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Topic: Tabletop Presentation Skills Checklist and Tips for Video-Based Conference Calls, Media Interviews & Self-Recordings
Date: April 7, 2020 (*Updated: July 8, 2020; and April 12, 2021*)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to offer CAP members and staff:

1. A checklist to ensure a higher quality of video-based conference calls; and;
2. Guidance on simple "tabletop" presentation delivery skills to more effectively engage with audiences through the limitations of video.

INTRODUCTION

To create a professional looking video-based conference call and media interview, behind-the-scenes set-up and staging **well in advance** of the call start time is essential. These tips also are very relevant to doing your own video-based recording for sharing on social media or other channels. In this resource are some basic tips and tricks to help set you up for success.

Video-based conference calls and media interviews will likely become part of the new business normal, especially when teams/collaborators need to convene in a timelier manner, or when travel or large group gatherings present cost, time, and health barriers.

In the CAP Presenters Program workshops, participants learn about full body nonverbal presentation delivery skills for in-person presentations (eg, posture, movement, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact). However, in video conference calls and media interviews, presenters often are limited to the tabletop visual frame of what is seen on camera or on screen:

1. Above the table while in a seated position (depending on torso length and chair height, this might be the presenter's waist or sternum height and up);
2. Above the podium top while standing behind a podium (depending on torso length and podium height, this might be the presenter's waist or sternum height and up)
3. Above the waist while standing with no table or podium obstruction

In the new business normal, it is increasingly essential to adapt tabletop/podium-top presentation skills (tabletop presentation skills) for a virtual platform. Despite the limited visual frame, awareness and implementation of the video-based conference call checklist and adaptation of presentation delivery skills tips and tricks can enable presenters to more effectively deliver messages and create greater audience engagement.

VIDEO-BASED CONFERENCE CALL CHECKLIST

- ☐ Video-enabled device
- ☐ Internet connection
- ☐ Battery check
- ☐ Audio and mic check
- ☐ Framing the shot
- ☐ Camera placement
- ☐ Staging your background
- ☐ Lighting
- ☐ Clothing
- ☐ Check hair and makeup
- ☐ Review presentation skills

Below are considerations for each component of the video-based conference call checklist:

VIDEO-ENABLED DEVICE

What kind of device (ie, smartphone, tablet, laptop/desktop with camera attachment) will you be using for the video-based conference call or media interview?

- Is it a device you have previously used and are comfortable and familiar with the different device functionalities?
- Is it a newer device that requires you to invest some time to become familiar with its various functionalities and how to manage the different components of a successful video-based conference call and/or media interview?

INTERNET CONNECTION

How will you connect to the internet for the video-based conference call or media interview?

- A direct, physical internet connection from a laptop or desktop computer is ideal to help mitigate potential video and audio delays; however, that is not an option for smartphone or tablet devices. In lieu of a physical internet connection, a strong WiFi or high-speed data connection through a smartphone or tablet device also should work well.
- If your internet connection is spotty or unreliable, move to a different location with stronger internet connection, move your device closer to the router and/or WiFi source, or move to an area where you have less physical obstructions (e.g., walls, doors, furniture) from the router and/or WiFi source to your device, enabling a connect to a stronger, clearer internet signal.
  - If you are competing with other users for a shared WiFi signal, help ensure you have a stronger signal by moving closer to the WiFi source than the others.
  - If you have other devices not in use nearby (eg, cell phone, tablet, other computers), turn off those devices' Wi-Fi connection for the duration of the call.

BATTERY CHECK

Will the battery life on your device last you through the entire video conference call/media interview?

- If possible, fully charge your video-enabled device prior to the start of the call.
- Regardless of whether your device is fully charged prior to the start of call, make sure your battery pack/charging cables are easily accessible to you.

AUDIO AND MIC CHECK

How will you listen and respond to the audio during the video-based conference call or media interview?

