

NVOAD Video Conference Call Tips

Video Conference calls have become part of our everyday work routine. This brief document outlines some of the basic tips to improve the overall appearance of your video call.

Content

Write it out

If you're presenting, determine what you're going to talk about, gather some facts and details and write it out. Writing it out verbatim will help you determine the length of your presentation and makes it easier to cut or add content.

Write like you talk

Write your content in a conversational style just as if you were telling this to a friend or colleague. We usually speak in short simple sentences but when we write we often use complex sentences. Keep it simple.

Write for emphatic delivery

Include commas where you want to breathe. Underline words or phrases you want to emphasize. Use ellipses for... prolonged pauses.

Practice aloud

Become very familiar with your written content, so familiar you don't have to read it. Practice delivery out loud to help you find words or phrases that are easy to read but hard to understand when spoken. This will also help you catch unplanned tongue twisters you may have written into your copy.

Practice visually

It's helpful to practice in front of a mirror or use your phone to video record your presentation. Are you looking into the camera or looking down at your notes? Remember to smile and let your face show emotions appropriate for the content.

Visuals

Go easy with text

No one wants to watch a presentation with slide after slide loaded with text. Remember a good picture is worth a thousand words. Rather than loading your slide with text, use a picture to capture attention, and then deliver the additional content verbally. You can include the additional information in the notes section which is helpful if you intend to share the presentation afterwards.

Don't overdo it with pictures

A good 20-minute PowerPoint may only have 5-8 photos/slides! Always ask yourself, does this really add to my content? Does it provide additional clarity?



Less is more

If you're giving 20 minutes, work on a 12 minute presentation and leave time for questions. Resist the urge to cram 25 min of content into your 20 min window.

Go for the big finish

The Primacy/Recency Effect demonstrates that people are more likely to remember the first things you say and the last things you say, so leave them with a powerful, compelling, emotional story that demonstrates your mission

Aesthetics

Surroundings matter

Critically look at the room in which you'll be making the presentation. Does the room have good lighting and sound? Is it an empty bedroom with a wooden floor (audio echo). Are there many windows? Are the windows behind you? Light coming from behind (windows or lamps) can cause glare and other issues. Carpeted floors or fabric wall hanging can help reduce echo.

Come out of the shadows

Dark rooms and poorly lit speakers create an ominous feel to your presentation. Move some lamps to better illuminate your face but avoid adding so much light you create a glare. If you'll be doing this often, you might want to invest in some inexpensive lighting.

What's behind you?

What is in the background of your image? Obviously don't set up in the kitchen with a week of dirty dishes behind you. Bookcases, large paintings, and even plain walls work best. If you need some branding, consider a company mug on the book shelf or wear a shirt with the company logo. Don't let the background be a distraction. Having a bed in the background can be unsettling. And only use the virtual background as a last resort. It's also good to eliminate people walking behind you - a real distraction.

Audio

Ambient sound

Stand in your room and listen critically for every sound. Can you hear the hum from a refrigerator? Is there a whistle in your air vent? Perhaps your fluorescent lights have a slight buzz. These are all potential distractions during your presentation and may impact the quality of your audio.

Good audio is the secret sauce

Audio is often overlooked. But if you can't hear the presenter or he/she is competing with background sounds, you're likely to lose the attention of your audience. Try a test call with a friend. Can they hear you clearly? Do you sound like you're speaking in an empty cathedral? You may want to consider adding an inexpensive microphone to your set up to improve the audio quality. You may also want to consider headphones with an integrated microphone which can add clarity and crispness to your audio.



Presentation

Stand if possible

You'll give your best presentation if you're standing. Standing gives you good breath support for a stronger voice. It keeps you alert and at your best. But be sure your arrangement is stable. A heavy laptop on top of some wobbly cardboard boxes will make you appear to be in an earthquake zone.

Look sharp

Stand tall, shoulders back, chin up. Good posture helps your breath support and gives your presentation a professional look. Be aware of unnecessary hand movements or gestures as well as unnecessary words like um, ya know, etc.

Eye to eye

Try to get your laptop camera to be at eye level with you. Too low and we're looking up your nose and you appear to be dominant. Too high and you appear weak looking up at the audience. Or we only see the glare of your forehead. Use books or small boxes to elevate your camera if needed.

Engage with the audience

Attention spans are short, especially during video calls. Good eye contact (looking into the camera) is just as important as during an in-person presentation. Know where the camera is on your laptop. Look at the camera, not at the faces on your screen. The effect will be that you're looking directly at each audience member. It may help to place a post it note at the camera as a reminder / for something specific to look at while you present. If you must read your content, pause to look at your audience and keep them engaged.

Accessibility!

Explain the visuals used for people calling in vs video or blind individuals - do you need language interpretation for this video call? Choose dark colors for text so it's easier to read.

Meet your audience where they are

keep tabs on the energy and engagement of the audience- make room for breaks if needed, have an alternative activity prepared for when people are getting bored, make the presentation interactive, etc.

Relax and smile

Before your presentation, take a few deep breaths and relax. If you've practiced, you should be confident with your content and your delivery. And remember to smile. It warms up the audience and you no longer appear to be a stranger. A bonus is that you can hear a smile. It warms and softens your voice.

Remove Distractions!

Turn off the view of yourself if it's distracting- turn your phone over or put phone on silent- close other internet browser tabs, mute the chat and other notifications



Have a tech support team if possible - have someone share the presentation so you can focus on the content and less on the technology- establish a person who can monitor the chat, answer questions as they pop in, etc.

Establish norms

Is it ok to eat during this time? Will you give breaks throughout so people won't have to get up and get water while you're speaking? Do you want people to engage via chat, raise their hands or just shout out? Will you share a handout or the presentation slides after the call?

Multiple day gathering?

Consider mailing something ahead of time to add a physical component to the gathering- a goodie bag with treats- the agenda or a handwritten note, etc.

You and your organization do amazing work. Seize every opportunity you can to share your amazing success stories.