

THE MEETING HOUSE - TOP TIPS ON VIRTUAL ETIQUETTE

Whether you use Skype, Zoom, Google Hangout or some other program, a video call is almost like being in a meeting in person. There are certain expected behaviors and social norms that should be followed to help the group interaction be most successful. The ability to take perspective, understanding non-verbal body language and other important social pragmatics come into play. Here are 8 key reminders of etiquette for socializing with friends during our new age of virtual connection.

- 1) **Be Self-Aware:** You are always on camera and everyone can see you. Every minor thing from a head nod to a slight pick of the nose is being viewed. Be mindful of your facial expressions and the impact it may have on the other participants.
- 2) **Dress to Impress:** No, a suit and tie or dress are not necessary but doing a little more than rolling out of bed in your pajamas is necessary. This may be the right time to find a clean shirt and comb your hair. You always want to make sure to project your best self.
- 3) **Look 'em in the lens:** A secret to video calls is that looking into the camera is the equivalent of looking others in the eye — that's how you appear attentive on the other end. Position your camera close to where you'd naturally be looking on your screen. You don't have to be looking into it at all times, just like you don't need to make perfect eye contact the whole time while having a conversation. It should feel natural and not forced.
- 4) **Quiet Please:** Try to set up the computer in a quiet space to eliminate background noise. In a perfect world, you'd take video calls in a quiet room with a door that locks. But most likely you'll need to optimize the environment you got. The worst environment for video calls is a crowded living room with lots of background noise. If that's the best you can find, then remember to mute your computer when you are not speaking.
- 5) **Test your tech BEFORE the call:** Open your app ahead of time to check for any software updates, and try a test call or two to make sure everything's working with both your camera and your microphone. Nothing looks more amateur than running late while your 2009 MacBook reboots with a new Skype update, or logging in to a video conference and yelling "Can you hear me now?" like the 2011 Verizon ad that we all inevitably think of.
- 6) **Be Present:** If their camera is on, yours should be, too. Generally, if you're on a video call with friends or in a classroom setting, and their cameras are all on, it looks bad for you to leave yours off. Any choice you make about the camera reflects on your professional and personal image. If you have your camera turned off, we can only assume you are still in bed with the covers draped over your head. Be present and a part of the team.
- 7) **Backgrounds Matter:** Take a minute to clean up and make your background look neat. Before you join the call, look behind you. Please keep dirty laundry, tissues, and your old bowl of cereal out of the frame. A key thing to think about is lighting: People would prefer not to speak to a cave-dwelling troll, but if overhead light is too bright, you'll look like a zombie. Ideally, you want even, plentiful light coming from the side, not blasting into the camera. You may need to draw the window shades (or open them) to get it.
- 8) **It's a Wrap:** Don't forget that the mic and the camera are on, especially when it's over. Nothing is more embarrassing than thinking you've ended a video call, blurting out, "Well, we'll never hangout out with those losers," and then realizing the microphone is still on. Or throwing shade at a friend via video and then learning that they're listening on the other side. These are easy things to do on video calls, where audio often runs through a separate channel (like the phone), you may not be able to see everyone on the other end, and the contents of your screen may be shared. So please, to save everyone a lethal amount of shame, warn others about live mics and cameras, tell people on the other side of calls who else is present, and use discretion about what's on your screen. Real talk should commence only after you've triple-checked that everything is disconnected.