

Taking the gloom out of Zoom:

Ten teleconferencing tips

It turns out, the class we all needed was “Lawyering by Zoom 101”.

It’s clear that remote meetings and videoconferencing are now a permanent part of the legal profession. But while online meetings bring benefits and convenience, they can also bring confusion and frustration.

We’ve summarized ten teleconferencing tips to help you be the best digital lawyer you can be.



1) Check your tech

You don’t need studio lighting and high-end audio-visual equipment for your personal computer, but a few basic steps will ensure you come across in the best manner.

- a) Place your camera at approximately eye-level. If you are using a laptop, this may require you to elevate the laptop above its usual position. When speaking, try to look at the camera. Positioning the on-screen video window directly below the camera’s placement can help create the appearance of eye contact while facilitating conversation.
- b) Use headphones to avoid audible echoes. If available, good quality headphones with built-in microphones will usually provide better sound quality than a laptop mic.
- c) Test the equipment and software. It’s a good idea to familiarize yourself with how to navigate software before jumping into a meeting, especially if you will be screen-sharing or hosting. Remember that Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Webex, and GoToMeeting have different features and interfaces that may require some initial test-runs.

you want to project. Different lawyers will have different views about what is proper business attire when videoconferencing.

Use a bookcase, artwork, or tidy shelf as a backdrop—avoid windows as they can be distracting and can negatively affect your lighting, making you difficult to see. A ring-light mounted behind your computer is a reasonably inexpensive way to ensure you are always fully visible in meetings.

Some video conferencing tools allow you to set a virtual background. If you’re going to do this, make sure your background is appropriate for your audience. (Alas, giving legal advice from outer space isn’t always a sure-winner.)

Finally, if you are working from a home shared with others, make sure they know you will be in a meeting and should not be disturbed. While an unexpected visit from a young child or adorable pet can often be the highlight of a meeting for those watching, it’s a good idea to alert others in advance if this may occur, in order to avoid surprise and embarrassment.



3) Prepare to share

Most video-conferencing programs allow users to share the contents of their screen with other attendees and may also allow joint annotation and other functions.

If you will be referring to documents during the meeting, or reviewing documents with a client, prepare in advance what you will and



2) Dress (and set-dress) to impress

When meeting with a colleague, a client, or attending an online court hearing, maintain a look that fits the situation and is consistent with the image



will not be screen-sharing. Remember to close any non-relevant windows or programs running in the background, as you probably don't want others to see the online shopping or cat videos you were looking at earlier.



4) Mute, mute, and mute

Nobody wants the conversation overtaken by the street sweeper outside your window. If you're not speaking, always mute. If you're hosting the meeting, or the host forgets to do so, remind everyone at the start that they should also mute their microphones if they're not speaking.

And then, when you inevitably forget to unmute yourself before making a brilliant point, try not to feel embarrassed when half-a-dozen people interrupt you to say "you're on mute."



5) Ensure confidentiality and security

When meeting with clients or discussing confidential information with colleagues, privacy is of utmost importance. If you are deciding *which* teleconferencing software to use, remember that not all video conferencing software provides the same security. Consider whether meetings will require true end-to-end encryption (which means even the software provider will not have access to the content of your conversation).

To avoid uninvited guests logging into your meeting and listening-in or causing disruption, require a password for entry (and don't post this password online). It's also a good idea to use a virtual waiting room where attendees will log in and wait until they are specifically granted access by the host.



6) Don't assume others know how to use the software

A client or colleague may not have used remote conferencing software in the past or may be unfamiliar with the specific software used by the host. If you expect to be arranging online meetings with new contacts, it's a good idea to prepare (or download, if one already exists) a brief step-by-step walkthrough of how to set-up any required software and access to the meeting, and provide those instructions (or a link) to every attendee in advance.



7) Set a (short) agenda

If you're hosting a meeting, it can sometimes be difficult to maintain everyone's attention and understanding. A clear and concise agenda, either outlined at the start of the meeting, or circulated in advance to all attendees, will keep the meeting on track and ensure all matters are dealt with efficiently and effectively.

Keep meetings short, if possible, but overestimate their expected length. If the meeting is expected to be long, remember to schedule breaks for everyone to briefly step away from their computers.



8) Confirm backup contact info

Technical difficulties are inevitable, which can prevent you (or others) from getting online and into the room at the scheduled time. Make sure you have backup contact information for the host so that you can alert them if you encounter a never-ending loading screen (or worse).

Similarly, if you're hosting the meeting, make sure the invitees have your contact information so they can let you know of any delays (or where they went if they suddenly disappear mid-meeting).



9) Summarize and memorialize, and/or record with written consent

At the end of the meeting, summarize what was discussed and any deliverables and follow-ups that are required. As always, if meeting with a client, remember to memorialize the meeting immediately after it ends and put any instructions received or advice given into writing.

In some cases, it may be helpful to record the whole meeting. If you intend to do so, it is helpful to obtain the written consent of those attending and confirm their consent at the start of recording.



10) Did we mention mute?

Seriously. If you're not speaking, hit that mute button. ■