- Minimize the likelihood of audio feedback by using a set of wired or wireless headphones/earphones. It is not recommended to use the speaker phone functionality on your device. Depending on the speed of your internet connection and the sensitivity of the microphone on your device, utilizing the speaker phone functionality/default speakers on your device could create a distracting audio echo for you and other participants on the line.
- During video-based conference calls, there is a likelihood of some audio delays from the speaker to the listener(s). You want to hear other call participants as close to real time through your headphones/earphones and allow the default microphone on your device to pick up only your voice/audio rather than your voice plus the echoes of other call participants through your default speakers.
- Consider the space around you. Is it a high traffic area more prone to ambient/background noise?
- Also, be sure to silence secondary devices not in use during the video call.

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FRAMING THE SHOT

Consider the platform for which the video will be used. Will the video-based conference call take place on Skype, Zoom or another webinar/broadcast platform like Facebook Live? Will the video be utilized specifically for mobile-friendly social media platforms such as Instagram or Periscope?

- For Skype, Zoom or webinar-based platforms, if using a cell phone or tablet, turn your device horizontal, not vertical.
- For Instagram, Periscope or social media-based platforms, if using a cell phone or tablet, turn your device vertical, not horizontal.
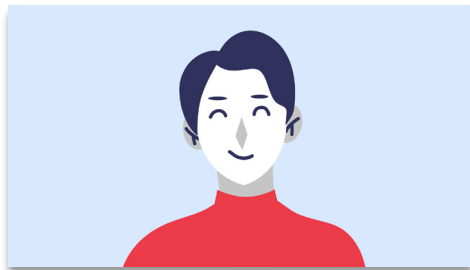
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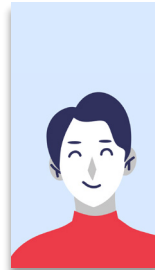
Preferable for Instagram, Periscope or social media-based platforms.

CAMERA PLACEMENT

Do not try to hold the device for the duration of the interview no matter how long or short the estimated length of interview time. For cellphone recordings, consider using a tripod. Regardless of how strong you might be, your arms will get tired and begin to shake.

- Place your device on a stable, flat surface. If using a cell phone or tablet, utilize a tripod or prop the device up (see image A below).
- Horizontally align the camera to your eye level to create greater sense of eye contact and increase audience engagement. If you have a video "preview" function on your device, align the video preview box with the camera source or move it as close to the camera source as possible (see "green line" in image B below).
- If necessary, raise your device to elevate the camera on your device to eye level. If you do not have a riser for your device, utilize a stack of books to create an elevated, stable, and flat surface for your device (see image C below).
- Do not shove your face into the camera. The sense of personal space—applicable to in-person meetings—also applies in video-based conference call settings (see image D below). Additionally, you lose visual real estate of you.
- Do not angle the camera up toward your face—not a flattering angle for most people. It accentuates the jowls and gives viewers an unintended otolaryngologist's view up your nostrils (see image E below).
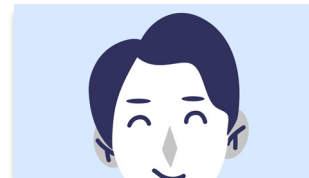
A

B

C

D

E

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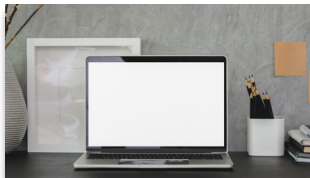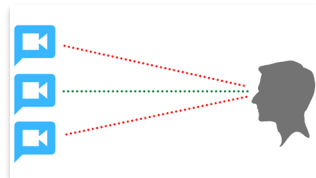
STAGING YOUR BACKGROUND

First, find a quiet spot in your home or office, and as much as possible, avoid distractions such as children playing or dogs barking. Your background should support and complement you. It should not become the focal point, creating a visual distraction during the video-based conference call/media interview.

