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Tips

For

Amazing Virtual
Communication.

By Jayne Latz



1. Make “Eye Contact”:



In virtual communication, “eye contact” is achieved by looking directly into your camera, not at your audience. Looking at your screen will make you appear as though you are looking down, making your listener feel disconnected. While it may be necessary to look at your screen intermittently, try to focus your gaze on your camera the majority of the time.

2. Clarity Matters More Than Ever:



Reduced visual cues and varying sound quality mean virtual communication requires extra attention to speech clarity. Be sure to slow down and enunciate each sound of each word.

3. Use Body Language to Make an Impression



Nonverbal communication is a great tool to help you stand out from the crowd. Smile and use gestures when speaking to appear enthusiastic and pleasant. When listening, nod thoughtfully to show you are engaged. Finally, don't forget to sit up straight; slouching will make you seem unprofessional, sloppy, and overly casual.

4. Take Advantage of Non-Verbal Communication:



Non-verbal communication is harder to read through a computer screen. Use expressive, yet natural facial expressions as you speak, and use gestures to highlight your point.

5. Position Yourself Right

Position yourself so that you are centered in the frame and visible from just below your shoulders to the top of your head. For the most flattering shot, make sure your camera is not looking up at you from below.

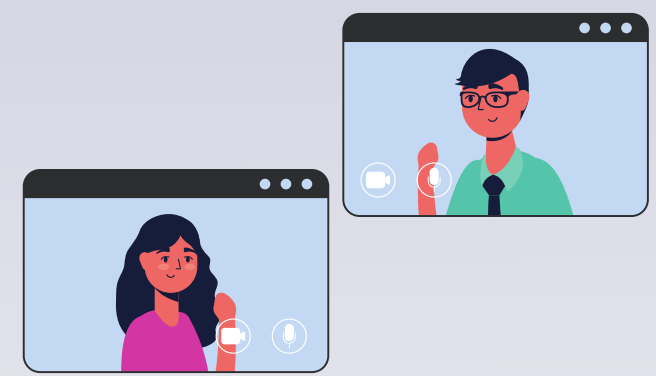


6. Posture is Key

Good diaphragmatic breathing is impossible to achieve if you're slouched over. Imagine a string running from your tailbone, through your spine, and out the top of your head, with a gentle force pulling from above. Keep your shoulders relaxed, and your chin level with the floor.



7. Be Mindful of Your Background



Piles of laundry or personal photos may be fine when you're having a video chat with friends, but for professional interactions, you need to curate a more polished background. Can't find an appropriate space in your home? Many programs, including Zoom, allow you to use a picture as a virtual background.

8. Get Your Lighting Right



It may seem trivial, but poor lighting isn't just unflattering, it can be a significant distraction for your audience. Practice your presentation in the location that you will actually be holding the meeting at a similar time of day. Then take a good look at yourself in the camera to see if there are any distracting shadows or glare. Try leaning slightly forward and backward to see how the lighting changes. Don't like what you see? Try putting a small desk lamp directly in front of you behind your computer. To soften the light and make it more flattering, drape a scarf or other thin fabric over the lamp.

9. Don't Read



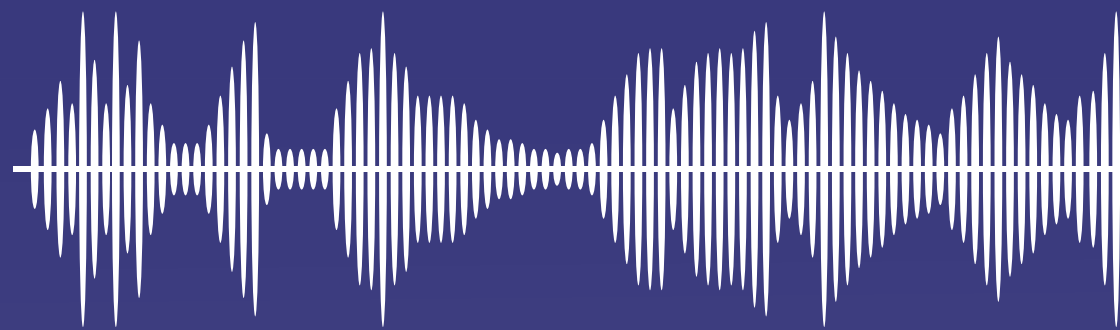
When presenting virtually, it can be tempting to read directly from your notes. Don't fall into this trap! Reading your notes verbatim will make you sound robotic and decrease the impact of your spoken message.

