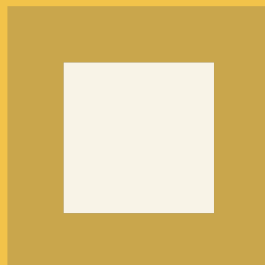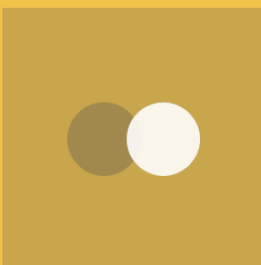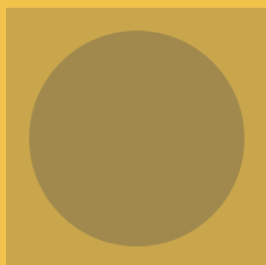# The Remote Interview Manual

Understand Competency Questions, Avoid Technical Issues and Get Short-listed

Kris Bolton

The Remote Interview Manual

Understand Competency Questions, Avoid Technical Issues and Get Short-listed

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Contents

What's in this book?

This book is split into five parts:

Preparation Prior to Interview. Discusses several activities to ensure you, your workspace, camera, microphone and computer are all ready for interview.

During a Video Interview. Discusses a number of aspects you should be mindful of to present yourself in the best way possible to your interviewer. The section also provides an overview of five of the most popular video conferencing platforms to acquaint yourself with.

Interview Questions and Answers. A series of questions and answers to the most popular formats of questions you are likely to be asked by an interviewer: competency-based, strength-based, behavioural and personal. Valuable preparation prior to an interview.

Troubleshooting Technical Issues. Technical issues can arise at any time, this chapter provides a number of problems and solutions you may encounter using any of the most popular video conferencing software.

Further Resources. A list of twenty-two competencies. Useful for forming answers to questions and checking against job descriptions to work competency keywords into answers. Additionally, tutorials for creating test meetings for the five most popular virtual meeting software.

See the contents page for more detail.

Introduction: Everything Can Come Together to Show You at Your Best

The aim of this book is to help you do your best. We focus on actions big and small; interview preparation questions, which is a relatively time consuming effort, and simple actions such as ensuring your laptop is at the right height to provide a good conversational angle. These things, and more, come together to show you at your best.

Ahead, you can expect to find reminders, suggestions, guides and tutorials for Windows and Mac for the five major video conference softwares: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Skype and Cisco WebEx. Tutorials on creating a test meeting in each of these are provided in Part V, at the end of this book. Acquaint yourself with the software if you haven't used it before.

Don't skip the the troubleshooting section in Part IV. Read it so you're aware of different issues which might occur. If technical issues do occur during your interview you will know how to remedy them.

Finally, good luck with your interview.

PART I
Preparation Prior to Interview

Preparation

This section discusses the main aspects of part one, preparing various aspects before the interview.

Prepare Yourself

We won't spend more than this paragraph discussing what I refer to as "givens" regarding preparing your appearance. For example, it is *given* that you will dress smartly and conduct your usual grooming regime prior to a remote interview. The results of these activities will not only show up on camera - high-resolution monitors and web-cams mean you are no longer able to hide behind the low-resolution blur of yesteryear - but they will also get you into a useful mindset. A mindset similar to people working from home who build habits such as only working from a specific physical space from within their home or getting smartly dressed. These activities create a mental barrier which separates work and home life, in those cases it is designed to reduce procrastination and other in-home temptations. In our case, we are getting into a positive frame of mind by looking our best so we can reduce nerves and excel.

We discuss interview preparation such as questions, second interviews and so on in Part III.

Ensure a Quiet Space

Mention your interview to family or housemates to ensure ambient noise is reduced. If you have young children, it may not be possible to be entirely silent - this is fine as long as your interviewers can hear you. Relax, apologise and continue to do your best.

Visual Composition In-Camera

Your aim is to obtain a camera angle which replicates the view someone would have sitting in front of you. Consider the composition of the two images below:

Move your laptop to get the best composition, taking into consideration the background and how you fit into frame. Place your laptop on top of a stack of books to bring the camera to an acceptable height. If you have an external web cam jury-rig a solution so the camera angle is appropriate. Don't take risks by balancing an external camera which may fall during your interview, however.

Four more pages are available in the complete book.

They discuss lighting, external microphones, audio, and tutorials for Windows and Mac on audio testing.

