



Video Conference Tips from a TV Anchor: Angie Lau is the Founder, CEO of Forkast.News

VISUALS

1. What's in the background?

As you appear on camera, know that the visual attention isn't always on you. Eyes will dart to what's behind you, the books you've piled up, or the laundry that hasn't been folded yet. Find a visually neutral background. Some texture would be nice. That white blank wall is fine in a pinch, but a bookcase or framed pictures are a nice touch.

2. Where's your light?

Make sure when you pick a spot, you don't put your back to a window. You'll be backlit. Which means your face will be dark, because the iris of the camera will be focusing on the light. Instead, face the window and the brilliant daylight will wash your face aglow with natural light and we'll all wonder where you managed to get that facial amidst the COVID-19 isolation orders.

If the sun has set, and your colleagues in the Detroit office are joining in on the call and you're on until midnight... then find a lamp, and sit in front of that. Let the light find your face. Face the light.

3. A little hairspray and makeup doesn't hurt... anyone.

Television (I mean video) is a visual medium. Which means it is a two-dimensional experience. What looks good in real life, doesn't always translate on camera. I'm talking about hair and makeup. Ladies and gentlemen, spray those fly away and just brush that hair in place. As for makeup, please don't go too crazy — there truly is no need... you're working from home after all! For men, a little loose powder will do — it removes the oiliness from that well-lit face of yours. The camera is looking for definition in the face, so eyebrow powder that frames your beautiful eyes and a little eyeshadow can also go a long way.

As for color, it's up to you. But au naturel feels right at the moment.

4. What to wear?

Stay away from patterns (your background will be visual noise enough), and stick to solids. Plain Jane is having a moment right now... as she should (because she's awesome). For men, a dress shirt, t-shirt, or collared shirt, sweater — that's fine. Dare to wear color. For women in corporate, you might want to stay away from ruffles on camera... but everything else is fair game, including your pajamas. I did once wear my pajamas on a video call (it was silky and looked like a tank, and I wore a structured cardigan with defined shoulders over it, so...). For those who are fashion bold, you know what to do.

5. Frame yourself.

The rule is an inch of space between the top of your head and the top of the screen. Aim to look at your laptop camera straight on. If you don't have a fancy tripod, just go grab a few books, a box of diapers, a pot turned upside down, whatever... and prop it on top of that.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION.

You've escaped to the bathroom. Your lovely husband is trying to keep your screaming toddler from rushing in, but you can still hear him crying "Mommmmyyyyyy!!!" And then it's your turn to pitch. It's go time!

6. Think happy.

How you feel is how you sound. And if you don't feel that way, take a breath. Breathe. Reset. Smile (yes smile — you're not the only one on the call trapped in the bathroom, believe me). Find your happy place, and settle into the moment. Focus.

By the way, it's ok to acknowledge sudden family needs that come up during the all-hands meeting you're leading. In fact, it's ok to say, "excuse me, let me just take care of this." The boss is human. Your boss will think you're human. And if they don't, well, that's a great data point for your career aspirations.

7. Don't look at yourself when you speak.

And yet we all do that. You've got to look into the camera. The camera is the person you're talking to. So, put a little sticky arrow pointed at the tiny pinprick hole on your laptop, because that's the eye contact you want to have with the camera (aka your colleagues who are logged into the video call). That camera is how you make human eye contact online. When you look away, look at the monitor, your eye attention is shifted... what are you looking at? You know what they're thinking? "He looks like he isn't committed to his idea." "She appears distracted, not confident at all."

While most people consciously don't think it's a big deal if your eye wanders to the screen while you talk, subconsciously if you can master it... you will be making your points more powerfully.

You'll hold your colleagues' attention, because you're "looking" right at them. And that human connection in this digital divide will be real.

8. Turn the "hmmms, uhhhs and ahhhhs" into silent pauses or "and."

There's something about people watching us when we speak that really gets deep into our psyche. You know what it is? Everyone is judging you. They know you are really wearing your pajamas. At least that's what you think. You know what they're really thinking? The exact same thing... about themselves. So, get over it.

About the Author

Angie Lau is the Founder, CEO for Forkast.News. Angie is an award-winning global journalist. She is a former Bloomberg News television anchor that has worked in the United States and Asia. For more communication tips you can follow her on: [linkedin.com/in/angielau](https://www.linkedin.com/in/angielau).