Home Recording Best Practices

There’s a pretty good chance you’ll be using Zoom for meetings and/or recording videos for one reason or another while we’re working from home. You might even need to record a voiceover for a video. Don’t hesitate to contact me via email if you have any questions or if you’d like me to edit some footage for you. Here are some tips that will set you up for success.

Always have the camera (laptop, cellphone, or otherwise) steady while you’re recording. Your hands may feel steady but the video will end up shaky. If you are shooting video on a cellphone, always shoot in the horizontal orientation unless the content is exclusively for social media.

Conference call and self-shot video recording best practices:

- When was the last time you cleaned off the camera on your computer or phone? Give that area of the screen a wipe with a soft cloth and I bet your video will look better than it would have before the cleaning.
- Position your camera slightly above your eye line. You can use a stack of books or anything else stable and handy to get the camera higher. This is much more flattering than having the camera point up at your face from below. Also, you do not need to fill up the entire frame with your face. Sit back from the camera so that the frame includes the top of your shoulders and has a little bit of room above your head. Remember that a recorded video has the potential to last... forever.
- ***This step is very important for any self-shot video but does not apply to general Zoom calls.*** If you are recording a video of yourself speaking, do not hit record and immediately start talking. Take a moment to pause and reset your posture after hitting record. The same applies on the other end. When you are finished speaking and ready to stop recording, hold for a moment before reaching for the mouse or keyboard. This will create better transitions and look more professional.
- Test your video before a meeting or recording. Go to the Settings menu in Zoom (looks like a gear in the top right of the main page). Click Video. Try the “Touch up my appearance” feature to see if you like it. What you’re seeing on the screen acts as a light source and is reflected back on your face. If it is too bright, find a way to darken your screen. I usually work with my screen’s brightness at or near full power, but this will probably blow out your skin tones. Adjust your monitor’s brightness until you’re easily seen but not blown out. This will, of course, vary by skin tone.
- For a little extra lighting, I have a desk lamp with adjustable brightness. If you have something like this, try positioning it on your “good side” just off-camera for a little added fill light. You can also face a window for some nice soft light, but don’t position yourself with a window directly at your back.
- **Wear what you might’ve worn to work. Ask yourself, “Does this need to be ironed?”. This helps establish a working mindset, but it’ll also help you look professional.**
- Free your background of mess and distractions. I have a couple of boxes in my office that I move out of sight when I’m on a Zoom call and I move them back when I’m done. No one will see the mess on the other side of the camera if you need to move clutter from the background to the other side of the camera. You could also use a UGS Zoom background: https://bit.ly/ugs-zoom-bg
- A flat, single-colored wall can be fine for a backdrop but it can come off looking a bit drab (and even veer into hostage video territory). If this is for your average meeting, go ahead. But if you’re recording a video for a wider audience, try something else. Consider using a nice corner of your home or apartment for the backdrop. For a professional look, tidy up your home office (if you have one—if you don’t, you can fake it and no one will know).

Recording high-quality audio:

- Your phone will probably work fine but if you have something better, go ahead.
- Make sure you have a quiet space for recording. You’ll be surprised at what gets picked up in the background that you might not account for. Turn off or get away from your A/C or overhead fan, make sure any pets or kids are away from your recording space, and put your phone on do not disturb.
- A closet with clothing or other soft material is probably the best place to record in your house. The material will absorb the sound much like a recording studio with foam insulation on the walls. You might sound good singing in the shower but that’s not a good place to record audio.
- If you’re reading from a script on paper, place the page on a flat surface. If you’re holding the sheet, the microphone will likely pick up the paper rustling.

Recording a video on your cellphone:

- The first thing to know is that you need to record your video in the horizontal orientation.
- Unlike laptops or desktop computers, the phone will need a bit more stabilization. Make sure the phone is propped up on something stable. Check the look of your frame before recording.
- Most of the tips from the Zoom section are applicable here.

File format:

Recording a Zoom session is easy. Just open a new session or join a meeting if you’re recording with others. Press record at the bottom of the video screen and stop the recording or end the meeting to finish the recording. This may vary for you, but when a recording is finished, it goes into a folder in Documents~>Zoom. I will need the .mp4 file provided in a folder at that location. If you’re recording a bit of audio on your phone, just send me the audio file in whatever format you have.