

# Videoconference Tips for Interviewees

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Videoconferencing provides exciting new opportunities for an interview experience. It allows a more personal connection than a phone interview without the expense of an in-person visit. However, as with most innovations in technology, it is only effective if it is without glitches. There are several important aspects to consider in anticipation of a videoconference interview that will help optimize your videoconferencing interview experience and present you in a positive light.

## Setting and Environment

It is important to realize that we perceive people differently through a camera than we do in person. Paying attention to where and how you set up your interview will increase your likelihood for a well-executed experience.

## Framing

First, think about framing. What can be seen behind you? Sitting flush with a plain white wall will make you look like you are in a police lineup. Consider a wall with a solid color, a bookcase or some other professional look. You want to be seen against an uncluttered background with no distracting objects, movement, or sound. Sit tall in your chair, but not too close to the camera. “The first three buttons of your shirt should be visible, or you risk looking like a floating head,” counsels Priscilla Shanks, a coach for broadcast journalists and public speakers. Angle your knees to the corner of your computer screen, and then turn your head slightly back to look at the camera.

## Lighting

Second, consider the lighting in your immediate area. Whether you are sitting in your kitchen or an office borrowed from a friend, make sure there’s no bright light (such as from a window) behind you. That will only darken your face. Ideally, the light source should be shining on your face from behind the webcam, and you may want to soften that lighting to avoid a washed-out appearance. Moreover, if the room in which you are talking is quite dark, you are probably not sending great picture quality to the person on the other end of the video call. Try turning on more lights or opening the curtains. If these tips sound familiar, they probably are. The rules for good lighting in videoconferencing are quite similar to lighting tips for picture-taking.

## Appearance

Finally, think about what you wear, not only in terms of communicating your professionalism, but also considering how the color of your clothes will transmit over camera. Avoid wearing patterns or white, since we tend to notice white spots on a screen first—you want your interviewer drawn to your teeth and eyes, not your shirt. Also, keep away from shirt colors that are too similar to your skin color. If you are a woman, consider the height of your neckline and minimize jewelry that might reflect light into the camera or otherwise distract the interviewer from paying attention to your great responses.

Most importantly, do a dry run with a friend to check your appearance, color, sound, and facial expressions.

## Technology

Of course, if the technology does not work, your advance preparation will not matter... and the focus of the interview will shift from the quality of your comments to determining how to fix the technological glitch. You may be asked to use Skype, Adobe Connect, or other web-based platforms. Many institutions are beginning to contract with independent firms that specialize in video interviews.

## Minimum Technical Requirements

- A PC or Mac computer
- An internet connection—a high-speed connection is best (“broadband” such as DSL, cable, fiber-optic, or satellite)
- A webcam to make video calls

Additionally, a headset is highly recommended for interviewees, to minimize any possibility of an echo. Most computers have built-in microphones and speakers, but you will get much better audio quality if you buy a headset or handset.

If you have never used Skype, set up an account name; some variation of your first and last name will do. Be sure to keep it professional. And again, be sure to test your connection ahead of time. Skype can be easily blocked by firewalls.

## Your Interview

When scheduling your interview, make sure you are clear on the day and time. Double-check time zones as well as whether daylight savings time is observed in your location and the interviewer’s location. Communicate that ahead of the interview date.

As you prepare for the videoconference, block out interruptions. Turn off your cell phone and other pieces of office equipment that make noise, and if you are using Skype from home, banish your family and pets for the duration.

Ask for the names and titles of the interview committee ahead of time. Similar to a phone interview, it will help you to know your audience (and their likely agendas) prior to the interview.

Make (virtual) eye contact. When your interviewer is talking, it is fine to look at his/her image on the screen, but when you answer, look at the camera. Gazing at the computer screen instead of the camera while you are talking will make you seem shifty. In advance, practice talking to the camera so it feels comfortable. Unlike a phone interview, glancing at notes will be obvious, so avoid using prompts and do additional mental preparation for questions you are likely to be asked.

Observe how gestures, facial expressions, etc., all show up on camera. If you can’t see something outside of the frame, say so. Your discomfort will be obvious, so make it a point to clear it up quickly.

Talk loudly and clearly, but do not shout. As the interview is beginning, confirm that all those interviewing are able to hear you clearly. If you have difficulty hearing them, do not hesitate to let them know. It is fine to ask for questions to be repeated if you are having difficulty hearing any of the committee members.

After all that, do not forget that this is still a job interview. Even though you are not meeting face to face, dress as though you are. When you “walk in,” have your resume ready—this time, as an e-mail attachment. And do not forget to do all the standard prep work. Do you know the number of questions you will be asked, so you can pace yourself? Are you ready to talk about your greatest weakness? Do you have questions prepared for them? While videoconferencing brings an additional element to the interview, the committee is still primarily listening to the quality and content of your answers—so do not let the technology supplant the importance of good dialog with committee members.

## Remember “Murphy’s Law”

Prepare ahead of time, so you can be focused on the interview and not the technology. Adequate preparation before the interview helps minimize the risk of issues developing, and will allow you to respond to problems should they arise.

- Allow an extra ten minutes for the call to allow for setup and problem resolution, even if you know your side is all set.
- Have appropriate back-up phone numbers with you so you can call the search committee if Skype fails and you can’t reconnect.
- If the technology fails you, do not hesitate to ask for the opportunity to continue by phone, try to connect again, or reschedule the interview.