# stone communications

Zoom is nothing more than bad TV. Yet it's probably here to stay, along with its cousins Skype and Teams. The impersonality of the screen can be intimidating. Here are some guidelines, with a model you might recognize, to help you present yourself in the best light.
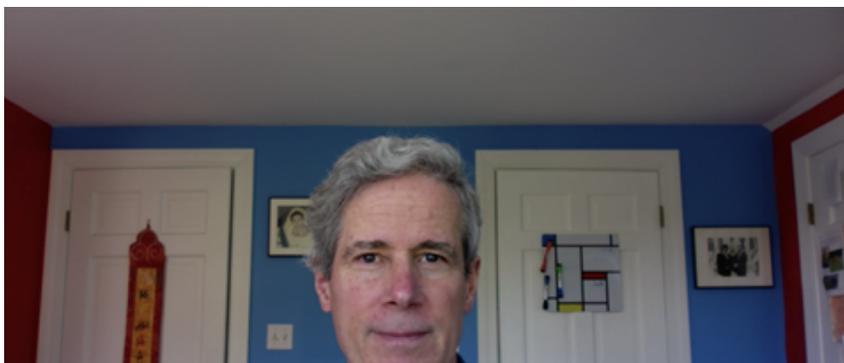
Composition Matters

This may seem elementary, but poor framing is the most common mistake I see. The shot should extend from mid-chest up, with about a fist's worth of headroom, as in the top photo.

Too much space above looks sloppy, as in the bottom picture.

Once you establish your frame, don't slouch because the empty area will take over.

To adjust the shot, simply tilt the monitor. (If your screen is fixed, use books or other large objects to raise it to the desired position.)

Act Like an Art Director

Remove clutter from the background. The shot on the bottom looks less distracting, minus just a few objects seen in the top shot.

If your walls are white or unadorned, add some color, if possible. A painting, photo, or a simple drape will make the "set" more inviting.

Use "virtual backgrounds" sparingly. Many people prefer to express themselves (or hide clutter) with digital backgrounds, yet the images sometimes pixillate (break up) when you gesture