10. Keep Your Message Simple and Clear



Watching a presentation remotely can make it more difficult for some people to fully concentrate. Distill your message down to its most essential points, and follow the three classic steps of a strong presentation: Tell your audience what you're going to say, say it, then tell them what you said.

11. Say Every Sound



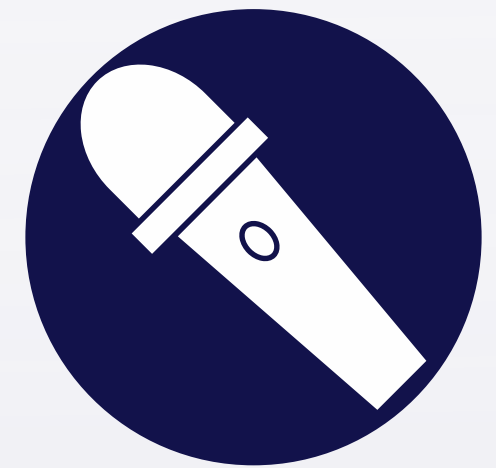
Slow down and enunciate each sound of each word to make sure your audience doesn't miss a thing. Take care not to drop sounds, particularly at the ends of words, and don't run your speech together. Articulating all of the sounds of every word will not only make your speech easier to understand, it will project professionalism and intelligence.

12. Harness the Power of the Pause



Sometimes silence can speak more powerfully than words. A well-timed pause can improve vocal variety, highlight an important point, or build tension. Regularly pausing also makes your speech easier to understand and allows your audience to take a moment to absorb your message. Before your next remote presentation or virtual meeting, take a moment to go through your notes and find places to pause that will maximize the power of your speech. Want help? Contact us to learn about our Strategic Marking System™!

13. Develop a Dynamic Voice

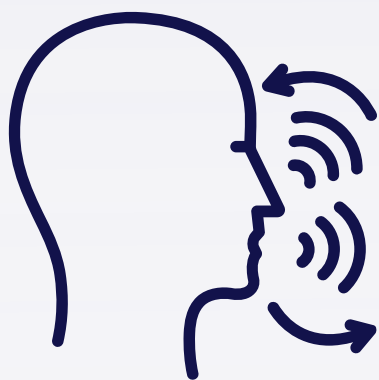


Nothing is more boring than listening to someone drone on and on in a monotone voice. Since it can be even more difficult to hold your listener's attention in remote communication, a dynamic speaking voice is crucial. Vocal variety helps keep your audience invested and can drive home key points of your message. Vary your pitch and tone of voice to reflect the mood and message of what you're saying. You can also change the pace of your speech as you talk to keep things interesting.



14. Maintain a strong voice

Strong voices convey authority, credibility, and confidence. This concept is just as true in virtual conferences as it is in an in-person one.



15. Breathe the Right Way

In order to achieve a strong, clear voice without straining, you should be breathing from your abdomen, not your chest. As you inhale, focus on relaxing your abdomen, and letting your stomach and lower ribs expand outward. This type of breathing (diaphragmatic breathing) gives you the best support and the ability to control your breathing.

16. Experiment with Tech in Advance



When preparing for a virtual call or presentation it is critical to test all your tech out first. Make a test call to a friend or colleague to fully understand how screensharing looks to your audience. Be sure that your audience is seeing your presentation itself, not the presenter view with your notes visible. Practice using the virtual laser pointer feature to direct your audience's attention as you present. If you are using audio, make sure your computer's audio feed is being shared directly with the audience (i.e., not just playing through your speakers).

17. Get Your Elevator Pitch Ready



When attending a virtual networking event there is often a kick off with an introduction portion. To make the most of this opportunity, be sure your elevator pitch is polished and ready to go in advance. The ideal elevator pitch is roughly 30 seconds and tells people who you are, what you do, and what makes you stand out from the crowd. Need help crafting the perfect pitch? Check out Corporate Speech Solutions' four-step elevator pitch A.I.D.E.!

