

# How to turn your smartphone into a webcam for video chats

You don't need a separate webcam to improve video quality when you use Zoom, Skype and other chat apps. All you need is your phone.

Coronavirus lockdowns, quarantines, and shelter in place orders mean you're likely spending a lot more time communicating with coworkers, family and friends through video chat and conferencing apps like Zoom (P.S. here are 13 top Zoom tips). If webcams are out of stock or you just don't want to buy a new one, you can easily use your nice smartphone camera and create one for yourself.

As long as the smartphone you use isn't more than a few years old, image quality should be better than your laptop's default camera, more functional and easier to position so you're not filming your double chin or straight up your nose.



Here's how to turn your phone into a webcam for free.

## You don't even need a webcam app

A dedicated webcam app (more below) has special features, but you don't have to have one to use your phone camera for video chats.

You can also just launch the app of your video chat service of choice, like Zoom, Skype or FaceTime, and chat directly through there. However, there are steps you can take to make sure that your video quality is the best it can be. Read on!

## Find and download the right webcam app for Android or iPhone

There are dozens of free and paid apps that can help you transform your workhorse smartphone into a webcam.

**Android phones:** I tried IP Webcam (free, or \$4 for the Pro version), DroidCam (free, or \$5 for the Pro version), and EpocCam Webcam (free, or \$5 for the Pro version). DroidCam had the most clear instructions within the app, but only works with Windows or Linux machines. The same was true for IP Webcam. Because I'm using a Mac, I went with EpocCam Webcam.

**iPhones:** I tried out EpocCam Webcam (free, or \$8 or \$20 for the professional versions), iCam (\$5) and iVCam (free). All were fairly easy to set up, once you find the instructional pages on their websites. EpocCam and iCam work for Windows or MacOS machines, while iVCam works for iPhone users who have Windows computers, not Macs.

**For any webcam app:** Whatever you download, read the privacy policy, install it and follow the instructions to connect it to your computer (you might have to download a driver, or run it through a browser or other viewer.) You'll be asked to give the app permission to access your camera and microphone.

**Be aware:** Running the app frequently may drain your phone battery, so you may want to hook up your phone to an external power bank or position your setup near a wall outlet if you find yourself in need of a charge.

## Use your phone's main camera

Your phone's main camera will produce a higher quality image than the selfie camera, and with more options for zooming and focusing as well. The iPhone 11, Samsung Galaxy S20 and many other premium smartphones have sharper resolution at 1080p than the latest MacBook models, which has a 720p webcam built in. For best results for using your phone as a webcam, use that rear camera instead of the front-facing selfie camera.

The webcam apps and video chatting apps will often allow you to select options like video resolution, quality and orientation, as well as focus, white balance and color effects.

## Stabilize your phone

Avoid cramping your arm or hitting an unflattering angle by stabilizing your phone on a tripod, stand or tabletop mount. This will give you the least shaky and most professional-looking results. (CNET recommends this \$37 mini-tripod from Manfrotto.)

## Set up some lighting

Whether you're working in a home office, at your kitchen table or on your bed, you'll need some good lighting to make your face look bright, eliminate shadows and maybe hide a wrinkle or two. Consider buying a ring light. (CNET recommends this basic \$30 model that comes with 36 LEDs, a clip stand and three light modes.)

## Invest in a microphone

Your AirPods (\$159 at Apple) or other headphones with a built-in mic will get the job done, but if you're using your new DIY webcam to record something professionally, you should invest in a good microphone. (CNET recommends this Blue Yeti USB Microphone for \$130.)

These tips should help you create a better home office and video conferencing setup, now that just about every meeting is a video meeting -- and potentially help you find a new use for your old phone as well. For more ways to repurpose your older phones, check out [Turn your old phone into a home security camera for free](#), and [Find new uses for that old Android phone or iPhone](#).

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