Your Computer at Its Best

Unless your laptop is new, it is good practice to ensure the load on your processor is not going to negatively effect your interview. Too many background processes may interfere, causing choppy video on your end and on your interviewers screen.

Restart your device and close any unnecessary applications which open on startup, and prior to your interview ensure only necessary applications are open.

You can view your systems performance to see if this is necessary on Windows and Mac.

Windows

Press and hold `ctrl + alt + delete` and select *Task Manager*, alternatively, search *Task Manager*.
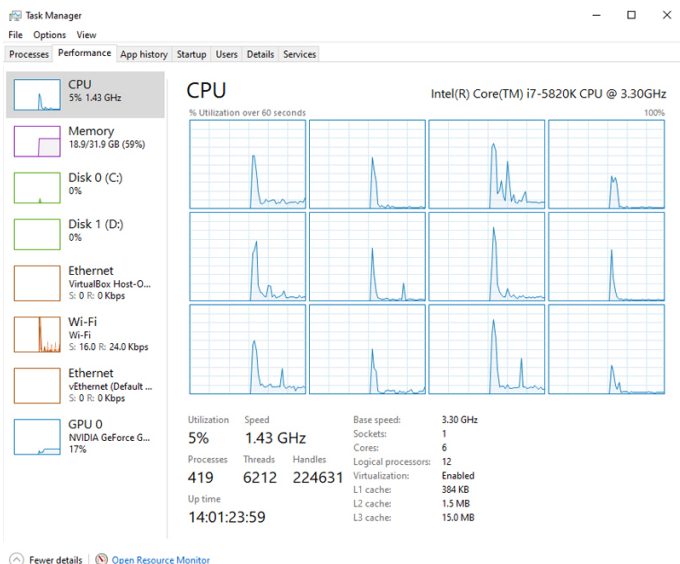
In Task Manager you can see your CPU and memory utilisation. If either one is high close applications and restart your prior to interview to avoid issues.

Mac

Search *Activity Monitor* in spotlight search (hold `cmd` + `space` to open search).
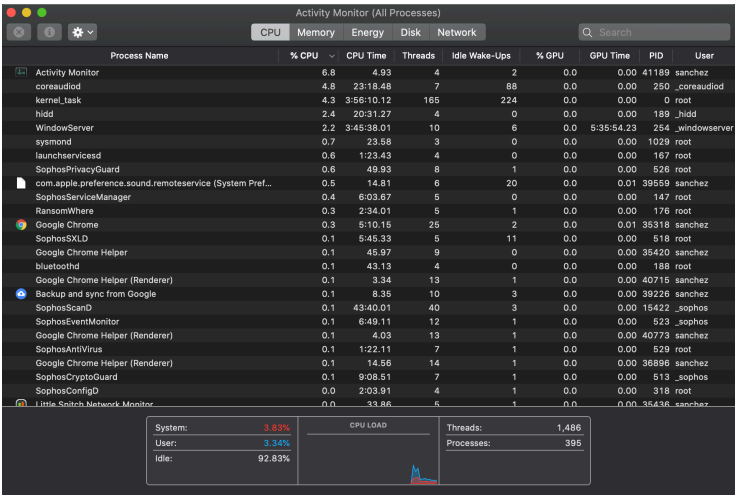
In Activity Monitor you can see your CPU and memory utilisation, if either of these are high close applications and restart your computer prior to interview to avoid issues.

PART II
During a Video Interview

During a Video Interview

Know Where to Look

You regularly hear how important good eye contact is to making a good first impression. In person this is easy, during a remote interview its harder - you're looking at your screen not your camera. It's important to be mindful and keep your gaze on or near your camera. This is visualised below with a golden triangle. As you move your gaze outside of this area, it becomes more obvious to anyone on the call they don't have your full attention.

Be Aware of Distractions

Your electronic devices are distracting things; notifications, navigation menus, among many others. You're in a space you're comfortable in, using a device you're comfortable with, it's easy to fall into the trap of distraction you wouldn't have in an in-person interview. Eye movements caused by distraction are easy to see and you must be

aware not to dart your eyes around. As the point above says, eye contact is important, even virtual eye contact.

Turn off notifications, update notifications or any other type of pop-ups or windows which may interfere with your attention during an interview.

Be Mindful of Audio Clipping and Feedback

Be aware of audio clipping and feedback. A microphone too close to your mouth may clip, cut off high tones producing unpleasant audio for your interviewer. You can perform an audio test as we discussed in part I to avoid this.

