

Zoom Tips

Infrastructure



The most important step you can take to create a productive but also survivable environment for frequent or sustained Zoom meetings is to adjust your infrastructure. Not everyone will have the room, equipment, or funds for the following suggestions, unfortunately. The single most crucial step is to adjust your space, lighting, and sound environment if you can. Then probably the second most important step (not possible for everyone) is to have a second monitor to free you from being monopolized by Zoom while you also want to be looking at something else or collaborating on a different platform such as Google Drive or email. An external camera and microphone (besides improving the quality of your sound/image) provide you with more freedom of movement, which makes a big difference during long meetings that otherwise lock you into a tight little space in front of your computer.

The following are specific infrastructure tips:

- **Location:** Arrange the room so that the lighting is best for showing yourself on Zoom but also tolerable for your eyes. Arrange the space around your desk so that sometimes you can stand up while talking (to break up the monotony of the "talking-head" view, and also for when you want to do broad-gesture physical demonstrations).

- **Connectivity:** Get as close to the wifi router in your residence as you can. Even more optimal: run an Ethernet cable from your laptop directly to the back of the wifi router rather than rely on wifi. Steps like these can dramatically improve your bandwidth and prevent audio or video stuttering problems (especially when your camera is on).
You can use the [Speedtest](#) service to test your Internet speed from different locations. Upload speed is the important metric, since it is usually the limiting factor if you are having trouble showing yourself in video without interruptions. The closer you can get your “upload” speed to 10-11 Mbps the better. (Internet services such as cable services typically limit upload speeds to 10 or so Mbps.)
- **Camera:** Get an external camera if possible. This is the one Alan uses and that the Transcriptions Lab and also the DAHC uses. It plugs into a USB port:
<https://www.amazon.com/Logitech-C920S-Webcam-Privacy-Shutter/dp/B07K95WFWM>. External cameras typically provide much higher quality video and a wider lens angle.
- **Microphone:** Get an omni-mic if you can that you can put anywhere on a table nearby, freeing you from having to talk into your computer and to be very close to it all the time. This is the one Alan uses and has had very good experience with:
<https://www.amazon.com/Logitech-C920S-Webcam-Privacy-Shutter/dp/B07K95WFWM>. (The primary purpose of such microphones in normal times is for small-group conferencing. You can put it on a table in a meeting room and it picks up voices adequately from everyone around the table. If you typically run a lot of meetings, conferences, etc., it might be worth purchasing such an omni-mic just to be able to use it for its main purpose once times return to normal after COVID.)
- **Second Monitor:** Get a second monitor screen if you can. Zoom works very well in a two-monitor situation. You can put the Zoom meeting on one screen while having your notes or whatever open on the other screen; and you can share either screen when you do Zoom screen-sharing. (You will want to position the external camera over the second monitor if that is where you position the Zoom window and will be looking at people.) Another solution is to run the Zoom meeting on a tablet computer in order to free up your laptop. (You can also run Zoom meetings on smart phones, but this is less optimal because it is hard to read things if someone shares a screen.)

Meeting or Class Management

- **As host:**
 - Appoint an alternate host and/or co-host if possible (e.g., a staff member, colleague, or TA as appropriate).
 - Create a script for yourself for configuring Zoom for your meeting (steps such as: enabling waiting room, chat, screen-sharing for other participants, etc.). This is

useful the first few times you run meetings for a particular group or class that may require different Zoom settings. Also prepare in advance any Zoom “polls” you wish to use in a meeting (e.g., using a poll for a vote).

- If you have a secondary computer, a good thing to try is starting a meeting on that computer. Then join your meeting from your primary computer. (There will be two of you in the meeting!) You can then leave the meeting running on the secondary computer after the preliminary “all-hands” part of a meeting or class so that people can return to it when they need to talk to you. Meanwhile you can go to work on your primary computer or jump into yet another Zoom meeting (e.g., among a project team or committee or student group).
- Create and circulate in advance shared *commentable* and/or *editable* meeting materials--e.g. on Google Drive. This helps keep everyone “on the same page” without depending on you as host to show things repeatedly. And it allows participants productively to add notes, questions, suggestions, etc. Materials might include:
 - Agenda (or lesson plan)
 - Documents (or a link library of relevant materials)
 - A taskboard or spreadsheet for organizing tasks, committee topics, or agenda items.
- For participant queuing, raising hands or using the raised-hand icon in Zoom is fine for small groups. For larger meetings in which the host cannot see or keep track of hands, ask people to use the so-called informal “stack” system in Zoom chat. For example, if Alan wants to speak, then the convention is for Alan to write in chat: “stack: Alan”. (Or, even more informally, just a simple, “I’d like to speak.”) The chat stream shows the request in sequence order. A host would ideally be assisted by a co-host or someone else who monitors the chat and reminds everyone of the queue order--e.g., “Next up we have X, Y, and Z who want to speak.”) Note that you can also ask Zoom to save chats as a text file, which is useful if participants also use chat to leave notes, links to resources, etc
- Establish the rules or conventions for Zoom meetings in advance, so that people know whether you welcome, or do not welcome the following:
 - Use of chat
 - Screen-sharing
 - Audio muting and video muting. (Telling participants that it is fine for them to mute their audio and video during a long meeting, or while conducting sustained working sessions, is one of the most effective ways to prevent “Zoom fatigue.”)