18. Do Your Homework



Before any event, in-person or virtual, it's important to think about what type of connections you would like to make. If a guest list is available, do a little research on the other attendees in advance. If you don't have access to specific names, think about the types of individuals you would like to connect with. In a virtual networking event, you may not have the opportunity to talk with a potential contact one-on-one, but you can still make a connection by asking them questions or responding to their comments in a group conversation.

19. Following Up in Virtual World Is Essential



With in-person networking, you may naturally run into the same people at multiple conferences and events. However, because the world of virtual networking is so wide, you need to make a concerted effort if you want to speak with someone again. After the event, take notes on people you would like to connect with further, and what they spoke about. A day or two after the networking event, reach out via email or LinkedIn. Instead of sending out the same message to everyone, individualize these communications whenever possible. Reference a conversation you had or a topic the person spoke about to make the connection feel more personal and increase the likelihood of maintaining the connection.

20. Punctuality Still Matters



When preparing for a virtual meeting aim to be seated at your computer at least ten minutes before the scheduled start time so that you have time to check your technology and compose yourself. “Arrive” at the meeting (i.e., click the link) about one to two minutes before the scheduled start time.

21. Be present and mindful



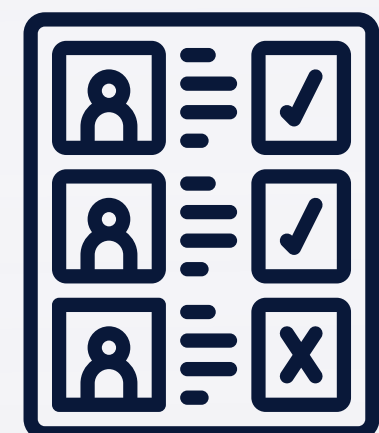
Even if you don't need to be fully engaged in the meeting, your professional reputation can suffer if it even looks like you're not paying attention. In order to encourage presence, close those other browser windows, turn your phone upside down, and remember that you're always “on camera.”

22. Don't become your own distraction



In a live meeting, you never have to worry about talking while muted, annoying ambient noise, or the interference of pets and children. But these are all common pitfalls of virtual meetings, and they can quickly sabotage your point. Be mindful of the power you have over both your virtual and physical environments.

23. Trim Your List of Attendees



When meetings on video call platforms like Zoom have too many attendees, it's even more difficult for people to feel connected. A crowded meeting may also mean that you won't be able to see all of your participants at the same time and may have to scroll through different screens to see everyone's face. When scheduling a virtual meeting, carefully consider who would actually benefit from attending and tailor your invite list accordingly.

24. Keep Monologues in Check



If you find that one person is dominating the conversation making it hard for anyone else to get a word in, politely redirect them in order to allow an effective flow of communication. In order to move things along, jump in, and say, "I really like what you're saying, and it sounds like you have some great ideas. Unfortunately, we're in a bit of a time crunch, but if you'd like, we can meet later on and discuss some of your thoughts."

25. Make the Agenda Known



When you're hosting a virtual meeting, as the meeting begins, review the goals that you would like to achieve and establish a set time frame in which you would like to address them. If everyone is aware of how much time you expect to devote to each topic, it will be much easier to keep your schedule on track.

26. Stick Around Afterwards



When you're hosting a virtual meeting, the host should always be the last to leave. Just like in-person meetings, people may have comments or questions for you or each other after the official meeting has ended. Closing the meeting before everyone has left can cut results in missed opportunities for communication and information sharing. Be sure to schedule your day with a 15-minute buffer after your meeting so you don't need to rush out.

27. Keep Your Information Private



If you'll be sharing your screen at any point, take care that your personal computer activity isn't on display for all to see. Whenever possible, share the specific application that you want your audience to see (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation or Word document) rather than sharing your full desktop. If you are sharing an internet browser, be sure to close all unnecessary tabs beforehand. You should also be aware that if you search in the address bar of your browser, auto-complete may reveal previous searches to your audience. To avoid this, clear your history, or navigate to sites before sharing your screen.