Audio feedback happens when your microphone is too close to your speakers, you have multiple devices in the same call, or your devices are incorrectly configured and you and everyone else can hear your audio input twice - you can hear yourself talk. Ensure your microphone is not too close to your speakers and that your input is correctly configured. If you are joining a call with multiple devices ensure you join using the proper procedure. Zoom offers this functionality, and this problem is covered in part IV Troubleshooting.

Seven more pages are available in the complete book.

They discuss your microphone, latency, video conference software and a brief overview of the five most common video conference applications: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Skype.

Cisco WebEx

WebEx's controls are permanently at the bottom of the meeting screen. Below we focus on the most pertinent controls to you.
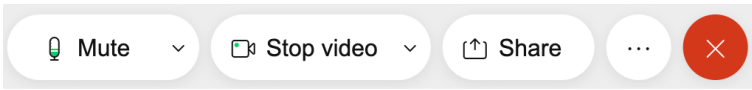
The mute, stop video and end call buttons are located here. The mute and stop video buttons each have additional menus denoted by the small downward facing arrow. Clicking this will open an additional menu, clicking anywhere else on the button will mute or stop video respectively.
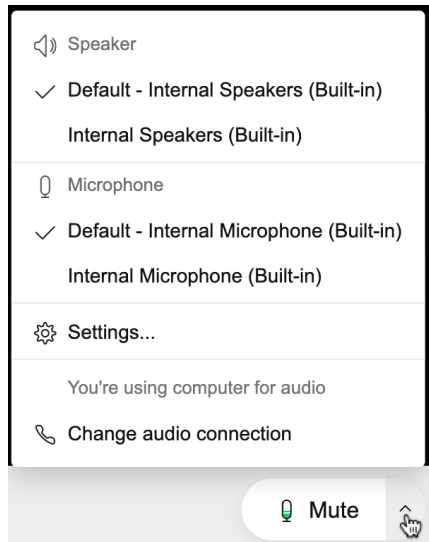
The mute button menu has four options. The first four options are toggle (only one can be selected at a time) options for the speaker or microphone. The number of

these options will vary depending on how many audio devices your device has. The 'settings' option allows those same first four options and an addition input level slider. Finally, the mute menu allows you to change your audio connection. This allows you to disconnect your computers audio and call in on your phone.
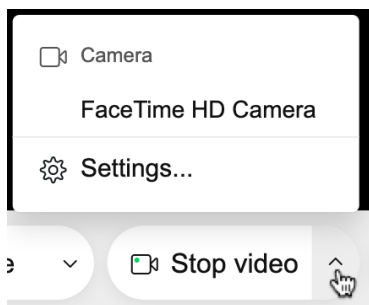
The 'stop camera' menu has two options, select your audio device (a toggle of available camera devices plugged into your device). The settings menu offers the same functionality, choose the camera device you want to use.
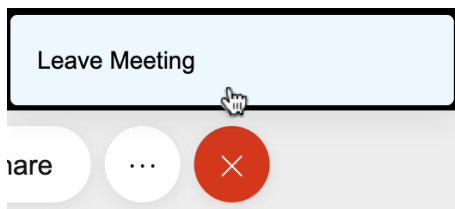
The leave meeting button works differently to other conference software, you have to click twice. The first click on the red circle opens the additional menu where you click 'leave meeting' to actually close the call.

PART III
Interview Questions Preparation

Interview Question Preparation

This section discusses the a number of the most popular types of interview questions you are likely to come across; competency-based, strength-based, behavioural and personal interview questions. Interviews may include more than one type of question.

What are Competency-based Questions?

Being competent at something "represents the skills, knowledge and behaviours required to perform effectively in a given job, role or situation". Competency-based questions seek specific real-life examples where you performed effectively in a situation. Examples of competencies include; problem solving, conflict resolution, delivering at pace and seeing the big picture. Large organisations may have frameworks built around these concepts, so searching online for documentation can be useful. For example, the UK civil service utilises a competency-based framework for recruitment and internal development. The framework can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-competency-framework

What are Strength-based Questions?

Strength-based interviews are a relatively new concept to be adopted by recruiters. They seek to understand what your natural strengths are and what you enjoy doing, testing your suitability for a role against these rather than your skills. This doesn't mean the recruit is disinterested in

what you can do, they will be listening to your answers and learning what you are good at and not so good at. The concept is based in psychology driven recruiting. By placing you in a role you enjoy and are good at, you are more likely to be happy, perform better and stay at the company longer. Questions such as "What are you good at?" and "How do you feel about deadlines" may form part of a strength-based interview.