- An excellent practice is to establish certain social rituals for a group--e.g., waving goodbye at the end of a meeting.
- For meetings with breakout sessions:
 - Breakout rooms in Zoom can be used very effectively in many situations, such as for group activity in a class. They tend to work best when breakout sessions are relatively short, organized around set tasks that do not require people to ask questions of the host, and have an announced end-point after which people know they will be called back into the all-hands meeting.
 - However, in other circumstances, breakout rooms have limitations. They trap participants in their room without any easy way to visit other rooms or to ask a question of the instructor or meeting host. An effective alternative to breakout rooms is thus the following:
 - Ask the subgroups in your meeting or class (e.g., a team, a committee) to create for themselves standing, “recurrent” password-protected Zoom meetings and post the Zoom meeting addresses on a shared Google Doc page. Then during group work, each group can go to their separate Zoom meeting. Meanwhile, the all-hands meeting can be left running so that people can jump back in to ask a question or share discussion with others.

(Note that when you schedule a “recurrent” meeting in Zoom, that meeting is de facto a standing meeting that can be used at any time. Zoom prompts you to put a recurrent meeting on your Google calendar as a repeated meeting on specific days or times. But that is just a convenience if you need to be reminded at those times. The real meeting is just always there when you want it.)
 - Establish a schedule for when participants should return to the all-hands meeting.
- **For all:**
 - Put the Zoom meeting on a secondary monitor if possible (or on a tablet computer or perhaps even phone) so that you are free to do other things easily on your computer during a long meeting.
 - See also below:

Zoom Fatigue Suggestions

Tips & Resources Gathered for the WE1S Summer Camp 2020

By [Ashley Hemm](#) (WE1S Project Manager, U. Miami),

with [Jeremy Douglass](#) (WE1S Co-PI, UCSB)

Set-Up/Introductory Matters

- Ask everyone what their setup is: number of machines/monitors/relatively stable connection, etc.
 - Is there/should there be a contingency plan for power/Internet outages?
 - Are any participants working together in the same spaces?
 - Take note of differing time zones

Participant Tips

- The “20-20-20” rule: every 20 minutes, take 20 seconds to look at something 20 feet away.
- Adjust blue-light on monitors to avoid strain, like f.lux, or filtering sunglasses (thanks, Helen!)
- Turn down the brightness on your monitors, and lower light in the room (thanks, Xindi!)
- If your space is bright enough, consider turning off the lights and using natural light
- Add in 5-10 minute breathing exercises (thanks, Rebecca!)
- Snacks and water to keep grounded!
- Laptop users, consider getting/creating a stand to raise your monitor to eye-level (thanks, Alex!)
- Take a fifteen-minute break every two hours. Rest your eyes during the break.
 - At breaks, step outside--or at least into a different room.
- For Zoom:
 - Gallery off: Switching from gallery to speaker view may also help to combat mental overload
 - Self-view off: Blocking self-view is also helpful to avoid overwhelming mental load
 - Other options: Not all talking/collaborating need to use Zoom. It may sometimes be easier to work via GChat in the GDrive, or via Ryver chats.

For Managers and Presenters

- Share agenda documents shared via Ryver and/or email.
This can be easier to follow along than a screen share.
- Clearly distinguish between meeting time and shared workspace time
 - turning off cameras/mics is great

- so is taking a few minutes to grab a snack, contemplate the void, etc.
- Stagger "official" smaller breaks if it looks like folks are flagging (e.g. in the longer AM session)
- Build shared daily rituals into Zoom meetings
 - e.g. like all signing off with a wave
 - also maybe a morning/afternoon stretch
 - sharing pets/children/favored plants/a new toy
- Social events should be optional and infrequent
 - Jackbox games
 - Happy hour

Sources

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