

happendigital

How to look great on Zoom (even if you're not being filmed)

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Can you see me, Clem Fandango?



You can get good results without special equipment in an ordinary room.

Zoom conference calls and down-the-line video interviews are going to be standard practice for the foreseeable future. So they're worth doing as well as possible, paying attention to the quality of image and audio that's being transmitted.

As a creative video agency, we've been asked by lots of our clients for simple guidance. It isn't difficult: for most people the easiest way to connect to Zoom is by laptop. Although the cameras and microphones built into laptops aren't that great, they're convenient, don't need to be handheld and are likely to be easily available at short notice.

The problem



Does this framing inspire confidence in the viewer?

A lot of remote interviews on TV look like this.

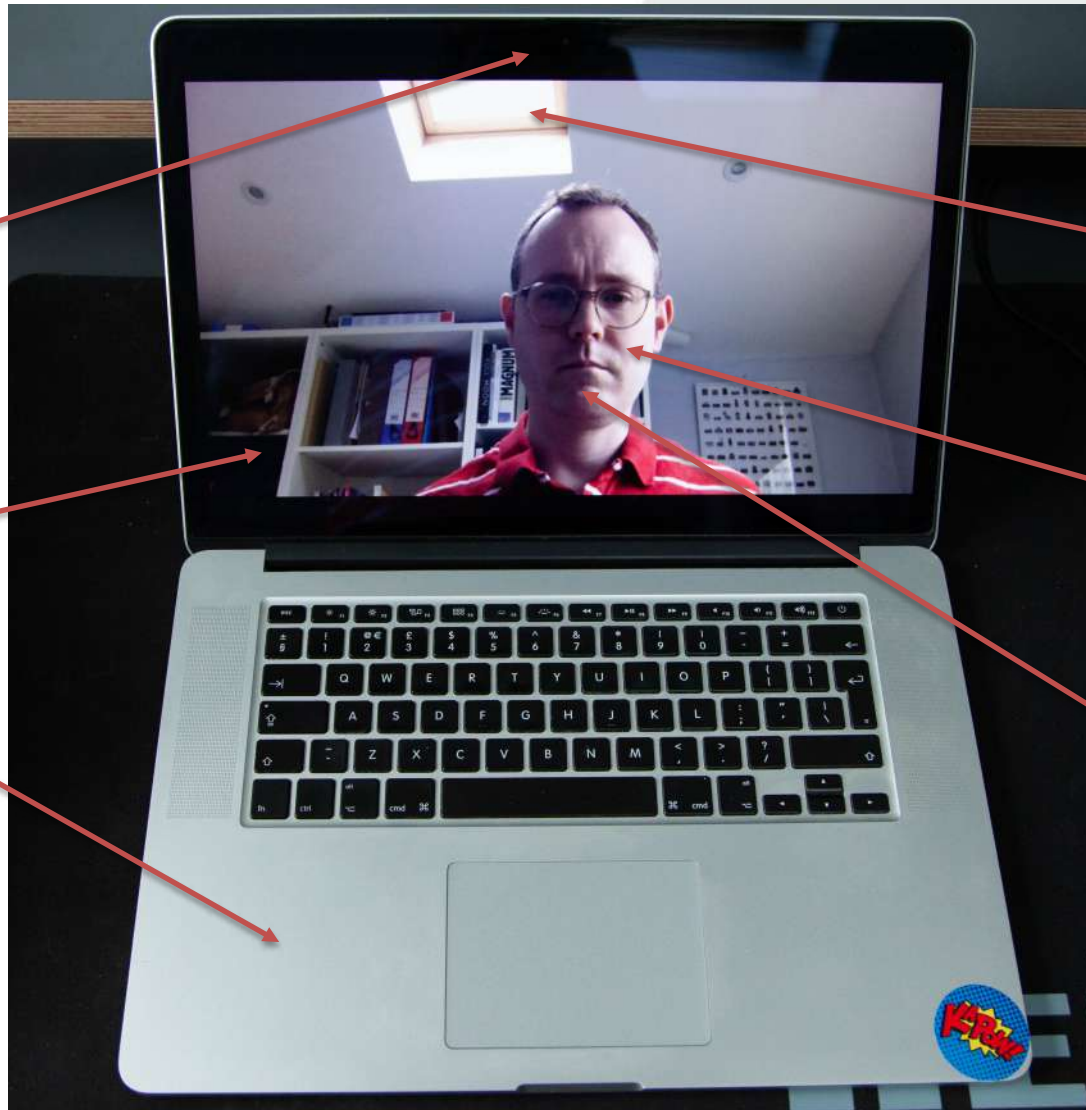
The laptop is on a desk, making the camera angle unflattering.

The background is cluttered.

The eyeline looks awkward because the subject isn't looking directly at the camera.

There's a light source in the background.

The viewer is distracted by the poor framing.



Camera angled up

Light source
in background

Distracting
background

Eyeline looking
at screen

Laptop flat on desk

Too much contrast
on face

The solution



This framing is more elegant and won't distract from what the subject is saying.

The face is evenly lit because the subject is facing a window.

The angle is more flattering because the laptop has been raised to eye level.

The eyeline is much better because the subject is looking straight at the camera, about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way down the frame.

There's no light source behind the subject confusing the camera.

The background is still a bit busy but now provides context because it's clearly visible.



Camera at eye level

Face evenly lit

Laptop raised
off desk

Background adds
context

Looking into
camera



Rather than try and use the window as a background,
Use the light to illuminate your face.

Two minutes to a better picture

Transform the picture by doing three things:

1. Turn towards the light. This makes sure your face is illuminated.
2. Raise the the laptop off the surface of the desk (here, by using two shoeboxes). This improves the camera angle.
3. Make sure the subject's eyeline is about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way down the frame.

Cheat sheet – video

Hopefully now you've got a good idea of what you should be aiming for. If you don't have a window to hand, move a light behind your laptop, or switch your desktop background to white and turn up the brightness. And think about the following:

- Clean your lens
- Keep the light in front of you
- Turn off lights behind you
- Raise your laptop up
- Look into the camera
- Wear solid colours not patterns

Cheat sheet – audio

Audio is arguably more important than video, but without a plug-in microphone there's not much you can do to improve sound quality from a laptop. However you can make the best of what you have:

- Find somewhere quiet and close the door
- Get close to the microphone
- Use a phone headset if you have one
- Use AirPods if you have them

Next steps

If you find that you're doing a lot of remote video conferencing or interviews it might be worth investing in some simple equipment to improve the quality of your video and audio:

- A ring light will ensure your face is evenly lit at any time of day
- An audio breakout box and microphone will dramatically improve your sound quality
- With the right apps you can use your phone's camera as a webcam

If you'd like to discuss how Happen could help you improve the quality of your video calls even further, please get in touch – hello@happendigital.co.uk

We would love to hear from you if you've found this guide helpful.

About us

We're Happen Digital, a creative video agency offering expert advice, creative ideas and practical support to organisations that need to explain themselves and bring their stories to life.

We offer decades of experience in some of the world's leading news organisations – including the Guardian, BBC and Channel 4 News. We put what we've learned to good use helping our clients communicate.

We work for companies of all sizes – big organisations like Auto Trader, Teach First and the Royal Academy of Engineering – but also startups and charities too – and we would love to help you navigate this difficult time.

thankyou

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