What are Behavioural Questions?

Behavioural questions seek to understand your suitability for a role and test your past behaviour against an ideal for the current role. Questions exploring your past roles and scenario-based questions exploring potential situations are used. Examples include: "What would you do if you became aware you were going to miss a deadline?" and "How would you react to a client providing particularly critical feedback of your work?"

What are Personal Interview Questions?

Personal interview questions target your personality and your achievements, rather than your skills, to test your suitability for a role. Questions such as; "What are your weaknesses?", "What are your hobbies?" and "How do you approach joining new teams?" are examples. Sections of interviews and the whole of a second interview may be personal questions designed to test to see how well you will fit into a team after you have passed initial questions on your skills.

Two more pages are available in the complete book.

They discuss the S.T.A.R method and how to use it.

Interview Questions & Answers
Competency-based Questions

These questions are worded to reflect a variety of specific competencies sought by a potential employer for a role. Competencies include 'Delivering at Pace' and 'Seeing the Big Picture'. A long list of competencies is included in the final section of this book. You can find likely competencies for a role by reading the job description and considering this list, or they may be stated in a 'person specification' or similar document with the job advertisement.

How do you prioritise work?

This can also be phrased as a describe statement: "Describe a time when you have had to prioritise one project over another." This question tests competencies such as 'Delivering at Pace', and seeks answers to your ability to understand priority and switch tasks when appropriate.

An example involving how you measure, monitor and reorientate to different tasks would provide a good answer. "In my previous role, I monitored tasks in order of priority using [insert software package]. I maintained consistent output by considering the tasks impact on the customer and the time it will take, to decide on priority. This allowed me to create a balance between tasks which can completed quickly and ones which take longer. For example, product launches took many weeks of preparation, while there were still many small tasks to be completed. Dedicating a slot of time to working on smaller tasks and a separate slot to the product launch and rotating two or three times throughout

the day allowed me to keep up with new incoming tasks and maintain pace on the larger piece of work."

Describe a time you used your communication skills to defuse a difficult situation.

Understanding how you use your communication skills to deal with difficult situations is a skill used in many roles, from customers in retail to disagreements with colleagues over project changes. The interviewer wants to know how aware you are of your own ability, and examples of times you have successfully defused, compromised or otherwise worked in a difficult situation. Showing an awareness of the other persons point of view and the impact of disagreements on work is a good start.

"I recall an instance at [insert company name], where a client had sent multiple requests for changes to be made to a particular asset and each time it had been done incorrectly. Their case was assigned to me. As you might expect, they were irate having to waste more time on something that should be completed. I was mindful why they were angry, so I could address the issue and help them achieve the outcome they wanted. Of course, you apologise, and make sure they feel heard - otherwise you're likely to annoy them further that they aren't being listened to. After listening and ensuring I understood the issue and task, I completed the aspect assigned to me and supervised the remainder of the task after I passed it to a colleague by periodically checking in. The client was content the work had been completed and I had further learned the importance of asking questions when you're unsure rather

than blazing ahead." Equally, this type of answer focusing on diffusion, people skills, empathy and professionalism is application to situations in retail, office-based or remote interactions (e.g. phone, teleconference).

Give an example of a situation you used project management skills to monitor a projects performance.

Experience and understanding of project management skills, such as time management, scheduling, risk management, critical think and more, are useful to answer this question. The phrase "project management" may put some people off, "I've never managed a project" you might say. We're not talking about that situation specifically, we're talking about the skills required to understand and manage any work, those skills previously mentioned. Any instance you have utilised those skills is relevant to a good answer to this question. Examples can come from higher education or the workplace.

"My undergraduate dissertation. Prior to starting my dissertation I conducted a short risk assessment, identifying issues and solutions to problems such as 'what if I don't have enough time', 'what if I become ill' and 'what if my supervisor becomes unavailable'. This pre-planning helped me a great deal - my supervisor did become unavailable towards the end of my project, as they became a father. The solution to this was moving to remote sessions and I gained access to another tutor for face-to-face discussion. My preplanning meant this event was not as stressful as it otherwise would have been, as I had already

considered actions. Additionally, my dissertation planning included a significant amount of time management to ensure I completed the various stages on-time. Many of the stages were dependant on previous work being complete so time management was important. I managed scheduling and dependencies through a gantt chart and organising my work into smaller milestones and monitoring using software such as Trello."

