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2026 EDITION

№ 03

A PRACTICAL REFERENCE

How to look professional on *video calls.*

Framing, lighting, audio, and the small choices that build credibility on every call you take.

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START HERE

Why competent people still come across *poorly.*

Most people do not come across badly on video calls because they lack expensive gear. It usually happens because the frame is working against them. The camera sits too low, the background pulls focus, the light is behind them, or their eye-line makes them seem detached even when they are speaking well.

01

Judgement, not gear.

A good setup does not draw attention to itself. It removes distraction, supports trust, and lets the conversation land the way it should.

02

Small choices, big impression.

Camera height, eye-line, and the contrast between you and your background quietly shape credibility before you have said a word.

03

Even when silent, you are on.

On group calls, looking visibly engaged is part of the professional impression. One distracted face affects how the whole conversation reads.

04

The standard should not collapse.

Internal calls are the best place to practise. Better habits in low-stakes meetings show up automatically when the call really matters.

"

THE WORKING PRINCIPLE

Professionalism on video is not only about how you look when you are talking. It is about whether the whole visual experience feels considered.

№ 01

Framing is the first *credibility check.*

A common mistake on video calls is the incorrect application of the rule of thirds. The rule divides the frame into nine equal parts, creating a grid that guides where the points of interest should sit. Your eyes should align with the upper horizontal line.

The Grid
REFERENCE

Eyes on the Upper Third
AIM FOR

DON'T CROWD THE CAMERA

Sitting too close produces a cramped image that feels more intense than intended. It can also exaggerate distortion and make every movement feel larger than it should. Including your upper torso rather than only the face usually makes posture, gestures, and presence feel more balanced.

FRAME FOR THE CONVERSATION

Leave a small amount of headroom above the hairline and enough space across the shoulders so you do not feel boxed in. The face should sit comfortably in the upper portion of the frame without touching the top edge or floating in too much empty space.

№ 02

Get the laptop at *eye level.*

A weak camera angle can undermine a strong speaker surprisingly fast. When filming on a laptop, the screen tilt makes a big difference. A few tilts and angles to avoid, and a couple to aim for.

Screen Tilted Inwards
AVOID

Screen Tilted Outwards
AVOID

Screen Centred
AIM FOR

Raised on Books
AIM FOR

> **FIELD NOTE**
>
> If your laptop sits too low, the camera ends up peering up at the underside of your jaw. The fix is usually simple: a small riser, a stack of books, or a proper laptop stand. The aim is to bring the camera to roughly eye level, with the screen tilted very slightly back rather than dramatically up or down.

№ 03

Your background should remove *distraction*, not create it.

Backgrounds matter because people notice them even when they are trying not to. The goal is not to create a memorable setting. It is to remove visual doubt so the conversation stays central. A good background does not need to be impressive. It needs to be quiet.

TIDY FIRST, BLUR SECOND

If the space is controllable, a real background usually feels more credible and more natural than a software effect. Small distractions often become much more noticeable on camera than they seem in the room.

Blur is useful when you cannot tidy the space in time. It is often better than letting clutter compete with the speaker for attention. But on recorded or client-facing calls, a proper physical setup matters more.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

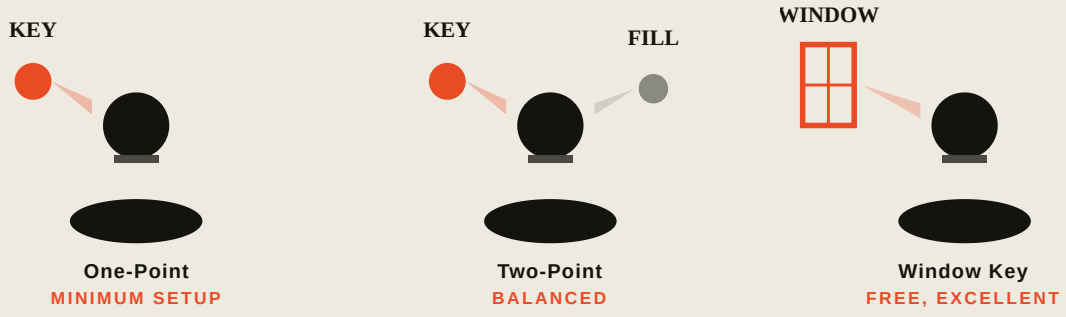
- Open doorways and corridors behind you
- Bright windows that blow out the exposure
- Bookshelves with strong horizontal lines
- Distinctive personal items in shot
- Pets, family, or housemates passing through
- Anything that moves while you are speaking

> **FIELD NOTE**
>
> Take a screenshot of your own preview before the call starts and look at it the way the other side will. Most distractions become obvious the moment you see the frame as a still image rather than a live mirror.

№ 04

Lighting is the *fastest* visible improvement.

If your face is underlit, the image immediately feels less clear and less engaging. The principle is straightforward: do not let yourself be filmed in the dark. Get light onto your face. Avoid sitting with a bright window or strong light directly behind you.



THE QUICK TEST

Sit in your usual call position and look at your preview. If you see strong shadows under your eyes, a bright halo behind you, or a face that disappears into the background, the lighting is working against you.

The fix is often just repositioning the laptop, facing the light more directly, or making a simple tweak before the meeting starts.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Window directly behind you (silhouette)
- Overhead light only (raccoon eyes)
- Mixed colour temperatures (orange and blue)
- Dim ambient light, no key on the face
- Light too close, blowing out one side

№ 05

Audio matters at least as *much* as video.