- For most individuals, a simple background will suffice. Clean, simple backgrounds increase the likelihood of other participants focusing on you, your expertise, and your messaging.
- Avoid sitting in front of a window, or in a chair with a tall back.
- For CAP members, a background of books and/or bookshelves lined with titles relevant to the topic discussed, your educational background (e.g., medical textbooks), or laboratory equipment visually reinforces your subject-matter expertise to other participants.

HAIR AND MAKEUP

During video-based conference calls, the audience's visuals are limited to the upper half of your body.

- Style your hair as you naturally would. Utilize a light hair product, or even a light lotion, to help manage flyaway hair.
- Simple makeup like powder can help offset less desirable lighting efforts (eg, dark circles on eyes; glares on the forehead, bridge of the nose or cheeks) for both men and women.

LIGHTING

What is the lighting situation in the room?

- Avoid placing a brightly lit source behind you to minimize backlighting effects (ie, a glow around you while darkening your face). This is particularly important for those with darker skin (see image A below).
- A soft white light behind the camera is more flattering. Avoid placing the light source directly above you to minimize dark shadows being cast to your eyes and nose.
- Avoid using too bright of a light that will wash out your complexion (see image B below).

A   B
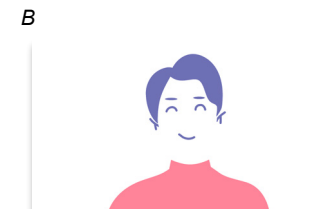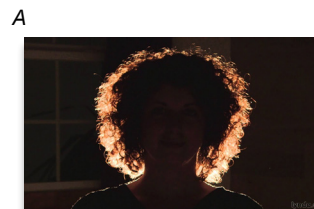
CLOTHING

Wear professional, comfortable clothing as you would to an in-person meeting. Your clothing, like your background, should support your presentation, message, and expertise.

- Avoid wearing clothing or jewelry with busy patterns, such as pinstripes, which can be visually distracting or not translate well on camera.
- If speaking to colleagues, wear a bright, solid colored dress shirt and jacket with clean, simple lines.
- For CAP members speaking to a reporter with a general public audience, wear a laboratory coat embroidered with your name and hospital or laboratory/practice logo as a visual reinforcement of your subject-matter expertise and your role as a physician.

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TABLETOP/PODIUM-TOP PRESENTATION SKILLS

Nonverbal presentation delivery skills are essential for video conference calls and media interviews. Presenters are limited to the "tabletop" visuals on camera or on screen:

1. Posture matters. While you should be front and center, don't hunch into the camera. Hunching into the camera can create the look of a scrunched or no neck. Test the camera, but typically, you would want to be about 1.5 to 2 feet away from the camera. You want to face your audience straight on. Don't shift your weight side to side. It's noticeable during in-person presentations/meetings and is significantly more noticeable during video conference calls.

2. Maintain good eye contact, especially during the opening and closing of the video-based conference call. Unlike in-person presentations where you should work different parts of the room, your audience is directly in the camera.

3. When making important points, use:

   A. Above-the-table hand gestures to emphasize those points (adjust your camera accordingly). Do not sit with your hands folded, or cross your arms, which is a defensive nonverbal gesture.

   B. Vocal variety to avoid sounding monotone and create emphasis on specific, actionable words.

   C. Dramatic pauses if you want your audience to think about what was just said, if you've just given a shocking statistic, or if you've told an appropriate and relevant joke. Give your audience 1 to 2 seconds to absorb and react.

   D. Subtle facial expressions to avoid looking wooden. When appropriate, smile to increase your likeability, which increases the likelihood that the audience will connect with what you have to say.

4. Always look into the camera rather than at the image of the interviewer and/or yourself.

5. If you need a cheat sheet or brief talking points for your presentation, use small post-it notes and place them near the camera without obstructing it. This minimizes noticeable eye darting and creates the illusion that you are maintaining eye contact with the audience.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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