Trello (https://www.trello.com) is a task organisation web app. Users create columns and create tasks which can be moved between the columns. A typical three column layout I've used consultants of To-Do, In-Progress and Complete columns, moving tasks from left to right as they move through each stage. Leaving you with a satisfying list of completed objectives and a good overview of what is left and in-progress at the current time.

Eight more pages are available in the complete book.

They provide further competency-based questions and answers, and strength-based, behavioural and personal questions and answers.

Questions to Ask The Interviewer

At the end of the interview you have the opportunity to ask questions. It's always good idea to have a few prepared as this is your chance to learn more about the role, company and build more rapport with the interviewer.

What is the culture of the team and organisation like?

Culture is a difficult concept to define, it is the mixture of the effects of leadership style and individuals attitude towards work and the business. You live in it everyday, so it's quite important. Ideally, you wish the interviewer to describe the culture of both the team and the organisation, as they can differ. Gaining insight into how teams operate gives you an idea of what it will be like working their and what they consider important. The answer may also describe how a positive culture is promoted (socials, team building, etc) and other aspects which improve how teams and organisations work. The answer essentially describes the experience of working in the company.

How has the team and organisation changed over the last five years?

Understanding how a team and the organisation have changed over recent years gives you an idea of how well the team and business are doing, how they are meeting challenges and what the future may hold. If the team or organisation have grown year-on-year, generally, things are

looking good. If the team or organisation has had lay offs recently, job security and the culture might be something to consider.

What do you think is the most challenging aspect of this role?

The answer to this question will serve you well should you be offered the role. Further, if you are interviewed by your line manager or department manager, the answer will give you valuable insight into what they have learned leading the team and provides an avenue to distinguish yourself. You may wish to target this challenge upon joining (this isn't necessary, you'll have enough to learn in a new role - but if you can, why not.).

Two more pages are available in the complete book.

They discus further questions to ask a potential employer.

PART IV
Troubleshooting Technical Issues

Troubleshooting Technical Issues

Much of the discussion in Part I was designed to avoid issues before they arise. Reducing processor load, checking audio input and so on. Please refer to Part I to mitigate risk.

This section will cover how to troubleshoot issues which arise during your remote interview. The section is split into sections for generic issues which may occur on any platform, and a section for each major platform.

Generic Troubleshooting

Frozen Video on Your Interviewers Screen

Problem: Your interviewer says their video feed of you has frozen (you assume they can still move their mouse and interact with their application, so it's not an issue at their end).

Solution: In the application you're using for the video call, turn off your camera off and on again.

For example, in Zoom press the video on/off button to turn off your camera and press it again to turn your camera back on. Similar controls are found in each of the major video conferencing softwares. Your interviewer will tell you if it worked.

Audio Echo During Meeting

Problem: You can hear an audio echo or audio feedback during your video call.

Solution: Ensure you have the correct single audio input device selected in your computers settings and that your microphone is not too close to your speakers.

If the issue is coming from your interviewers side and multiple interviewers on the same call are in the same room, this may also be the cause.

If the situation persists, whoever is causing the issue can mute their microphone until they wish to speak, limiting the interference.

Four more pages are available in the complete book.

They discuss further generic troubleshooting and troubleshooting solutions for common issues amongst specific video conference software.

Part V
Further Resources

Table of Competencies

Competency	Description
Adaptability	Adapts to changing priorities, organisational needs, environmental change and effectively deals with people from different backgrounds.
Collaboration and Partnering	Works collaboratively at all levels, sharing information and building positive relationships. Challenges assumptions, while maintaining approachability and delivering project objectives.
Communication	Ability to effectively organise and express ideas. Actively listens.
Conflict Resolution	Recognises conflict and addresses it in a manner that respects and considers the needs of all stakeholders.

Five more pages are available in the complete book.

They discuss more competencies and their definitions.

