

Using Your Webcam: Look and Sound Like a Pro

Webcams can be a valuable tool in a virtual classroom. Live video chat, or discussion groups with a webcam component, can provide an opportunity to attach faces to names and create a sense of community. In addition, including a webcam component to your virtual office or other course communications can help students connect with you as an instructor.

Consider using these tips to look and sound your best as you interact with your virtual class.

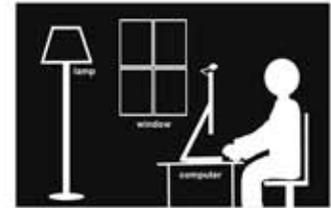
1 Use an Objective Eye

Take a moment to look at your webcam image as an objective viewer. Do you appear comfortable and relaxed? What will students see in the background? Is the location where you'll be conducting your webcasts relatively quiet? Choose a location for your webcam sessions that will be comfortable for you. Choose a background in that location that will not be distracting for your students.



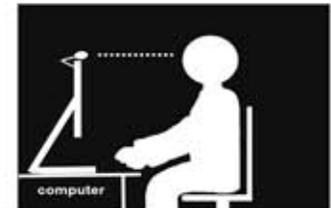
2 Put Yourself in the Best Possible Light

The closer you are to a source of light, the more impact it will have on your webcam image. Webcams can be sensitive to strong sources of natural and artificial light. Using a typical office as an example, lamps and windows would be common sources of strong lighting. If you are sitting in front of light sources such as these, the light they produce may overpower the image of you on the screen. The result is a loss in image detail and quality. Choose a location that minimizes the impact of strong light sources. Avoid sitting in front of windows, and turn off additional artificial lights if necessary. Light that is both even and flat, meaning light that is evenly distributed throughout a room, works best with webcams.



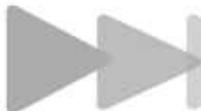
3 Keep the Webcam at Eye Level and Make Eye Contact

Position the webcam so the lens is at eye level. This will be more comfortable for you as you speak and look better to students viewing your webcast. It may not be possible to have the camera exactly at eye level in every situation, but avoid steep angles where you find yourself looking up or down at the camera. When addressing the webcam, look straight at the lens as much as possible. Keeping your focus on the webcam lens will help students feel as if you are talking directly to them. If you wear glasses, be careful to avoid a reflection from the computer screen or lights in the room.



4 Use a Microphone Whenever Possible

Using an external microphone, instead of your computer's internal microphone, will greatly improve the audio clarity and quality of your voice in an online discussion, virtual office, or class message. It will also reduce interference from external audio sources and help students hear you more clearly. Although headsets with microphones can be expensive, earbuds with a built-in microphone can be purchased for under \$10 at most department and electronics stores. These types of microphones use the headset input on your computer.



Common Mistakes to Avoid



Your glasses may reflect light from the computer or other light sources. This can be distracting.



Windows or other light sources can be overpowering if they are behind you.



Avoid looking up or down at the webcam. Keep it at eye level.