

Videoconferencing Etiquette and Meeting Tips

Compiled by Alan Hecht, Stephanie Janson, and Carol McQuiggan

A videoconference is simply another type of meeting and all typical meeting rules still apply – be on time, pay attention, supply everyone with the same information going into the meeting, bring (or send) enough materials for everyone. However, with this type of long distance meeting, the conditions at one end can greatly affect the meeting experience at the other end. Here, then, are tips on videoconferencing etiquette.

Before the meeting

Supply participants with the agenda. The agenda and other pertinent meeting material should be emailed to all participants at least a day before the meeting. Other handouts should be mailed to the remote sites in advance. Web site links need to be shared so the remote sites can bookmark and access them during the meeting.

Plan to wear the right clothes. Neutral or muted colors, such as medium blues or light pastels help the camera focus more easily. Avoid wearing clothing with very intense colors – reds tend to bleed on the screen, whites may glare, and black absorbs the light. Avoid bold, complex or busy patterns like small checks or narrow stripes in clothing, scarves, or neckties – they can affect the camera's ability to focus and lower picture clarity.

Prepare presentation materials. For the document camera, use landscaped format with a wider margin, 1 ½" on all sides, since sides will be slightly cut off and need to fit in a 3 X 4 ratio. The font should be a 24 pt. or larger simple font, such as Helvetica, for the body of text and 36 pt. bold or larger for headings. Use concise, bulleted information with simple graphics and few words. Use no more than 4 to 6 words per line, 6 lines per page. Save lengthy text for handouts. The best colors are black print on pastel paper, or yellow print on blue paper for a clear, readable image. Avoid black print on white paper and avoid reds, oranges, and pinks – they may bleed when projected. Also avoid the use of glossy or shiny materials.

Just prior to the meeting

Reduce environmental noise. Turn off fans, close windows and doors, mute cell phones and beepers, lower volume on office telephone and computer alert sounds for incoming mail and instant messages. Microphones can intensify these normal sounds.

Use the camera presets. You can preset different camera views to focus on different people/speakers. Fill the screen as much as possible with people rather than the table, chairs, walls, floor, ceiling, and especially ceiling lights.

Follow the elbows and wrists rule. When you stretch out your arms, the edge of the screen should fall between your elbows and wrists. Ten percent of the picture area should be left above the heads.

Adjust the lighting. Do not turn down lights too much as cameras do best with the most amount of light. The wall behind you should be darker than your face to avoid back-lighting, which would put your face in a shadow.

Mute the microphone. The microphone should remain muted until the videoconference starts or until you wish to speak.

Beginning the meeting

Use introductions. Introduce all participants at the host site, and then the remote site. Move the camera as you do the introductions so the participants can be seen and heard.

During the meeting

Maintain eye contact. The remote sites should remain focused in the camera's direction, avoiding shifts in attention – looking out the window, multi-tasking, etc. It is important to maintain eye contact by looking at the camera when speaking. The host site's participants should consider the camera as another person and look at it during their discussions.

Mute the microphone. The remote sites should keep their microphone muted until they wish to speak.

Use your normal voice to speak strongly and clearly. Because of the one second audio delay, use a brief pause between speakers to assure the full audio signal has been transmitted. When many people are speaking at once, it is difficult for remote participants to discern the conversation. Repeat questions or comments to be sure that the remote sites heard them. Allow time for others to answer or to make comments. Often, the individuals at the remote sites will wait to see if someone in the host location has a comment or answer to the question before they will respond. Do not feel that you need to address the remote participants individually, but use a blanket "Does anyone else have anything to add?" with a pause long enough to accommodate them. However, when asking a question to a specific remote participant, identify them by name first, and then ask the question so they have a chance to turn off their mute and respond. Two people cannot speak at the same time – try to avoid interrupting. If the remote participants are having difficulty making themselves heard, simply say the word "comment" or "question" so the host site can give you a chance to respond.

Limit side conversations. As with any meeting, try to limit distracting side conversations.

Be aware of the microphone placement. The microphone can magnify sounds that are normal for a meeting. Be careful not to put papers or other objects on them. Do not rustle papers or tap on the microphone or table.

Keep body movements to a minimum. Avoid distracting movements like swaying, rocking, or pacing. Move and gesture in a fluid, natural way.

Restore eye contact after an audio visual presentation. After a PowerPoint presentation or document sharing, restore eye contact with the remote sites.

Use a document camera for on-the-fly writing. Do not use the chalkboard or whiteboard, but use a document camera with a nice sized marker to make the writing as readable as possible for the remote sites.

Use instant messaging. IMing could be utilized to inform the sites of audio or video difficulties, and for quick comments.

Ending the meeting

Allow time to end the meeting. Allow approximately five minutes for a meeting wrap up and goodbyes. Review action items and confirm the next meeting date.

Resources:

Etiquette and Tips for a Successful Videoconference

<http://www.hbg.psu.edu/iit/mw2/etiquette.htm>

Internet Videoconferencing: Coming to Your Campus Soon!

<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EQM0043.pdf>

Tips and Techniques for Successful Video Conferencing

http://www.att.com/conferencing/tips_vid.html

Video Etiquette

<http://www.edtech.wednet.edu/resources/videoconferencing/k20video/etiquette/etiquette.html>

Videoconferencing Communication Skills

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/vidconf/communication.html>

Videoconferencing Tips for Meeting Participants

http://www.louisville.edu/it/itis/distance/tips_sprint.html

Videoconferencing Etiquette Cheat Sheet

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	Hosting site	Remote sites
Before the meeting		
• Supply participants with agenda/handouts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Plan to wear the right clothes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Prepare presentation materials	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	if presenting
Just prior to the meeting		
• Reduce environmental noise	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Use camera presets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	if available
• Follow elbows and wrists rule	for presenters	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Adjust the lighting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Mute the microphone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Beginning the meeting		
• Use introductions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
During the meeting		
• Maintain eye contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Mute the microphone	when not speaking	when not speaking
• Use your normal voice – strong and clear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Use a brief pause between speakers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Repeat questions or comments to be sure that the remote sites heard them	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Allow time for others to answer or to make comments	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Two people cannot speak at the same time - avoid interrupting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Limit side conversations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Be aware of microphone placement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Keep body movements to a minimum	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Restore eye contact after an audio visual presentation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
• Use instant messaging	with remote sites	with hosting site
• Use document camera for on-the-fly writing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ending the meeting		
• Allow time for wrap up and goodbyes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>