

5 tips to improve image and sound in Zoom calls

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If you're a content creator who regularly works with high-end video and audio equipment, you need to look presentable when you're on Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or even Discord calls. While quality hardware helps you look more professional, anyone can achieve it with just a few small changes.

1. A little light makes a big difference

When people are unhappy with the image on their webcam, the first thing they will do is buy a nicer webcam. This often makes a difference, but the key to improving the image quality of almost any webcam is lighting.

Whether you stand near a window, increase your screen brightness, use a dedicated light, or use a combination of these methods, lighting often makes the biggest improvement to your webcam image.

The image below shows a \$129 4K webcam, the OBSBot Meet 2, without any lights to see what a person would typically look like on a video call.



Next, see the improvement by adding moderate front lighting while dimming the room a bit.



You don't need studio lights or anything too fancy, nor do you need to be as fancy as using a DSLR as a webcam, but even a little extra lighting can significantly improve how you look on calls.

2. Good webcam placement

We've all been on a video call with someone using a low, unflattering angle on their laptop webcam, with their face bobbing in and out of the frame – don't do that. Generally, placing the webcam higher and straighter, as close to eye level as possible, will improve the framing and make it look more professional.

Tip : If you use your laptop's built-in webcam, consider purchasing a stand for your computer to raise the height and angle of the camera so it's closer to eye level.

See the image below of the MacBook, laid flat on a table, with the screen extended as far as possible for the least flattering angle from the webcam.



Compare this to a laptop on a lightweight stand with the screen almost perpendicular to the ground, creating a more upright camera angle.



Alternatively, you can opt for a dedicated webcam to give yourself more space. Either way, try to position the webcam close to eye level and avoid low, unflattering angles.

3. Use a better microphone or buy a dedicated microphone

While video quality can make you look professional, audio quality is much more important for accuracy. A call is useless if you can't understand what's being said. Most MacBooks and some Windows laptops have decent built-in microphones, but audio quality is almost always improved with a dedicated mic.

There are many best practices for using a microphone properly, but in general, the closer the microphone is to your mouth, the clearer the sound will be. A dedicated microphone is much easier to position for quality sound than a laptop's built-in microphone, but if you must use a laptop microphone, try not to place your mouth too far away from the device.

4. Avoid using fake backgrounds

In almost every Zoom call, at least one person is likely to use a fake background, such as an AI-generated office space or a company logo. There's nothing inherently wrong with these, but they often look cheesy. Think about how someone could partially or completely disappear from the frame if they were to walk around with one of these fake backgrounds.

Unless your physical background is completely blank and contrasts sharply with you, like a green screen, you should only use a fake background if you want privacy. Even then, you can still use Zoom's built-in background blur feature to make things look more natural.

5. Use your device's noise cancellation feature

Zoom and similar calling platforms are great tools with great features like background blur and noise cancellation, but chances are your device can perform these features at much higher quality.

On new Windows devices, you can get GPU-based background blur like through Nvidia Broadcast, while on almost any macOS device with an Apple Silicon chip, you can get similar features through Portrait Mode.

These options create a much better blur effect and can make your webcam look like a fancy camera with a strong bokeh blur effect. Zoom's background blur effect, while effective, is inaccurate when it comes to motion and a bit too much blur, as shown below.



Compare Zoom's background blur effect to the MacBook Pro M1 Max's portrait mode below, which still blurs any meaningful information in the background while still being higher quality.



Nvidia Broadcast also has a great AI-based background noise removal feature. Newer Macs have a similar utility, but in my experience it doesn't work consistently.

Note : Regardless of which operating system you're using, you should check to see if your device has any extensions to better implement Zoom's background blur and noise removal features.

With a little lighting, better webcam placement, a better mic, and a cleaner background, almost anyone can easily make themselves look more professional on Zoom calls.

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