

Video Conference Etiquette 101 (Netiquette)

Many of us are not quite used to video conferencing. We don't know how to act, where to look, what to wear, and so forth. That's why we have put together a helpful guide to video conference etiquette.

Here's everything you need to know:

Before your meeting:

Dress to impress.

It's easy to give in to the temptation to wear sweatpants and an old t-shirt because you're working from home. However, your colleagues and customers expect you to have a professional appearance. Dress for your video conference the way you would for an in-person meeting.

Control video and audio quality.

Invest in a quality webcam and speaker and microphone headset. These provide better video and audio than your computer's built-in system. Try to hold meetings in quiet, indoor locations to control ambient noise.

Adjust your lighting.

Don't sit directly in front or beside a bright light source, or else all the audience sees is a bright light and a shadowy figure. Experiment with moving lamps and your camera until you can see your brightly-lit face on the screen.

Think about your background.

Try to provide a nice, plain background. If your treadmill is in your office and you use it more as a place to hang laundry, that's not really the best visual for your audience. You can't control everything in a mobile environment, but you should give some thought to background prior to your meeting.

Practice speaking to the camera and not the screen.

Our tendency is to look at the person on the screen, but you should look at the camera when you speak so the audience feels like you're talking directly to them.

Optimize.

Sharing. Generally DO NOT select "Share Your Desktop" (unless you want every pop-up email and private message on display for your audience!). Instead, open up any relevant documents before the call and share only those during the meeting. Note that when you share, most video conference apps prioritize the shared item to the bandwidth. This can reduce the other video feeds' quality, so don't share longer than necessary.

Practice hosting. Most video conference apps are very easy to use, but a live video conference with a customer is not the time to explore its features. Make video appointments with internal employees and friends to get used to using the app. Practice scheduling and inviting people to meetings. Learn how to mute and unmute audience members and re-assign the host role.

Bandwidth and signal. If you can afford it, increase your bandwidth. If you are wireless, try to remain close to the wireless router and consider installing a signal booster in areas of low signal strength. When you have the option, choose wired (instead of wireless) for video conferencing.

During your meeting:

Mute your microphone when necessary.

Most video conference apps have a “Mute Microphone” option that cuts down on ambient feedback for the audience. When there is a lot of back-and-forth discussion you will turn this off, but you should mute yourself when listening to a presenter.

Use the app’s chat function.

You can send a question or statement to everyone or privately to a participant.

Think about your actions on camera.

Always remember that everyone can see you. Someone is watching as you take a big, wide-mouth yawn, stretch, or wander around the room. These exaggerated movements are distracting to the audience and can be disruptive to the speaker. Try to stay still and be attentive – or at least act attentive!