier segment the one adjustment it's worth being able to make, in my opinion, is zooming in and out, as it gives you way more control over the distance between you, and the camera and your background. It's nice to be able to fine tune these distances just by moving a slider so that you are the most comfortable and functional and have exactly what you want in your background without having to keep physically moving your chair and/or the background.

Slide #156 Time stamp 3:38

Text Slide #157 Time stamp 4:02

I mentioned some examples of third-party apps in an earlier segment when I was talking about virtual backgrounds. I have iGlasses for Mac (by Ecam) which is about \$20. There's also Manual Camera - Webcam Control for \$9.99, XSplitVcam \$6 USD per month or \$25 USD per year or \$40 to purchase outright, last time I checked, and Mactaris Webcam Settings for Mac. The Mactaris app sort of worked on my old laptop...however the one thing I really wanted, the zoom function was grayed out because my old webcam was too old to support this more current software. I mention this to make the point that you will have more flexibility and options if you keep your system as current and up to date as possible.

According to Wirecutter, at the time of writing this, they chose as the best webcam for video conferencing the Logitech C920s HD Pro

Slide #158 Time stamp 4:47

which took top spot from its predecessor the Logitech C920, so pretty reliable brand, it seems. I actually bought one of these for \$99.99 from Staples and ended up returning it but I think the reason it didn't work properly for me may have been an incompatibility with Mac, although they are supposed to work with Macs. Logitech provides free downloadable very simple to use software that allows for adjustments and fine tuning such as zooming in and out, colour balance etc., but its latest iteration was not made to be compatible with Mac.

You will find, if I haven't said it yet, that there are generally more options for Windows users than for Mac users, in terms of compatibility.

After that webcam I tried, for fun, a brand I'd never heard of that had a ringlight - an Aluratek LIVE HD webcam, for \$120.

Slide #159 Time stamp 5:30

I thought the ringlight was kind of a cool idea and if you weren't a glasses wearer it could work...it's certainly better than no light! But the lens wasn't super sharp and there was distortion at the edges of the frame, which wouldn't bug some people, especially if you were using a virtual background in which case you wouldn't see the lens distortion, but it bugged me, so back it went.

Web cams also apparently come with some choice of lenses. I've seen ads for ultra-wide angle web cams. In our case that's actually the opposite of what we want. The wider angle the lens, the more of our background will show if it's a room, so less wide angle, less area behind you that you have to worry about. And if you have a fabric background or green screen the wider angle the lens the larger those will have to be. Also in terms of portraits....remember that video calls are effectively video portraits...we will rarely be flattered by a wide angle lens, especially if you lean towards the camera. Typically portrait lenses are longer lenses, so while that may not be an option in a web cam, at least avoid the ones specifically featuring an ultra-wide lens.

Honestly there are so many different web cams available for such a wide range of prices – from \$40 – to hundreds of dollars – with various features, and designed for such diverse uses – from connecting with family on Skype to serious content creation and streaming, it will make your head hurt. Which is why, again, I rely on Wirecutter rather than spending overwhelming amounts of time on research myself.

Another advantage of external web cams is that they can include their own built-in microphones, even stereo microphones, so you get both enhanced video and audio without having to buy another device.

At the time of my writing this I have to say I don't have a lot of information on or experience with separate external microphones, speakers or headsets for video calls. It has been claimed that the new Macbook Pro's dual speakers are as good as external speakers. There are lots of articles by people selling fancy, expensive options for speakers, mics and headsets, but unless you are becoming a streamer I'm not sure you need them.

I personally don't love having earbuds in my ears, and I don't feel a need for a headset. I will use earbuds, the less visually obtrusive of the two, when there's distracting noise around me, or when I don't want other people in the room to be able to hear what's being said by the other participants on a call. Again, in terms of a good choice I'd direct you to Wirecutter.com, where they will tell you their choice for best headsets, and give you super helpful hints such as to remember to select both the correct camera and microphone if you do use an external one, in your meeting software settings as the input sources.

Slide #160 Time stamp 7:53

Slide #161 Time stamp 7:59

Also in their article "How to pull off a professional video call from home" published in April 2020 they do suggest using headphones to "prevent feedback loops that result from your mic picking up other people speaking." I haven't experienced this, but it's obviously a possibility and something to be aware of.

And they suggest using fabric to absorb sound if you have "room echo", so add rugs to the floor, and curtains or blinds over windows.

