Successful Video Conferencing, Lighting and Presentation Guidelines

In this lesson you will learn how to make video look professional for your video conferences.

- Your Video Canvas
- Types of Camera Shots
- Lining up the shot
- Clutter
- Background
- Lighting
- Finally, a good example!!!

NOTE: This lesson is to help you look better in your video conferences. This is not to suggest that you should do all these items every time in all you conferences. Again remember, they are only suggestions. They can help make the difference between a good video conference and a great video conference.

Your Video Canvas

Painting the Pixels

In a video conference, you are a video artist. You have a 3x4 video canvas that contains about 350,000 pixels to tell a story. You are composing a picture to show the other site. It is very important to consider what will be in the picture as well as what will be left out.

Sometimes, if you are not careful, you convey a different message than what you intended. An image composed of a conference room filled with books, papers, water glasses, laptops, wires and cables shows a very cluttered picture. The mess is a distraction from the message you are trying to convey.

Likewise, sitting or standing in front of a big glass window may seem like a nice idea at the time - showing off the spectacular location of the video conference room. However, you will appear as just a silhouette. Whatever message you were trying to convey is over shadowed because you cannot be seen.

Ask yourself these simple questions:

- What is the point I am trying to get across?
- What idea am I trying to convey?
- What do I want the far site to learn/think/know from this conference?

Too many times, your audience may leave the conferences thinking:

- That room sure if full of a lot of stuff!
- That big table that took up 85% of the picture - I wonder if it was oak!
- Gosh, he sure does have a really nice tree outside his office!
- She must be proud of that ceiling and those lights which filled 75% of the picture!

Ok, so maybe people will not leave your conference consciously thinking those things. However, you have an excellent opportunity to focus their attention on your message, idea, or content by carefully choosing what to show (and not to show) during a conference.

And it isn't hard to accomplish...

Types of Camera Shots
There are a few basic camera shots that you can use in a video conference.

Wide Shot or Establishing Shot

This is usually a wide picture of the room. It provides the participants at the far site an idea of what your room or environment looks like. It establishes the setting of your video conference.

A wide shot can be an establishing shot. However, it can also be a wide camera angle or a "loose" shot of a group of people in a room.

News shows usually start with an establishing shot of the news set with the anchors sitting behind a big desk.

Likewise, TV shows usually show an exterior picture of a building to establish where the scene is taking place. For example, most of us can picture in our heads what the Brady Bunch house looks like. We remember it from the establishing shot of the house. Same is true for the establishing shot of other shows.

Can you recall establishing shots for these other TV shows: Arnold's Restaurant on *Happy Days*; the bar on *Cheers*, the set of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*?

Medium Shot

A medium shot can range from a few people to one person. It usually includes the head, shoulders, chest of the person talking and sometimes the desk.
It is used to focus attention on the person who is speaking.

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Close Up Shot

Close up shots range from
the head and shoulders…   …to just the head.

Extreme Close Up Shot

This shot usually shows the eyes and the mouth to focus the attention
on the emotion of the person. This technique is used a lot on TV news
programs when the person being interviewed is about to cry or
confess a crime (60 Minutes).

The extreme close-up *should not* be used in video conferencing since this invades an individual's personal space. It is rude to zoom the camera in this close on a person at either the near or far site during a video conference.

Think of a video conference as a face to face meeting: In a face to face meeting you would never stick your face close to another person's face. Likewise, zooming in the camera on someone's nose, ear, or any other body part is considered rude and unacceptable.

Lining up a Camera Shot

Now that you know it is important to fill your canvas with important images (namely you) it is time to talk about *framing* - or how to line up the shot.

Headroom

Headroom is the amount of space between the top of your head and the top of the frame of the video window. Here there are the two extremes of too much and too little.

Too Much Headroom
All too often people leave too much head room at the top of the screen.

Some people leave so much headroom, there is enough space to capture any low flying aircraft!

Other users tend to show the ceiling and the lights in the field of view.

Too much head room is bad for several reasons:

- It usually wastes about 1/2 of the screen with images that don't do anything for the message or the conference.

- Having the lights in the picture, causes the camera to close down the iris or to let less light into the camera. This results in you looking much dimmer.

Too Little Headroom
Sometimes people will crop off the top of their own head! Perhaps this is so you cannot see what they are thinking. Or perhaps it is a way to hide thinning or graying hair.

This is not very useful because:

- The forehead can convey a lot of information and emotion (surprise, anger, sympathy).
- If you are cropping off the top of head then you are showing more of the body, legs or table - these items do not usually "say" much or "help to tell our story."

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Just enough Headroom

Good use of headroom accomplished two items:

- Fills the video space well to tell your story.

- But not so much that the viewer feels you are about to **bonk** your head on the top of the frame!

