

Virtual meeting etiquette — what is and isn't ok a year later?



At the beginning of the pandemic, virtual meeting etiquette and norms were still unclear to many. However, it's 2021, and virtual meetings are still going strong thanks to COVID-19 and continued remote work for many employees. The shift to online work happened so quickly that you might still be wondering, am I doing this right?

We've all been there — stuck on another video call and wondering what exactly is appropriate. Should you open up that bag of chips? Is it ok to drink your coffee? Put your feet up on the desk? Do you have to turn on your camera just because everyone else has? Do you really have to put on dress clothes and clean up your office?

Many of the same rules of etiquette apply to a virtual meeting that would apply to one in the office. Being prompt, making eye contact with the speaker, and paying attention will go a long way to making the meeting a success.

But how do you ensure your Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams video meetings stand out, make an impact, and avoid any faux-pas?

Learn the features of the platform you're using

Hosts and participants alike should familiarize themselves with the platform being used. How do you set a background? Where is the mute button? How do you turn the camera on and off? Doing so will ensure you're not fumbling around with the tech when it's time to get started or throughout the meeting.

Join early

Without fail, if you try to jump on your call right at the start time, technical difficulties will pop up. Hop on at least 5 minutes early, or more if you are hosting. If you've never used the platform before, be sure to give yourself time for any downloads that might be necessary.

If you are hosting, set a plan

In-person meeting etiquette and virtual meeting etiquette aren't that different in many cases. Like in-person meetings, your participants want to know what will happen during the video call, so set an agenda. Let anyone who needs to present know ahead of time so they can prepare.

Above all else, maintain momentum and stay on track as much as possible. As the meeting host, you also act as a moderator during the virtual meeting. Be sure to keep the conversation focused on the matter at hand so it doesn't become a meeting that could have been an email.

Get dressed

Everyone will know if you are wearing your pajamas. Give your best shot at dressing professionally yet comfortably. If you wouldn't go into the office with uncombed hair and wearing your favorite college t-shirt, be sure to step it up before your video chat too. We've all seen the video meeting wardrobe mishaps, and you don't want that to happen to you.

Invite only those who are essential to the meeting

Being respectful of others' time is important in the office and when working virtually. Just because you can invite someone to a Zoom call doesn't mean you should. Focus on inviting those who are essential and sending the meeting notes to those who would benefit from being in the loop. Also, keep in mind that fewer participants can make the meeting run smoother from both a technical and conversational perspective.

Introduce the participants

Ensure that all participants have a chance to be introduced and welcomed. This is good etiquette normally, but even more so in a virtual meeting where it's harder to introduce yourself to others beforehand. One way to do that is to use the waiting room feature if the platform you are using has one. Just as you wouldn't let colleagues sit through an in-person meeting without an introduction, we shouldn't do so on video calls either. Give everyone a chance to say who they are and what they do.

Eat before the meeting

Watching someone eat on video isn't very appealing. Try to limit snack and mealtime to before or after your call. On the other hand, it is generally acceptable to sip your coffee or water during video meetings.



Clean your workspace and stage your video area

If you aren't going to use a background during your call, make sure you have a clear work area and a clean space behind you. Check to see what is in the background of your camera — and remove anything inappropriate or distracting. Make sure your lighting is working well, too. Facing a well-lit window works wonders, or even putting a lamp near your camera can help. In general, you need a lot of light for video calls, so turn on those lamps and get a ring light for your camera if needed.

Look at the camera, and adjust it if it is too high or too low

Your camera should be at eye level, but you might have to get creative to raise it to a better position if you are using a built-in camera on a device. There are many solutions available and products to purchase that will raise your device to the correct height. This will allow you to avoid those distorted views offered by a camera that's at the wrong angle.

Mute yourself if you aren't talking

We know many people are working remotely with a full house of loved ones and beloved pets. This juggling act means there's sometimes background noise. Still, mistakes like this were more forgivable early on, and the expectation to understand virtual meeting etiquette is a bit higher.

—Put yourself on mute to avoid embarrassing slip-ups or dogs barking in the background. Also, don't forget to un-mute yourself when you start talking!



Avoid distractions

This one might seem impossible given the pandemic, but do your best to avoid distractions. Arrange for someone else to oversee the virtual schooling, let the dog out, or manage anything that might pop up during the meeting. If that isn't possible, do what you can to prep everyone that you'll be on a call for a time. Set up a signal with your kids, so you know if they have an emergency or can wait a bit. Close your door if you can.

If you are hosting, you should be the last one to leave

Once the host leaves, most platforms shut down the video call. To avoid the issue of cutting off someone's final thoughts, be sure to wait until all others have left the meeting before shutting things down.

Many companies are considering long-term remote work, even after the pandemic passes. It's a good idea to perfect your video call etiquette and train your staff on best practices, as it doesn't look like those Zoom meetings are going anywhere any time soon.

Additional Resource: Taking meeting minutes for a virtual meeting? Consider a few of [these best practices](#).