

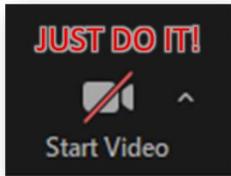
Upping Your Game in Zoom

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The pandemic forced countless tech-tardy lawyers to embrace work-from-home solutions, particularly videoconferencing tools like the easy-to-use Zoom.¹ It's been tough. Some advocates became reluctant kittens while others still struggle to master the mysteries of "unmute." Yet a year on, lawyers and judges handle Zoom meetings well. Zoom and its ilk of conferencing apps have helped us see how much productivity we cede to commuting, parking, metal detectors, in-person hearings and business travel. Even when it's safe to return, many won't go back to old, wasteful ways.

Videoconferencing is here to stay, and a long year of pandemic has left us weary of looking up noses and barely audible audio. It's time to shift from makeshift adaptations to permanent solutions and up your game in Zoom.



1. Turn on your camera. Sometimes our appearances or surroundings make us reluctant to be visible; but when we aren't seen, we aren't fully heard or understood. A talking head is more engaging than a disembodied voice; gesture, facial expressions and even the limited body language of a Zoom call bolster your content and credibility. So, turn on your camera, it makes a big difference.

2. Invest in a capable external camera. Many laptop cameras are poorly situated or have insufficient resolution to deliver a sharp, well exposed image. Trying to type while keeping the camera trained at eye-level is nearly impossible. Instead, invest in a quality webcam camera with a minimum 1080p resolution that solidly attaches to a tripod or other support putting the lens at eye level. I like the \$100 Logitech C922, but less costly cameras will markedly improve your appearance and supply a backup microphone should your primary mic fail.



L A M B

- Lighting
- Angle
- Microphone
- Background



Put an end to Baaaaaaad Zoom calls!

You can remember the next four tips with the mnemonic **LAMB** for **L**ighting, **A**ngle, **M**icrophone, **B**ackground.

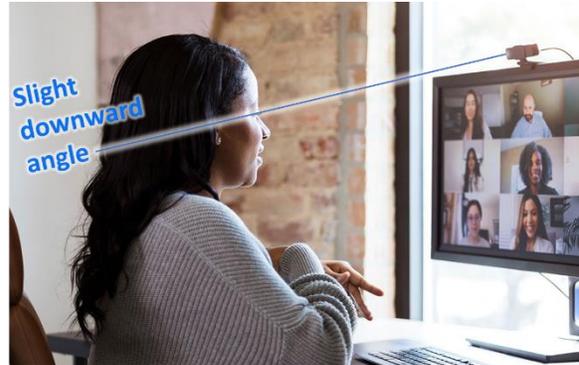
3. Lighting: Strive for soft, even lighting. Most home and office lighting make for a ghastly appearance on Zoom, producing harsh shadows or leaving callers looking washed out or ominous. When a bright light source like an exterior window is behind a Zoom caller, others see a sinister silhouette. Orienting yourself to face a window helps on sunny days, but the best approach is to set up sources of light that softly and evenly illuminate your face. A pair of desk lamps on either side of the camera can work, but a modest investment in a ring light (\$25), soft box (\$40) or a pair of dimmable LED panels (\$40) goes a long way to making you look your best. Hint: Use your cell phone camera in selfie mode to confirm that the lighting is right.



For those occasional situations where the lighting is wrong, you can compensate using Zoom's Adjust for Low Light setting in *Settings>Video*.

4. Angle: Place your camera just above eye-level.

The simplest way to up your game in Zoom is to ensure that your camera is slightly above your eye-level and *never* below your level gaze. If you're using a laptop camera, place the laptop on a sturdy box or books to raise the sight line. Whatever you do, don't position your camera so that callers look up your nose or see a ceiling fan spin behind you. If you must type while you Zoom and can't raise your laptop, revisit tip 2 above about the benefits of investing in an external camera.



5. Microphone: Get a good one. Laptop microphones do a decent job of capturing your voice, but they also capture your typing and ambient noise. In some rooms, laptop mics make you sound like you're in a barrel. The superior approach is to use a dedicated, quality microphone situated close to your mouth. Many swear by earbuds and headsets, but for my money, a Blue Snowball or Yeti cardioid condenser microphone (\$90) on an articulating arm (\$25) is ideal. Not only will your voice come through loud and clear, you'll look like a radio host!



Zoom offers users the ability to suppress background noise in *Settings>Audio*. Use this feature sparingly and only when necessary as it tends to muddle your voice while eliminating ambient sounds.

6. Background: Add a green screen. Hats off to those whose orderly homes and offices supply lovely, static tableaux of books and tasteful art as their Zoom backgrounds. For the rest of us, cluttered shelves and household traffic necessitate the use of green screens or virtual backgrounds to keep the focus on what we say, not how we live. A greenscreen—just a green cloth hung behind your chair—allows you to display an image or video as your background during a Zoom Meeting. If your computer has a late model processor (*e.g.*, Intel i5 or later), Zoom supports virtual backgrounds without use of a green screen, although many find the effect odd when their hands disappear if brought too close to the camera. In my Zoom room, a muslin greenscreen hangs on a drapery rod to be easily deployed or stowed between meetings. A 6'x9' greenscreen with its own stand costs about \$45, or you could attach a \$20 greenscreen panel to the back of your chair.



