

# Why your MacBook webcam looks bad in Zoom meetings and how to fix it

Even the best laptops can be saddled with lousy cameras. Drawing attention away from the flaws is the key to looking your best.

Just as the entire world has shifted to online video meetings, Apple released a new version of its popular 13-inch MacBook Air. Better keyboard, faster processors, all great stuff (as you can see in our review). But, one component that didn't get upgraded was the system's webcam.

Reviewers, shoppers and MacBook owners (or potential owners) were quick to point this out. MacBooks have never been known for having the best webcams. The iPad Pro, iPhone, etc. all have great forward and rear-facing cameras, but the 720p resolution camera on the MacBook is noisy, looks flat and lacks depth-sensing technology.



Now, Apple couldn't know the new MacBook Air would be released just as Zoom meetings and other video meeting software were becoming the new norm. This is the same camera the company has been putting in laptops for years, and this isn't the first time we've complained about it. Many Windows laptops are barely better, many with similar under-1080p resolutions, but at least some have better light sensitivity, color accuracy or depth-sensing for facial-recognition logins.

## So, what are we going to do about that?

There's at least a reasonable chance you're beaming into an online video meeting from a MacBook Air or something similar. That means you're not looking your best. Especially for a smaller, low-slung laptop like the Air, your camera isn't going to be at an optimal angle if it's sitting on your desk or kitchen table and aimed up at you.

One option is to use your phone's camera. Either the front or back cameras will be better than any laptop you have. For TV appearances from my work-from-home office, I've been using my phone mounted from an eye-level tripod clip (more on that later).

Yes, you could also attach an external webcam from Logitech or another company, but most models are sold out right now on Amazon and elsewhere, so you may be stuck with the built-in camera. Whether it's a MacBook or another laptop, here's how to make the best of it.

## Raise your laptop

If your laptop is anywhere close to a good ergonomic position for your hands, then it's nowhere near the best spot for a Zoom meeting. Get some big books. Get some giant board game boxes. Prop that sucker up. Use big coffee table books or something similar, so you won't get as much wobble. Don't use empty cardboard boxes.

Where do you want the camera pointing? Get it to sit just above eye level.

## Good lighting cures (most) ills

The MacBook Air webcam looks especially bad in low-light situations. Lots of other laptop webcams do, too. That's why movie and TV sets and professional photography are flooded with giant lights. You don't need all that, but a good source of natural sunlight is an easy and inexpensive way to drastically improve your webcam shot. Face the window, don't put your back to it. You want the camera to see the light from the window, not the window itself.

If natural light isn't available, don't spend a ton on a fancy light setup. This set from UBeesize is under \$50 and includes an 8-inch ring light, a tripod to mount it on and phone clip as well. Almost everyone at CNET is using this setup or something similar right now.

My colleague Brian Cooley has many more general webcam setup tips, including some good headset mic suggestions, although your phone headset or AirPods should be fine for anything short of a live hit on CNN.

## The one Mac with a better webcam

MacBook Air, MacBook Pro, even the iMac, all have that 720p webcam. But, there is one current Mac with a better camera. Chances are you don't have it, so don't get too excited. It's the \$5,000-and-up iMac Pro, which has Apple's on computer-based 1080p FaceTime HD camera. Don't go run out and buy one just for that, however.

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