

Practical Tips for Being On-Camera Remotely

Purpose	Practical Tips for Being On-Camera Remotely serves as a reference for researchers as they participate in online meetings, presentations, interviews, panel discussions, and conferences. It provides guidance for participating and being recorded remotely with video and audio. Quality video and audio matter in communicating effectively when research findings are being shared with end users, and this resource presents some best practices.
Format	These guidelines cover three overarching areas—Technology, Environment, and Presentation—each providing a variety of tips to consider.
Audience	This document is designed for researchers. The general public also can use this resource as a reference to help them prepare to participate on-camera remotely for online events and recordings.

About the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center

The Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC) is a national center operated by the [American Institutes for Research](#)® (AIR®) that translates health information into easy-to-understand language and formats for patients with spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, and burn injury and their families and caregivers. The center reviews and synthesizes current research, publishes articles and technical reports, develops knowledge translation tools, and creates patient and family resources to inform clinical practice. The center website, [MSKTC.org](#), houses all of this information for public access.

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Technology

Opportunities for presenting your research findings in remote settings have increased. Meetings, presentations, interviews, panel discussions, and conferences are conducted regularly online. You quite likely will be responsible for conditions in the remote environment that differ from those in face-to-face settings. Having the right technology will help you look and sound your best when you are engaging in online events and being recorded remotely. Below are tips to optimize your video and audio quality so you can communicate your work effectively online.

- Use a laptop or desktop computer rather than a tablet or smartphone that is connected to the internet through a cable (e.g., Ethernet) rather than Wi-Fi (or wireless). If being wired to the internet is impossible, try to have your computer as close to the Wi-Fi router as possible for the strongest signal.
- Use a fast internet connection if you can (i.e., more than 75 megabits per second or 75 mbps). Avoid using a shared internet connection (e.g., libraries or coffee shops), because the speed will be slow and possibly unreliable for video use.
- If possible, use a landline phone instead of computer audio (also known as voice over internet protocol [VOIP]), so in the event of internet connectivity issues, you can still carry on with the audio portion of your presentation. Related to that advice, always keep a hard copy of your slides and/or notes handy so that you can continue your presentation without the need to refer to them electronically. Consider sending your final slides and other related materials in advance to participants in case they also experience internet issues.
- Close all software running on your computer except for the platform software you will be using and/or your web browser, if needed. This will help reduce the amount of internet bandwidth your computer is using and may improve your video and audio quality.
- Position your laptop or web camera at eye level so that you aren't looking down into the camera (e.g., stacking books or a short stand works well). This will prevent your face from being distorted because of the camera angle and will help eliminate shadows under your neck and eyes.
- Use an external USB web camera that plugs into your computer (not the one built into your laptop). An external camera can be positioned easily, and some types can even be mounted on desktop tripod stands typically used for regular cameras.

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- Use an external USB microphone rather than the built-in microphone of your computer. Computer microphones are of low quality and will pick up background noise and make your audio sound “tinny.” External microphones can be self-standing or be mounted on a tripod stand, or, depending on your needs, you also might consider using a USB headset, which has a microphone closer to your mouth and is of a much better quality. Note: Many external USB webcams already have a built-in microphone that will work well, so if you are using an external webcam, you may not need another microphone.
- Test your technology before using it in an actual event or recording. Use the technology in a “dry run,” recording yourself and viewing the recording for both video and audio quality.

Environment

Even with the proper technology, you will want to ensure that the area around you is quiet and well lit. Here are some best practices to consider:

- Use a lamp or some other light source off to your side to illuminate your face properly. White (or cool) light is usually better and more flattering than warm light that may cast a yellow tint, although you may need to experiment with different types of lighting depending on your skin tone (i.e., light skin needs warmer light and dark skin needs cooler light).
- Sitting next to a window (with the light shining on one side of your face) can work if the light from it is not too bright. This will prevent shadows on your face and under your chin.
- Never sit with your back to a window or strong light source as that will cast you into shadow and will distract your audience.
- Use a white wall, sheet, or piece of cardboard or white foam sheet opposite your light source (i.e., a lamp or a window) to balance the light and more fully illuminate your whole face.
- Pay attention to your background to ensure nothing shows on camera that you do not want people to see in your home or office.
- If possible, consider positioning yourself with a wall to your back, but not so close as to cast a shadow behind you, or use a sheet as a backdrop. An uncluttered bookcase or some other office-like background can work as well.
- Avoid using virtual backgrounds (e.g., some platforms such as Zoom support virtual backgrounds). Virtual backgrounds are prone to unsightly video artifacts, particularly if you are moving about on-camera, and may cause you to phase in and out of video. Virtual backgrounds also can be distracting to the viewer.

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- If you are one of several presenters, consider coordinating with other presenters so that your backgrounds are similar (e.g., plain background, an organization branded background).
- Position yourself in a quiet room or setting to help eliminate background noise.
- Place a blanket or towel on your desk or table (and under your laptop or computer and microphone if needed and appropriate) to help improve the room acoustics. The blanket will help reduce an echo, which can occur when your voice bounces off the walls and ceiling.
- Do a test of your video, audio, and lighting with another person for their opinion, preferably using the same platform you will use for your event so that you can see and hear how your presentation looks and sounds and make any necessary adjustments.

Presentation

What you wear, how you look, and how you present your content matter. Here are some best practices to consider:

- Avoid prints and basic black and/or white. Wear solid colors, but be sure they do not blend into the background (e.g., white shirt on white background).
- Avoid wearing jewelry that may cause noise as you move or may be shiny and reflect light or cause light flares.
- Check yourself in a mirror to make sure that you look your best: Hair is combed and neat; makeup (if applicable) is touched up; and clothing is orderly (e.g., tie is synched and centered; buttons are aligned; zippers are closed; jacket sits well on shoulders).
- If you need hardcopy notes available, place them in front of you on the table or desk. Notes under or next to the camera will prevent you from making eye contact with the camera and thus with your audience. Some platforms show your notes next to your slides in presenting modes, reducing the need for hardcopies.
- If you have multiple cameras (e.g., one on your laptop and one on a monitor) be sure that the camera that shows you facing forward is activated.
- If you are sharing slides or other media on your computer, be sure to look up at the camera occasionally while you work through your talking points.
- Speak clearly and simply, keeping your audience in mind. Avoid jargon and acronyms unless you explain them first.

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- When responding to a question, you might restate part of the question for the audience in your response. For example, when answering the question “What is your favorite color?” you should say: “My favorite color is blue” rather than simply “Blue.” Also, read aloud questions that are posed in the chat, because participants may not have video access and doing so will help them understand the flow of the conversation better.
- Try to condition yourself to not say things like “um,” “uh,” and “like” between thoughts or sentences. Avoiding the use of such fillers will sound more polished.
- Keep water nearby so you can stay hydrated and avoid the “tick” sound that happens when your mouth is dry.