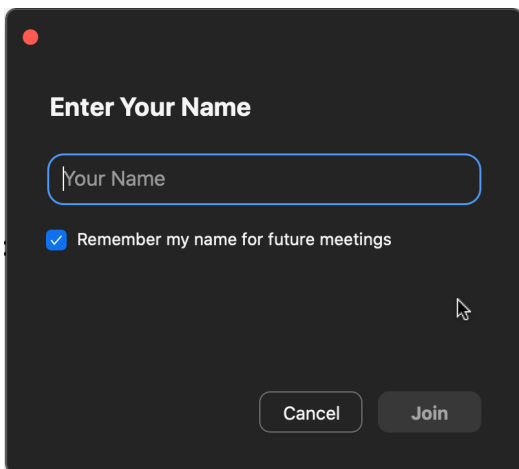# How to Join a Test Call in Each Virtual Meeting Software

Zoom

To join a test zoom meeting type https://zoom.us/test into your browser.
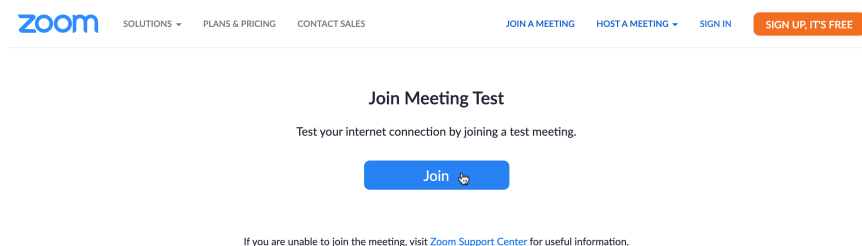
You can download the Zoom client or conduct a meeting from within your browser. The option to join from your browser seems to only appear if you click launch meeting and then click cancel on the prompt which appears (leading the zoom website to think you're having issues with the downloadable client).
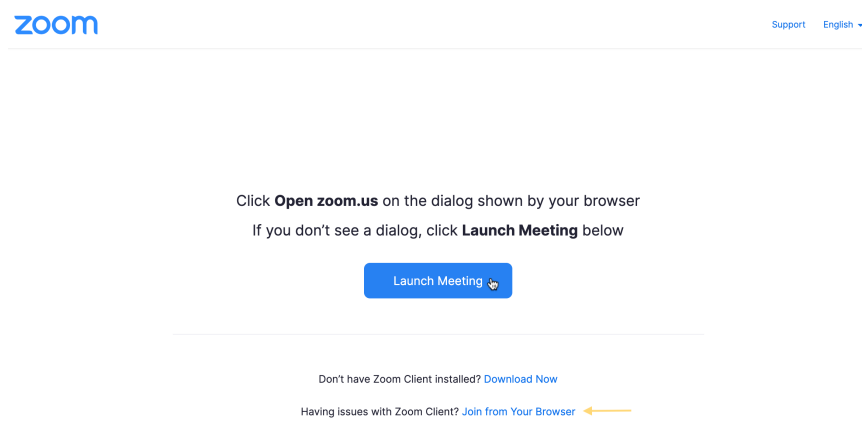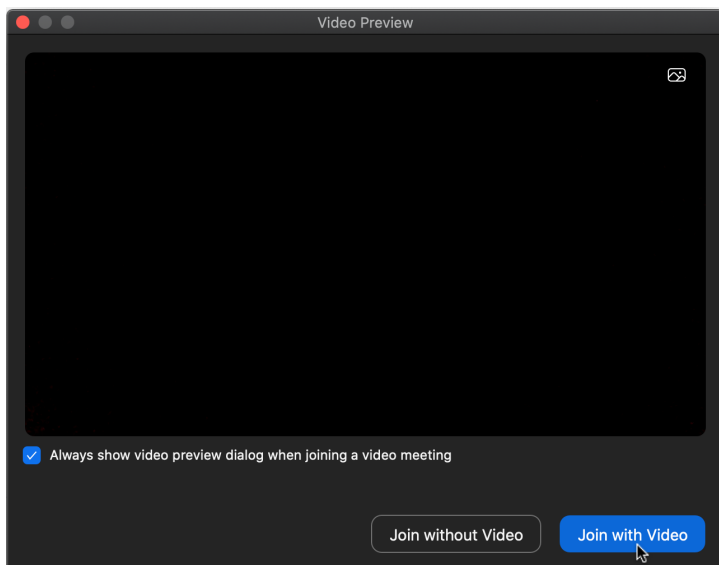
Enter you name to appear on screen and click join.

You're shown a video preview. Check your background and video composition. Reposition your computer or place your laptop on a stack of books to get the best composition.

Eight more pages are available in the complete book.

They include the complete tutorial for Zoom and for each of the other four common video conference applications: Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Skype and Cisco WebEx.

Forty more pages in total are available in the complete book.

Go to www.interviewmanual.com.

End.