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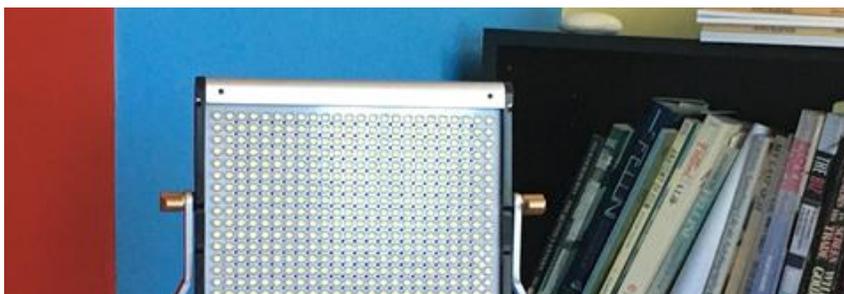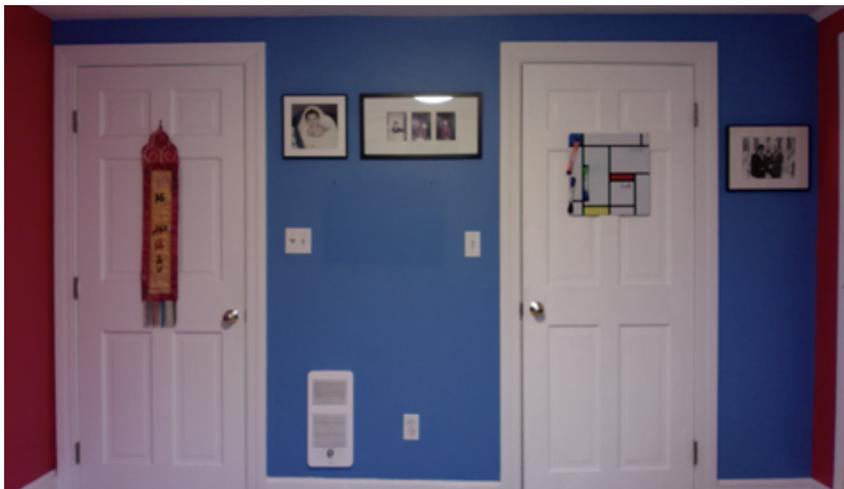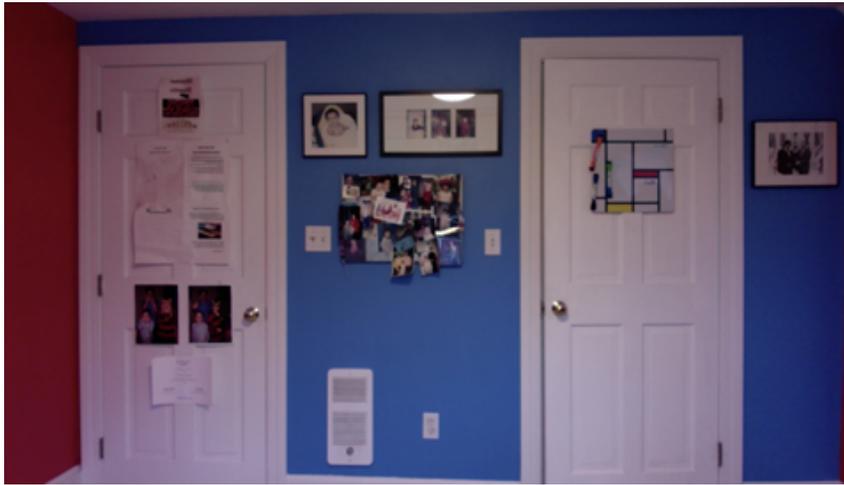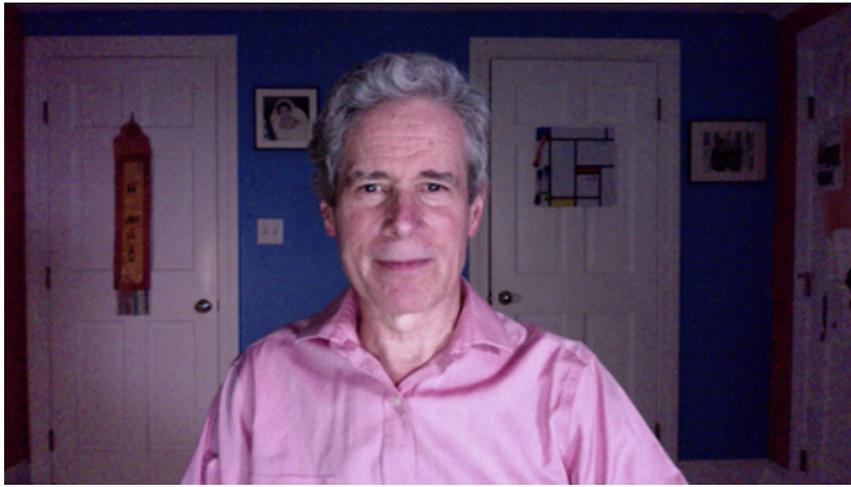
Light it Up

At night, pay careful attention to lighting. I use a simple, inexpensive LED light, 12" X 12", seen here.

Place the light in front of you, at an angle about 30 degrees above the horizontal, and 30 – 45 degrees off the camera axis (that's the line extending directly from the lens to your face.) My LED is adjustable so I can vary the intensity and the color temperature (to mimic either sunlight or incandescent bulbs).

In the top shot, I used just one light. (Generally, one instrument will probably suffice. I'm showing more elaborate setups just to demonstrate the possibilities, in case you want to add texture and nuance.)

In the second picture, I aimed a second light at the back wall to make the scene less gloomy.

Finally, I opened a door to add depth. (The hall light increases the impact.)

Remember: the goal of lighting is to focus interest and attention on the subject.

Clothes for Close-ups

The same wardrobe rules apply to TV and Zoom alike:

Don't wear white, because it blooms on camera. Notice that the shirt is overly prominent.

Don't wear black, because it soaks up the light and will look somber.

Do wear neutral colors such as khaki, olive green, light brown, etc.

Blue is a classic choice for the camera, by the way.