Settling on a favorite background is a fun challenge. I like to change my background to suit the meeting or my mood; but most lawyers gravitate to a photo of a striking conference room or reception area—either their own or a stock photo. Images of 1280 x 720 pixels or 1920 x 1080 pixels work best.

As a privacy feature, Zoom added the ability to blur your real background to its February 2021 release (*Settings>Backgrounds & Filters>Blur*).

7. Test your audio and know how to mute and unmute. “Can you hear me now?” If that weren’t already a wireless provider’s tagline, it would be perfect for Zoom. I can’t count the number of teleconferences where participants can’t be heard because they haven’t tested their audio before joining. It takes just seconds to check your audio in Zoom: simply go to *Settings>Audio>Test Speakers* and *Settings>Audio>Test Mic*.

Don’t be the person who delays and disrupts meetings because you’re challenged by mute and unmute. Microphones pick up all the noise around you—indoors and out—so whether it’s a barking dog or keyboard clicks, it’s good Zoom etiquette to mute your mic when others are speaking and know how to quickly unmute when you wish to be heard. This is especially important when making objections in Zoom trials. Toggling the mute button on the Zoom menu bar is the best-known method, but you can also use Alt+A on your Windows keyboard (⌘+Shift+A on a Mac). A useful shortcut is to enable the option “Press and hold SPACE key to temporarily unmute yourself,” allowing you to use the spacebar on your keyboard like a push-to-talk key when Zooming. This option is found near the end of the *Settings>Audio* panel.



8. Use your full name in Zoom. The judge or an opponent should be able to readily pair a Zoom caller with the caller’s full name. Consider adding “Plt’s Counsel” or “for Def. Acme” after your name to make things easier. If you right click on your name onscreen, you can edit it.

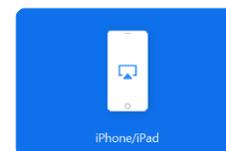
PRO TIPS!

Now that you look and sound great on Zoom calls, consider other Zoom uses to up your game.

Videoconferencing made higher education possible in the pandemic, and without Zoom, judicial proceedings would have ground to a halt. I use PowerPoint whenever I teach or present in court, and Zoom’s Share Screen feature does a splendid job of allowing me to display PowerPoint slides. Zoom’s *Share Screen>Advanced>PowerPoint as Virtual Background* feature even lets me put myself into the slides like a television weathercaster.



A little-known Zoom option is the ability to share an iPhone or iPad screen in Zoom. (*Share Screen>iPhone/iPad*). I use this feature when I want a second or mobile Zoom camera or need a close-up of physical evidence. By turning on my iPhone or iPad camera and sharing its screen, I have an untethered camera. Likewise, I can use my iPad to manage, present and annotate documents. Anything you can see on your iPhone or iPad screen can be shared via Zoom. Imagine handing a shared iPad to a witness and allowing the witness to write and draw onscreen much as has always been done using whiteboards and pads in court. Of course, Zoom also natively supports its own shared whiteboard capability.



Initiating a legal hold for potentially relevant evidence used to require client site visits and deskside interviews. Zoom’s support for shared screens and remote control of a client’s mouse and keyboard is invaluable when identifying and collecting evidence in discovery, especially from mobile phones. Using software applications like [iMazing](#) or [CoolMuster Android Assistant](#) over a Zoom screen share, I work hand in hand with clients to locate and gather responsive text messages and photos. Zoom remote sessions and screen shares reduce the risk of relying too heavily on custodians to meet discovery duties by affording a practical means of oversight.

KEEP GOING

Personal computing, online research, the Internet and the Cloud all altered the practice of law, but they took years to take hold. Videoconferencing in the pandemic changed our law practice overnight. To their immense credit, a million American lawyers who'd never messed with cameras, mics and computers set aside technophobia and succeeded in acquiring videoconferencing skills to keep going. We can build on that achievement and do better, not just upping our games in Zoom, but fearlessly embracing other forensic technologies—like competency in electronic discovery—that will allow us to serve our clients more effectively, efficiently and at lower cost.

OTHER RESOURCES

Security in Zoom isn't the pressing concern it was as Zoom has implemented many security features it once lacked. For tips on securing Zoom meetings, see <https://craigball.net/2020/03/23/protect-your-meetings-from-zoom-bombers/>.

For a 'cheatsheet' of Zoom keyboard shortcuts, see <https://craigball.net/2020/03/14/zoom-cheat-sheet/>.

¹ Zoom (www.zoom.us) is a videoconferencing tool akin to competitive products Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and GoToMeeting. Zoom allows users to hear and see one another, participate by voice call, make presentations, chat, share screens and deploy a whiteboard. Meetings can be recorded and secured to limit entry to only authorized participants. Though specific to Zoom, the tips offered here will up your game in any videoconferencing application.