



LIGHTS...CAMERA...ZOOM?

While virtual interviews over Zoom became popular during the pandemic, they have proven to be a useful tool to employers when hiring a candidate remotely. Therefore, whether we like it or not, Zoom interviews may be here to stay. Being interviewed virtually can feel like a whole new ballgame but there are a couple things you can do to give yourself the best chance possible to stand out to employers over the course of one virtual meeting.

The Set Up

Choose a Professional Background

Ensuring your room is clean before attending an interview would have been the last thing on the to-do list once upon a time. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case. Before you even speak, your interviewer will most likely notice your background, therefore it is important to choose something that appears professional. There are a couple different options when choosing your background. If you choose to import a graphic, be mindful of the image you pick. Make sure it is nothing too complex or distracting that will cause the interviewer to focus on anything besides you. The University of Florida has made several different backgrounds available for download here:

<https://connect.ufalumni.ufl.edu/events/virtual/backgrounds>. When choosing a background, make sure your computer camera quality is strong enough to still see your image clearly in front of the picture.

The other option is to go the more traditional route of setting up your own background. If you do this, obviously be mindful of what is behind you. Avoid displaying any private space in your house such as your bed, bathroom, kitchen, or couch. You should also ensure your interviewer is not seeing any clutter, or distasteful décor. Positioning yourself in front of a blank wall is a safe bet, but make sure it is not white or a mirror, as this can cause your lighting to reflect poorly. The University of Florida Career Connection Center provides rooms students can reserve for interviews and can be contacted at this number (352) 392-1601.

Laptop Placement

According to Bill McGowan, founder and CEO of Clarity Media Group, about 90% of people have their laptops propped too low, either giving the interviewer a view up their nostrils or causing them to look downwards at their computer. The "perfect height" is considered about 3 shoeboxes higher than the average desk. Find objects such as books or boxes and stack your computer on them to where the green video light is level with your eyes. If done properly, your head should be placed at the top of the screen, and your chest at the bottom.

The Lighting

The most important part about lighting is that it is in front of you. Having your light source behind you or on the sides of you can make you appear washed out or shadowy. Setting yourself up facing a window or light source such as a desk lamp or reading light will give you the best results.

Pick a Quiet Space

Make sure your interview space is quiet and free of distractions. Any excess sounds could transmit over the audio and distract either you or the interviewer. Before you login to your interview, turn off your phone, TV, radio, and watch, and make sure you are not anywhere prone to hearing animals,

children, or other voices. If your interview is with more than one person, it can be useful to turn yourself on mute whenever you are not talking. This allows everyone to hear the one person talking clearly. Just don't forget to go off of mute when its your time to shine.

Zoom Name and Profile Picture

It is important that your name and picture reflect who you are as a professional. Make sure your screen name is set to your actual name with proper capitalization and spacing prior to joining your call (Ex: Albert Gator). If you have a nickname you prefer to go by, indicate that on your screen name as well. It may also be smart to make your profile picture match your LinkedIn headshot, making it easier for them to associate your face with your accomplishments. These things can be changed on the Zoom application by clicking My Account -> Edit.

Technology

Precautions

There are a couple things you can do before your interview to avoid any last-minute technology issues. First, test your meeting link more than 24 hours before your interview. If your interviewer uses a platform that you're not as familiar with, download the program 3 days before your interview to give yourself time to practice and familiarize yourself with it. To avoid lags and glitches, sit close to your router. If possible, ask anyone else who might be on the Wi-Fi to disconnect temporarily. When it comes to your computer battery, always have your laptop plugged in before starting your interview. Even if your computer s already at 100%, not plugging it in adds an unnecessary unpredictable variable.

Having a Backup Plan

If there is one thing we have learned about technology through all of this, it's that it works great until it doesn't. When interviewing in a completely virtual space there are many unexpected things that can go wrong that have nothing to do with your job qualifications. However, being prepared for these situations can help your problem-solving skills stand out. When confirming your interview time and Zoom link, ask for a direct phone line in the case of technology issues. Have the number on hand during your interview in case you need to quickly utilize the "dial in" feature on Zoom.

Time Zone Differences

Pay very close attention to what part of the country your interviewer is in. The last thing you want to do is be 5 hours late to an interview with someone in London or 3 hours early to your interview with someone in California. If you think someone might be in a different time zone, verify this with them when confirming your interview.

Dress to Impress

Business on the top... Party on the bottom?

Perhaps one of the only things that should not be different about preparing for your Zoom interview rather than an in-person interview is how you dress. No matter if they can only see a couple inches of your clothing or not, you should dress head to toe in what you would wear to an in-person interview. Only dressing business professional from the waist up will not allow for your mind to be in full interview

mode. Also, consider wearing colors that are representative of the company, after all, you wouldn't attend an interview at Florida State in orange and blue.

It's Go Time

Eye Contact

When interviewing for a position in person, making direct eye contact makes you appear confident and knowledgeable. However, if you look directly into a person's eyes on the computer, it may appear to them that you are looking down which does not create as powerful of a connection. When the interviewer is speaking, make sure to look directly into the camera to appear fully attentive. If you are someone who is tempted to look at your own picture when you speak, it may be useful to set your view to "speaker view" and put your own picture at the top of the screen, directly below the video camera. This way if you glance down at your own image, you are only looking down a couple centimeters.

Attentiveness

While it may feel easy to multitask while on Zoom, it is very noticeable to the other party if you are not giving them your undivided attention. If you are looking around the room or typing on your computer or phone, you may make the interviewer feel as though they are interrupting your free time. No matter how good your computer setup is, if you don't appear to want to be there, they won't spend their time on you.

How do I look at my notes?

Many people like to make notes of talking points or information you have gathered about the company prior to the interview. To avoid looking like you're reading off your notebook or computer screen, condense your notes as best you can and write them on a sticky note to place on either side of your webcam. This will give the illusion that you are maintaining eye contact while still having your facts easily accessible.

Popular Questions

There is no formula to having the perfect answers to interview questions. However, it can help to practice what you would say in different scenarios. Listed below are the top 5 most common interview questions in 2020:

Tell me about yourself.

What skills do you have that would help you to succeed in this position?

Tell us about a time you made a mistake and how you handled it?

What is an accomplishment you are most proud of to date?

Do you have any questions for us? (It is best to have some potential questions prepared)

Taking Notes

During an interview, you should be prepared to take notes on important things the interviewer is telling you and any questions you may think of throughout the interview. Notes written with pen and paper are preferred and recommended rather than typing on your computer in order to reduce the noise of the keys. If an interviewer asks you a question with a list of items and tells you to place them

in a certain order such as a ranking, make sure to write them down so you do not have to ask them to repeat the potential choices.

Be Confident

Preparedness is one of the easiest ways to increase confidence before an interview. No interview is one size fits all, but hopefully these tips can help to ease your mind before going into an interview. Remain calm, take deep breaths, and take a moment to pause if necessary before answering a question. Don't forget to smile and enjoy talking to someone new. Chances are, they are just as nervous as you are because at the end of the day, we're all humans. You got this!

After the Fact

The Follow-up

Don't forget to follow-up with your interviewer! Highlight a couple things you learned from them as well as thanking them for their time. This can be done through LinkedIn, email, or a handwritten note.