Another suggestion: Avoid oversized jewelry that might catch the light and distract the viewers.
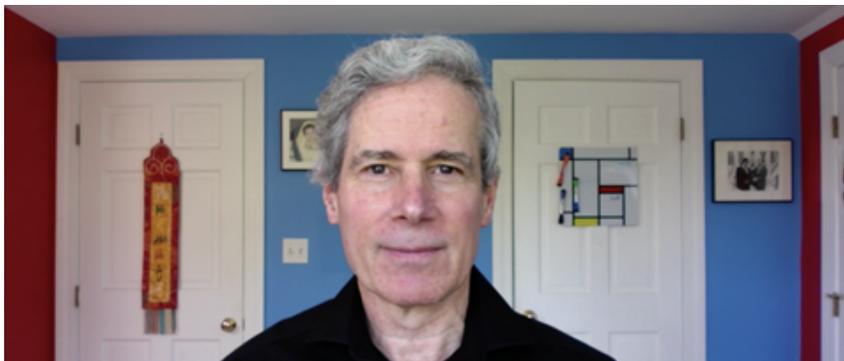
Body Language Grammar

As always, speak your "native" body language. That means gesture as you would normally. Nothing else will work. (See these examples, which are freeze frames from a speech I delivered.)

If you try to be too serious and static, you will look lifeless. On the other hand, if you gesticulate too much because you think that will make you appear more lively, you'll end up looking mechanical instead.

Do, however, look at the camera lens at the top of your screen. If that feels weird, try centering your gaze on the middle of the screen. (Looking away is more disconcerting on Zoom than in person because the audience can see your eyes clearly in close-up.)

Ditch the Din

The built-in microphones on most computers these days are just fine, so I don't think it's necessary to invest in separate mikes or headphones.

Remember, though, that any ambient sound, coming from birds, leaf blowers, or even papers you're shuffling on your desk, will "go home" on the mike. *You* may not notice the distractions because your brain can filter out the extraneous audio, but the microphone can't. Everything is mixed onto one channel.

Be considerate and find a quiet area! Mute the audio if you leave the room to avoid accidental interruptions

from those around you.
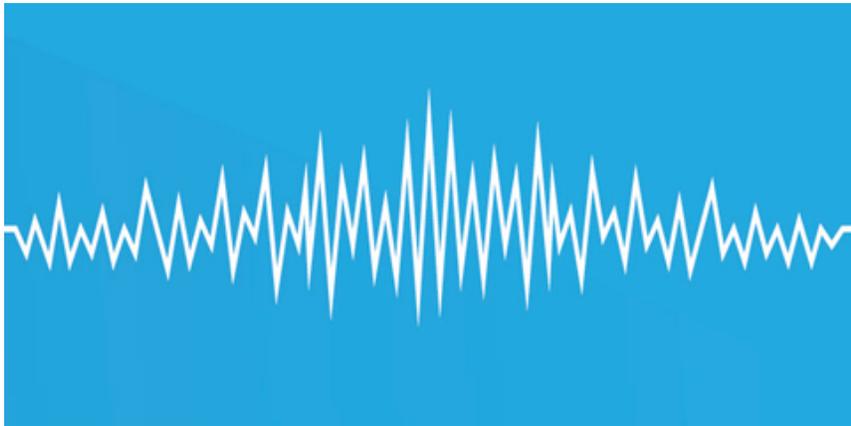
Protect Yourself

Zoom bombing — hacking by uninvited guests — may be rare but it does happen. An environmental consultant I know worked with 30 or 40 colleagues in a public session hosted by a government agency. All of a sudden a screeching noise interrupted the speaker. Hackers proceeded to scrawl obscene words and drawings on the screen, then chanted offensive messages and rude slogans. That ended the meeting.

To avoid this nightmare, don't post the login information publicly. For added security, use a password, or ask guests to register before they receive the link. You might also consider the waiting room feature — an electronic version of a velvet rope outside a nightclub — to control who enters. Check the Zoom website to learn how to lock a meeting once it starts.

Please let me know if you need assistance with presentations, messaging, or executive coaching. I'm just a Zoom call away. I now offer two-hour trainings (instead of four hours) to minimize online fatigue.

I wish everyone a safe fall,

Greg

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