28. Minimize Distractions



Family members or pets can be a major distraction if they wander into your frame while you're speaking. If you can, make your call from a room with a closed door, and put a sign outside beforehand reminding people that you will be on a call at a certain time. If you're unable to isolate yourself, try to make calls with your back to a wall so that no one needs to walk behind you as they cross the room. If you have a furry friend who just can't resist cuddling you while you work, put them in a closed room or distract them with a toy or long-lasting treat before you begin.

29. Create a Dedicated Office Space



Working from home can make it difficult to separate work activities from your day-to-day responsibilities and distractions. Setting aside a space in your home exclusively for work can help create some mental distance and make it easier to resist distractions.

30. Get Dressed



If you aren't planning to see anyone, it's tempting to work in your cozy indoor clothes or even your pajamas. But holding to your morning routine can go a long way towards getting into a professional mentality. Each morning, take a shower and put on at least semi-professional clothes before you sit down to begin your workday.

31. Set Boundaries



Let friends and family members know that even if you aren't physically going into the office, you're still maintaining your typical workday and will not be free to socialize during work hours. If you have children at home and an uninterrupted workday is unrealistic or too difficult, try to set aside specific, predetermined times to catch up throughout the day.

32. Remember Professional Development



Don't become stagnant just because you're at home! Technology has made remote professional development easier and more convenient than ever. Seek out remote training opportunities online to make sure you stay up to date on your professional skills. Want to work on your communication skills? Check out our website to learn about our virtual training, communication workshops, and materials to continue your communication journey from the comfort of your home.

33. Keep It Consistent



Even people who typically speak with a strong voice sometimes drop their volume at the end of a sentence. This habit risks your listener missing important information, especially over virtual communication where computer microphones may reduce quality. Keep your volume strong throughout each of your sentences to make your speech sound more energized, confident, and clear.

34. Warm Up for a Dynamic Voice



When working from home, many people go long stretches without talking to others. Warm up before jumping on your next video call or virtual meeting to make sure your voice is strong, dynamic, and engaging. Breathe in on a count of five, and exhale on “mmmmmmmmaaaaah” alternating between “mmm” and “ahh.” Take a deep breath and gently release it on “aaaah” going from your highest note to your lowest in a long sigh. Lip and tongue trills are another great way to gently warm up your voice.

35. Avoid Closed-Off Positions



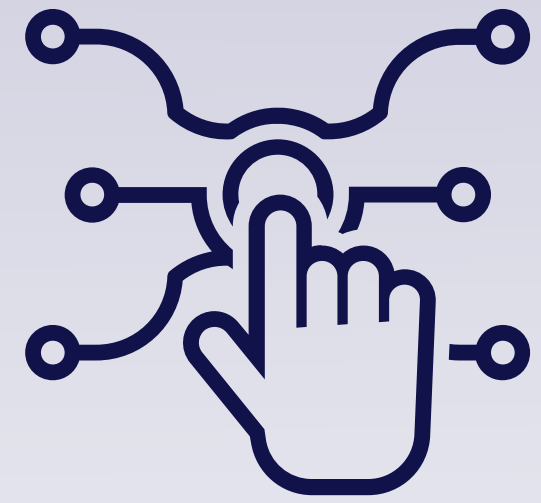
Many people fall into a passive, closed-off position when participating in video calls, leaning back in their chair and crossing their arms. Since it's harder to read the nuances of your facial expression, this can be mistaken for hostility or aggression in a video call. Keep your body language open, with your hands on the desk in front of you or on your lap.

36. Watch Your Facial Expressions



When you're not physically in the room with another person, many people fall into a flat, fixed facial expression that can appear bored or angry. Try to maintain the natural give and take of non-verbal communication, smiling and nodding when listening, and using expressive facial expressions when you speak.

37. Use the right technology



Consider an external webcam with a light and a USB microphone. You want to keep the same professional standard as your office environment. Investing in the right technology can make all the difference. You will also want to make sure you have a fast computer or laptop and a strong connection to WiFi.