Wirecutter has more tech tips for smooth video calls I think are worth mentioning: Shut down all programs you aren't using while video conferencing. The platform you are using...such as Zoom, uses up a certain amount of your computer's energy...so make sure you are not allocating the energy it needs to other apps.

They also talk about testing your Wi-fi before your call. They talk about specific requirements in terms of bandwidth which can be tested by going to <https://www.speedtest.net/>

I'm sure you've seen instances of your or someone else's video looking really fuzzy and low grade, or worse freezing or cutting out intermittently during a call, which is frustrating and distracting and can really derail a meeting. Wirecutter makes recommendations for three possible solutions if your speed is inadequate: moving closer to your router, switching the frequency (some routers have 2 options), or lastly switching to a wired connection ie. an ethernet cable shown here.

Slide #162 Time stamp 9:10

If your computer doesn't happen to have an ethernet port you can buy an inexpensive adapter like this:

Slide #163 Time stamp 9:18

or you can use a Powerline Networking Kit which "uses your home's electrical wiring to share your internet connection". Wirecutter recommends this one.

Slide #164 Time stamp 9:23

Another tip they suggest particularly if you are working wirelessly is not to enable HD as doing so will take more bandwidth.

And that's all I'm going to say about the gear.

Part 9 Conclusion (Length 3:21)

Final do's and don'ts:

Check your phone or computer is charged or at least plugged in if not charged.
Get settled 5-10 minutes ahead of the meeting start time and make sure you have the correct platform and log in info, so you are not panicking and fumbling trying to connect past the start time.
Test your mic and camera before you start the call and set-up your virtual background if you are using one.

Slide #166 Time stamp 0:33

There have been stories about people getting onto calls without checking their settings presumably after someone else used their computer...one lawyer in a virtual trial showed up with a Snap Camera filter that made him look like a talking cat and he couldn't figure out how to turn it off.

One woman suddenly became a potato when she switched filters and couldn't figure out how to switch it off. Bottom line, maybe don't be playing with filters, but if your kids have been using your computer, give yourself time to make sure they haven't changed any critical settings and if they have, reset them! Get the background set up prior to the call, use the touch up my face setting if your camera is really good and your face is just too sharp.

Enter meetings on mute and mute yourself when not speaking in a group.
If you need to step away turn off your camera.

Slide #167 Time stamp 1:17

On Zoom you can go into Preferences and upload a still photo of yourself so there is a place holder that keeps your presence in people's minds and eyes.

Slide #168 Time stamp 1:20

Slide #169 Time stamp 1:24

Slide #170 Time stamp 1:26

Remember to turn your camera back on when you return. But try not to leave and return frequently as it may be a bit distracting and disruptive.

If you are going to screen share your desktop make sure your desktop is tidy, or be careful to select accurately the part you want to share!

Turn off things that make sounds, like phones, loud fans, etc. Silence desktop notifications. Windows 10 has a built-in feature called Focus Assist that facilitates this. On a Mac you can use a 3rd party app such as Muzzle.

If you can, make sure you are registered on the platform as your name and not as a nickname or set of initials or company name...you want people, especially people you may not have met before to be able to see your actual name in your window.

Show up to every virtual meeting as if it matters.

We can do better. These days everyone has access to shooting video. I'm thinking of experts who call in to discuss a topic during a news broadcast, and often look terrible with their distracting backgrounds, terrible camera angles, over or underexposed skin, etc. Nobody expects them to look like the in-studio professional, heavily made-up hyper-polished TV anchors they are talking to, and I don't know if people figure they can't compete, and aren't supposed to or aren't expected to compete with the on-camera pro's so they don't even try, or if there is some unwritten convention right now that has it that the more unpolished you look the more trustworthy you are. Do video calls have to look bad to feel authentic? I don't think so! There is no good reason not to take some care. And if we *can* show up well, why wouldn't we? Doing so will only enhance our credibility.

And finally, going forward I expect to see portrait clients showing up way more prepared than in the past because you're getting so much practice showing up brilliantly on video calls!

Disclaimer: It is possible that by the time you see this video the specific info I share regarding items and their prices and where to get them may have changed. Please understand that it was my intention to share helpful info that was relatively correct at the time of writing the script. It was also not my intention to specifically endorse or criticize any brands or products or suppliers. My intention was to share my own experience in hopes it may give people an idea where to start as they figure out their own set-ups. Thanks for your understanding.