



Columbia
Law School

Instructions for Filming From Home

As we continue to adapt to the current public health situation, video can be a fantastic tool for staying connected and engaging with your community. These basic guidelines will help you film compelling, high-quality videos of yourself from your home using tools you already have on hand.

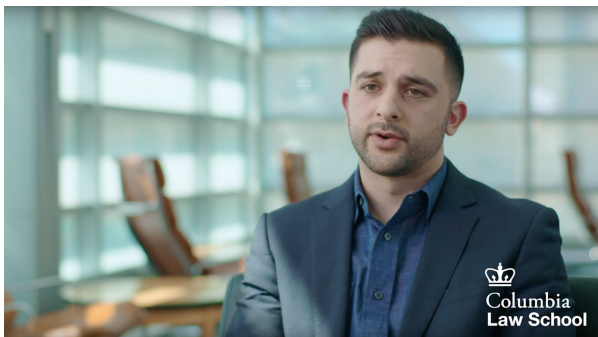
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SETTING YOUR SCENE

Whether you're using a video camera, smartphone, or laptop, there are a few simple steps you can take to make sure you're capturing clean, clear footage. You can also use these scene-setting tips to help light and frame Zoom video calls.

Background

- Make sure your subject—you, in this case—is the main focus of the frame. Avoid backgrounds that are overly busy or include a lot of extraneous motion. Whenever possible, ensure that other people's faces are not in view.
- If you're filming in front of a flat wall, sit far enough away to avoid casting shadows behind you.
- If you have space, you can add depth to your shot by sitting or standing in front of corners. This will draw the viewer's eye to your subject.



DO add depth to your shot by filming in front of a corner.



DON'T sit too close to a flat wall; it can cast distracting shadows.

Lighting

- The best at-home lighting is daylight. Try to position yourself facing a window (or set up a light if daylight isn't an option) with your face pointing about three-quarters of the way toward the light.
- Make sure that there are no bright lights behind your head, like windows, lamps, or even a sunlit wall.
- Avoid overhead lights if possible. They can cast unflattering shadows on your face.



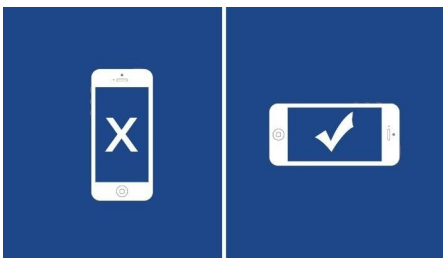
DO position yourself in front of a window, facing the light.



DON'T have a bright light behind your head.

Framing

- If you're using a smartphone, make sure you're recording in landscape orientation (horizontal).
- Rest your camera on a flat surface to ensure that the frame isn't off kilter or at a weird angle. Keep the horizon line level.
- Position the camera at eye level. When speaking to the camera, you should be looking straight ahead toward the lens, not up or down.
- Leave some room between the top of your head and the top of the frame.
- You don't always have to be in the middle of the frame; sitting off center adds visual interest.



DO film video in landscape orientation.



DO position your camera at eye level and try sitting off center.

RECORDING YOUR VIDEO

Capturing Footage

- If you're filming on a smartphone, use the back camera, which records higher-quality footage than the front-facing "selfie" camera.
- Whenever possible, avoid handheld shots. If you don't have access to a tripod, you can prop your recording device on a stack of books, a window sill, etc. As long as your shot is steady and level, it should look great.
- **Always do a test shot:** Get in position, hit record, and say a sentence or two. Then watch the clip to make sure your visuals and audio are set up the way you want them.
- Wait three seconds after you hit record before you start speaking to ensure that your words don't get cut off. Similarly, when you're done speaking, wait three seconds before ending your recording.
- Speak slowly and clearly. You're doing great!

Capturing Audio

- Set yourself up in a quiet, preferably empty space to minimize unwanted background noise.
 - If you have to choose a well-lit room or a quiet room, prioritize the quiet room. It's important that viewers can hear what you're saying.
- If you're in a home with other people, let them know you're filming a video and ask that they remain quiet until you're finished.
- If you're filming on a smartphone, turn on Do Not Disturb so your phone doesn't buzz during your shoot. (And ask your housemates to do the same!)
- Be sure to switch off anything that could contribute to background noise, such as air conditioners, fluorescent lights, or clanky radiators.
- Remember: if you can hear it, the audience will hear it. If there's a dog barking outside or fire engines driving by, wait until the noise has subsided before continuing.

OTHER TIPS AND RESOURCES

- Whether sitting or standing, make sure your appearance is neat and tidy (clothes smoothed out) and your back is straight.
- Avoid clothes with thin stripes or busy patterns, which can cause feedback on camera.
- When in doubt, start your sentence over or rephrase as necessary. It's always better to have too much footage than not enough—if something feels unnatural, try saying it a few different ways.
- Powder or oil-blotting sheets are great tools to make sure your face doesn't appear too shiny on camera.
- Don't use the zoom function on a smartphone. It degrades the quality of the footage. If you want to get a closer shot, move your smartphone closer to your subject.
- Additional resources:

- [A Beginner's Guide to Taking Great Video on Your Phone](#)
- [How To Make Professional Videos \(At Home Without Pro Gear!\)](#)
- [The 7 Best Smartphone Video Editing Apps in 2019](#)
- [Shooting Video with an iPhone](#)
- [Everything You Need to Shoot Good-Looking Video With Your iPhone](#)
- [12 Simple Tips for Making Your Videos Look More Professional](#)
- [13 Videography Tips for More Professional-Looking Videos](#)
- [How to Look Your Best on a Webcam](#)