38. Remove Clutter



Remove clutter or mess from your physical background as well as from your computer desktop. Clearing your desktop clutter is especially important if you will be sharing your screen at any point during presentations.

39. Preparing



When preparing for a virtual meeting always ensure your devices are fully charged or plugged in to avoid depleting batteries or losing connection all together in the middle of a meeting. Nothing disrupts a good meeting more than the presenter disconnecting mid-training.

40. Troubleshooting



If you hear feedback, ask other participants to turn off their computer speakers if they're using their phone. Also, when phones are set up vertical and the speaker is on the bottom feedback can occur. Suggest participants sit the phone on two books laid side-by-side, leaving space in the middle for the speaker.

41. Start and finish on time



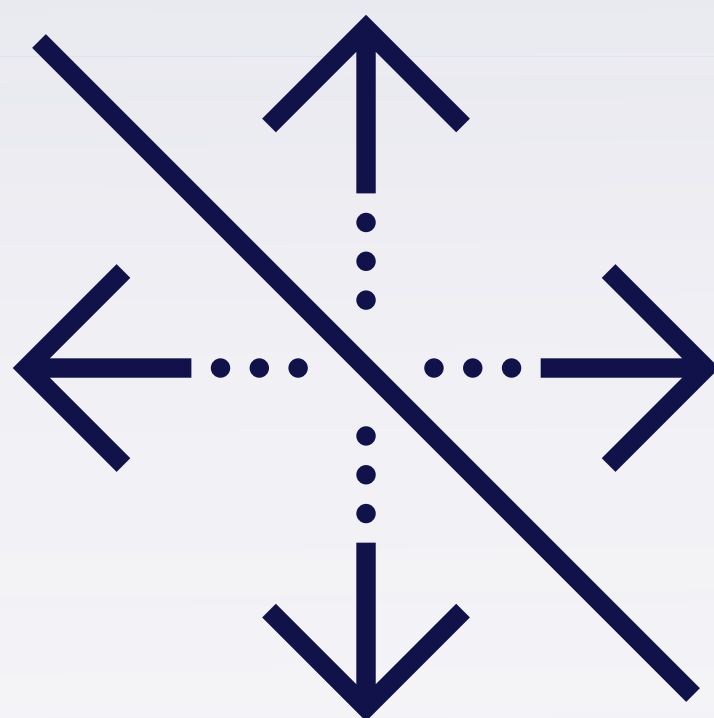
Technical glitches or poor facilitation can cause virtual meetings to run on. Arrive early, test technology and set up your workspace and your surroundings so that you are ready to start on time. For the best time management, stick to the agenda and reign in individuals who might monopolize the meeting time.

42. Allow some social interaction



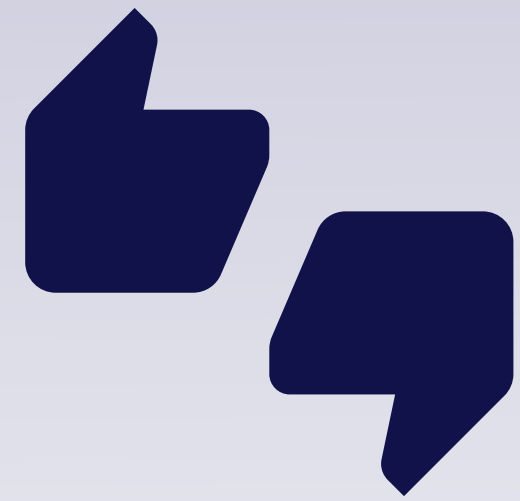
We are feeling more disconnected now than ever before. It is important to allow for social connection and light conversation. Planning to facilitate intentional “get to know you” questions can make a big difference and help keep morale strong.

43. Be stationary



In the ideal situation you will have a virtual office set-up with a laptop and webcam. However, if you will be hosting the virtual meeting using your phone, it's best not to walk around while you are speaking. The people attendees will be distracted by the movement and shakiness. Instead find a place with a pleasant background and prop your phone up, being mindful of leaving the speaker exposed so as to not have feedback.