Looking Space

- First, give yourself enough space around your head so that the viewer doesn't feel claustrophobic for you.

- Then give yourself space to look into. Otherwise, it looks like you are about to **bonk** your head into the side of the frame.

Watch almost any TV show or news interview where the person is not looking into the camera. You will notice that when the speaker is looking slightly off to one side, there is space for him to look into. Sometimes, shows will be *arty* and break this rule. However, most of the time there is looking space. Actually, you may rarely use this technique especially if you are usually talking directly into the camera.

Clutter

You want to fill the frame with images and objects that relate to the message you are trying to tell. Often in a conference room, there is extraneous stuff - computer, speakers, keyboard, mouse, books, cables, papers, cups, soda cans. Video tends to flatten the depth of field and just make all these items look like a bunch of clutter. None of these items has anything to contribute to the visual story you are tying to tell.

Therefore, when possible, try to hide all the cables, papers, and cups off camera.
If you are talking about a product or want to show something, try to have a clean surface with nothing else on it. That way, the focus will be on the item you are trying to showcase. The resulting video will look much cleaner and more professional.

Backgrounds

Your background can also add to the clutter or distract from the focus.

Bushy Hair

Sometimes people like to put plants in the conference room for some greenery and color. That is fine. But be careful where you place the plants. Too often, people will place themselves in from of a tall plant. This results in a rather funny looking picture - a person with a plant growing out of the top of his/her head.

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White Walls, Bright Windows and a Silhouette of You!

Bright Backgrounds and "Auto Iris"

The "auto iris" function on a camera performs very much like the iris in your eyes. When you walk outside into bright light, your eye closes the iris to let in less light. When you walk into a darkened theater, your eye opens the iris to let in more light.
The camera looks at the entire picture in the frame and tries to discover what is the brightest part. Then the camera will close the iris of the camera to let in less light based on what is the brightest part of the picture.

Therefore, if you are sitting front of a very bright background with lights creating hot spots on the wall, the camera will assign the background as the brightest part of the picture and close the iris of the camera to let in less light. This will result in you appearing as a shadow or a silhouette.

Likewise, if you are sitting in front of a window on a bright sunny day, the camera will compensate for the bright outdoor light.

These might be good techniques to use if you are in the witness protection program and do not want people to be able to see you. But in a normal video conference, it is a better idea to let the far site see you and your facial expressions.

Colors

Mixing **indoor light** and **outdoor light** could cause you to look **greenish** or **reddish**. Indoor light and outdoor light have different color properties. Outdoor light has more blue. Indoor lights (fluorescent lights) have more green. Incandescent lights (lamps) have more orange and red.

Your Schoolstation camera has built in *white balancing* capabilities. White balance actually looks at the colors in the pictures, figures out what is supposed to be white, and then compensates to make white look white. (Some personal camcorders have a setting for indoor lighting, outdoor lighting or auto. This setting is compensating for the different lighting conditions).

However, if you mix indoor and outdoor lighting, the camera could balance for outdoor lighting (from the open window) while you are sitting in indoor lighting. The result - the camera reduces the blue filtering - leaving either a greenish tint (fluorescent light) making you look nauseous or a reddish tint (incandescent light) making you look a tomato!

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Fluorescent Lighting
with White Balance set for
Outdoor Lighting

Incandescent (Lamp) Lighting
with White Balance set for
Outdoor Lighting

For the most part, the cameras really do a good job to compensate for thoughtless lighting. But try to do your part to help the camera decide which type of lighting you really want.

Lighting
Of course lighting is important to your conference but sometimes there isn't much you can do to change the lighting.

However, one of the biggest mistakes people make is including the lights in the picture. Remember, the camera will auto iris to the brightest part of the picture.

If you include the ceiling and lights in the field of view, the camera will iris down to accommodate the bright lights.

Another one of the biggest issues of lighting is the fluorescent overhead lighting in most office environments. The "ice cube tray" lighting was designed to provide a good source of overhead lighting to illuminate documents and materials on your desk. However, the overhead lighting can cause undesirable shadows to appear on your face - creating especially dark circles under your eyes.

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"Ice Cube Tray" Lighting

There are some manufacturers that make lighting for video conference environments. These lights can be either mounted on a tripod or "clipped" to the cross bars of drop ceilings to provide lighting from a more head on light source. This helps to reduce the shadows created by the overhead lighting.

Clipped to the drop ceiling

Mounted on a tripod

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Good Examples

Good

Better

- Little clutter in the picture.
- Comfortable Medium Shot.
- She is centered in the middle of the screen.
- No bright windows or lights in the background.

- Dark curtains helps the subject pop out against the background.
- The over head lighting helps to fill in the features on her face.
- Less dark shadows under her eyes and in her neck.