People will tolerate slightly imperfect video for longer than they will tolerate poor sound. If the audio is weak, hollow, inconsistent, or hard to follow, attention drifts quickly. That is why audio deserves as much attention as framing and lighting.

BUILT-IN MICS ARE THE WEAK LINK

Laptop microphones are convenient, but they rarely compete with a dedicated external option. If you are doing a lot of professional calls, it is worth considering a proper microphone that connects directly to your computer.

If you are often on the move, a wireless mic that pairs with your phone can make a major difference to clarity. This does not mean everyone needs a studio setup. It means audio is one of the smartest places to invest.

QUICK WINS BEFORE BUYING ANYTHING

- Choose a quiet room, away from traffic noise
- Turn off air conditioning or fans for the call
- Close windows facing busy streets
- Mute notifications on phone and desktop
- Avoid hard, echoey rooms with bare walls
- Use headphones to stop your speakers feeding back

> **FIELD NOTE**
>
> If you can only fix one thing before your next call, fix your audio. Good sound makes you easier to trust, easier to follow, and easier to stay with. A modest external microphone delivers more impression-shift than almost any other upgrade.

№ 06

Eye-line shapes how *trustworthy* you seem.

People focus on how they look and overlook how they appear to be paying attention. Looking off-axis from the webcam, even briefly, weakens the sense of connection. A better habit is to hold your gaze forward and return to the lens deliberately, especially when making a key point.

THE NOTES TRAP

The temptation to glance at a slide deck, a second monitor, or a printed page off to the side is strong. The audience feels that visual disconnect immediately, even if your words are good.

Keep notes brief and easy to glance at. For more presentation-heavy setups, hardware solutions exist that place notes closer to the lens so the presenter can maintain a more natural eye-line.

PRACTICAL HABITS

- Position notes directly under the webcam
- Keep the speaker view next to the camera
- Return to the lens when making key points
- Move full-screen video off second monitors
- Avoid reading long passages from below
- Stay still while listening, not just while speaking

> **FIELD NOTE**
>
> Group calls are where eye-line discipline matters most. If three or four people are on screen, it is not enough for each person to look good only when speaking. Everyone needs to remain visibly engaged throughout, or the whole conversation feels less coordinated.

№ 07

Multi-speaker calls need *consistency.*

When several people appear on the same professional call, the setup should be coordinated, not left to chance. The strongest multi-speaker conversations show visual consistency. People are framed at roughly similar scale. Lighting is broadly matched. No one is dramatically closer or farther than the rest.

WHAT COORDINATION LOOKS LIKE

That kind of coordination is subtle, but it helps a lot. It makes the conversation feel more intentional and better handled. The mismatch is often obvious in business calls: one person too close, another far away, another with very different lighting, another on weak audio.

If the call matters, it is worth aligning the basics across every participant before it begins.

THE PRE-CALL ALIGNMENT

- Similar shoulder-to-head framing across speakers
- Cameras at roughly the same height
- Comparable background tone, not wildly different
- Each participant tested their lighting
- Each participant tested their audio
- Internet connection confirmed stable

> **FIELD NOTE**
>
> If the call is high-stakes, send participants a one-page setup guide an hour before. Even a brief note about camera height, lighting, and audio can shift how the group reads on screen, and most people appreciate the prompt.

№ 08

Internal or external, the standard *holds.*

There is a real difference between a casual internal call and a recorded external one. The level of polish may change. The stakes may change. Your attire may change. The basics should not.

WHY INTERNAL CALLS MATTER

Internal calls are the best place to practise. If you get used to better framing, better eye-line, and more consistent engagement in low-stakes conversations, those habits are already there when the call really matters.

The opposite is also true. If you let standards slip in internal meetings, you will fall back on those defaults the moment a client appears.

INDIVIDUAL OWNERSHIP

If everyone is in one office, a brand can control the environment. The setup can be standardised in one place. That changes when people are joining from home, from other offices, or from different parts of the world.

At that point, each participant has to do their own due diligence: background, lighting, sound, and a stable connection. One weak link can interrupt the rhythm of an otherwise well-run conversation.

> **FIELD NOTE**
>
> Looking professional on video calls usually comes down to better judgement, not more equipment. A good setup does not draw attention to itself. It removes distraction, supports trust, and lets the conversation land the way it should.

QUICK REFERENCE

A simple checklist before *every call.*

Two minutes before the meeting starts, run through this list. None of it requires equipment you do not have. All of it changes how the call reads.

The two-minute pre-call check.

- [ ] Eyes near the upper third of the frame
- [ ] Breathing room around head and shoulders
- [ ] Background tidy or blurred
- [ ] Face is clearly lit
- [ ] Audio tested, voice sounds clear
- [ ] Notes positioned near the lens
- [ ] Internet connection stable
- [ ] Pre-flight screenshot taken
- [ ] Camera at roughly eye level
- [ ] Not too close to the lens
- [ ] Nothing distracting in frame
- [ ] No bright window directly behind you
- [ ] Notifications muted on phone and desktop
- [ ] Headphones on if needed
- [ ] Quiet room, no background noise
- [ ] Two minutes of breathing room before

Need a hand getting it right?

From recorded interviews and brand films to live streamed events, I help teams look credible on camera and keep their conversations central to every video they make.

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