44. Gestures



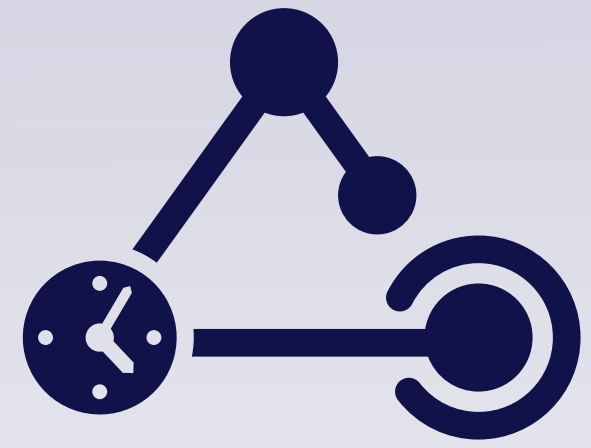
Building trust is essential right now. Remember to smile! A smile will help people feel welcome and can brighten the mood. It's also ok to use your hands when you speak but, if you wave them too close to the camera they may appear huge. To prevent this, try to keep your arm movements close to your body.

45. Embrace Technology



Collaborate technology can help keep your virtual team closely connected. There are many tools available to communicate instantaneously (and as a group), manage workloads, share computer screens, track tasks and your progress, share files and more. Lean into team-mates that have a strength in this area and allow them the opportunity to shine.

46. Respect Time Differences



It can be a challenge working with team-members in different time-zones. Try to build a team where the greatest time difference between any two members is no more than 12 hours, when possible even less would be better. For scheduling meetings, take into consideration the time of day in for all people that will be invited to the meeting.

47. Get a Little Personal



While it is great that we are seeing just how many things can be an email, and not a meeting, we are also losing connection with each other. Our virtual meetings are almost systematically task-oriented and to the point. In order to bolster teamwork, build personal interactions and diffuse tension, it is important that we encourage social bonds. Make an effort to get a little personal with your team, have a prompted “check-in” question or a quick game that generates laughter.

48. Setting up your virtual background



Be careful to not to use a glass window as your background. Walls or bookcases typically work better, and healthy-looking plants are a bonus. You don't want to Allow sunlight, directly or reflected, to shine into the webcam.

49. Dress the part



When considering what to wear for a virtual meeting, focus on neutral tones in blues, greens, and brown. Do your best to avoid wearing black, white, or bright colors that may reflect light or anything with busy patterns.

50. Individual Connections



While group meetings are efficient and can cover more ground, remember one-on-one connections are critically important. Without the in-person connections it is easy for people to feel unimportant or forgotten. Schedule regular check-ins with key collaborators, even if the call is brief.

51. Do a Mental/Emotional Self-Check



The sudden change to working remotely has thrown many people off. Not to mention speaking in front of a camera can be especially stressful if you're not used to it. Before your next meeting, consider practicing deep breathing and clearing your mind. Research has shown mindfulness meditation can slow down heart rate and help us be more present. Youtube offers a ton of mindfulness meditations, some as short as 5 minutes.

52. Embrace the virtual platform



Our shift to working remotely was sudden but now that we've had time to adjust, we can have fun with it. We have been able to connect with people all around the world. It is challenging but I promise if you follow these 52 virtual tips you will drastically improve your virtual presence.

Thank you for joining us.

I'm confident that with the tips and strategies in this book, you are well on your way to becoming an engaging, confident speaker who inspires and impacts their listener. I wish you the best of luck on your communication journey!

—Jayne Latz

About the Author

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For over 25 years she has worked as a speech-language pathologist, college educator, professional speech trainer and coach. In 2006 she founded Corporate Speech Solutions, LLC which specializes in advancing speech and communication skills for business professionals. She is a Vistage Speaker, a member of National Speakers Association (NSA) and served on the board of the local New York City Chapter for three years. She has been featured in the Wall Street Journal (three times) and was a guest on the Today Show. She is the proud author of *Communicate Up The Corporate Ladder*, *How To Succeed In Business With Clarity and Confidence*. To learn more, visit CorporateSpeechSolutions.com

Contact

Schedule a telephone call with Jayne Latz to discuss how you can incorporate these tips into a dynamic and engaging presentation.

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