10 Tips
for Presenting Yourself Online

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COVID-19 has changed the way we are living and learning. One of the significant changes is that much of our interaction will now be taking place via our internet connections. Whether you are interacting though Zoom, Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, or some other application, there are things you can do to improve your presentation online. Here are a few tips to help you make that happen.

1. Place your computer's camera at or slightly above eye level.

If necessary, prop up your computer on a short stack of books or a box. Looking down at the camera can appear as if you are looking down at the participant. (You'll also avoid the dreaded up-the-nostrils view.)

2. Talk to the camera, not the computer screen.

Eye contact is important, even when you and the participants are not in the same room.

3. Sit far enough away from the computer.

Make sure your shoulders and upper arms show on screen. Think of a bust statue, or how newscasters look on the air.

4. Set the scene behind you.

"Busy" or messy backgrounds can be distracting. Allow for some distance between you and the bookshelves or wall of artwork behind you so that they're not in sharp focus. If you must sit in front of a plain light-colored wall, push as far away as possible to avoid looking like a mug shot.

5. Adjust the lighting.

You want more light on your face than behind you. Some of that will come from the computer screen. Adjust the placement of lamps and experiment with opening or closing curtains, shades and blinds on windows, especially those behind you. Side lighting from lamps and windows usually will look better than overhead lighting.

6. Wear solid colored clothing .

Prints, especially smaller prints, can "move" on screen and be distracting.

7. Smaller rooms are better for audio.

If you must work at your dining table, try to face away from the largest part of the room. High ceilings and lots of space could make your voice sound hollow. (Some work-from-home podcasters set up makeshift studios inside their closets so their clothing baffles the sound, just like foam on the walls of an audio booth).

8. Use a comfortable, stationary chair that supports good posture.

If your chair rocks or swivels, you will, too.

9. Take more frequent breaks than during an in-person presentation.

Neither you nor the participants will be able to move as much as you normally would because you're tied to the computer screen. Pause so that the participants (and you) can shift in their chairs.

10. TEST EVERYTHING!

Most of us are working from home without quick access to the IT people in our offices. (Your tech-savvy children now home from school might be able to help you figure it out.) If possible, allow at least the first 10 minutes of your online session to make sure everyone's technology is working. Be prepared to go "old school" – print out your most important PowerPoint slides so that you can hold them up on camera if you can't get your slides to show up on screen. Email the complete presentation to participants later, if necessary, rather than delaying your session to try to fix the technology mid-session.

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