(Approx. 1278 words)

Zoom Etiquette

Tips for Having Better Meetings

By Tom Burt, Vice-President, Sun City Summerlin Computer Club

www.scscc.club

tomburt89134 (at) cox.net

This month’s article will explore Zoom etiquette, which has a big impact on how successful Zoom web conferences are. There are many types of Zoom sessions from informal small discussions to more formal business or committee meetings to educational seminars. Zoom is also used extensively for “remote learning” in K-12 and higher education. Etiquette rules will vary somewhat for each scenario.

Part of the appeal of Zoom is that you can attend a meeting without commuting – just fire up your webcam, speakers, and microphone, click the hyperlink to join the meeting, and *shazam*, you’re *there.* Actually, your electronic effigy is there … and all the other attendees are [virtually] in *your* home, looking through your camera at you and whatever else is in your house.

A Google search for Zoom etiquette yielded 23 million hits – an indicator of how prevalent Zoom has become as an alternative to “in-person” meetings. Here are two links to representative articles if you want to dig in a bit more:

<https://www.andrewmacarthy.com/andrew-macarthy-social-media/zoom-etiquette-tips-great-video-calls-meetings>

<https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/zoom/zoom-etiquette-attendee/>

Here are some things you can do to be more friendly to other Zoom meeting attendees.

## Invest in Good Gear

When participating in a meeting, your co-attendees will appreciate being able to see and hear you clearly. For a desktop, a quality USB 2 web camera/microphone combo can be had on Amazon.com for under $40. The best is to get one with 1080P (HD) resolution. The webcam/microphone mounts on top of your desktop monitor. Most modern laptops have a webcam and microphone built-in, though often not capable of 1080P resolution.

## Test and Configure Your Gear

It’s no fun for meeting attendees to wait around while newbies try to learn how to do basic things in Zoom (like changing view, turning the mic and camera off and on, posting a chat, setting a background). In your web browser, go to <https://zoom.us/test> and join the test meeting. This will let you download the Zoom client software, check out your camera and microphone settings, configure your background and confirm how you will look and sound to others during a Zoom session.

## I See (and Hear) You / You See (and Hear) Me

Be mindful that, when your webcam and microphone are enabled, the other meeting attendees can see and hear you. This might seem obvious, but it’s easy to forget that you’re on camera. Also, the Zoom app has two display modes: Gallery (which shows a thumbnail image of each attendee in a grid on the screen) and Speaker, which shows a full-screen view of whoever is currently speaking. Each Zoom session attendee can choose which view they want to see.

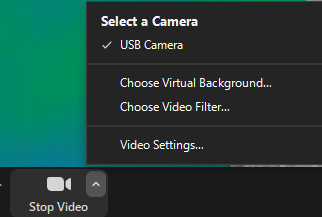
If you sneeze, burp, cough or make other vulgar noises, or if your phone rings, Zoom may suddenly display your face on the speaker view of someone else’s display. Even in Gallery view, Zoom displays a yellow box around the current speaker’s thumbnail image.

It’s wise to keep your microphone muted except when you explicitly want to speak. Then press and hold the **Spacebar** to unmute your microphone only while you’re speaking. When finished, release the Spacebar again to return to mute mode. You can also toggle between muted and unmuted by pressing the **Alt+A** keys. Or you can click the microphone icon at the lower left of the Zoom window to toggle between muted and unmuted.

You can also toggle the video off and on by clicking the camera icon at the lower left of the Zoom window. It’s a good idea to do this if you’re leaving the room temporarily or even if you just need to blow your nose or perhaps if someone comes into the room and needs some momentary attention.

## If possible, Use a Virtual Background

Zoom’s client software is quite clever at distinguishing your head and torso in the overall video image the web camera is seeing. How well it does this depends on the processing power of your computer’s video chip along with the Zoom software. This allows you to have zoom superimpose your head and torso onto a background image or looping short video clip that you can select. The background replaces whatever is actually behind you.

The idea is that you don’t want to share your messy computer room with the rest of the attendees. The virtual background hides that; it will even ignore another person in the room if they’re a few feet away. This allows my wife to work at her computer without being on camera while I’m in a Zoom meeting.

Zoom has a small set of default backgrounds and you can add images of your own to the set. To enable and choose a virtual background, click the ^ chevron on the camera icon to open a popup menu. Then click either “Choose Virtual Background” (for a still image) or “Choose Video Filter” (for a looping video clip). You can add new background images by clicking the + icon and then selecting one or more image files stored on your computer’s hard drive.

## Identify Yourself

Remember to click the 3 dots at the upper right of your on-screen thumbnail and rename your session so it displays your name instead of your email address. Zoom should remember this setting for future sessions.

## Dress for Success

Especially for formal / business meetings, put on business casual attire. This is especially true if you’re working from home.

## Avoid Eating on Camera

Drinking beverages is acceptable but avoid noisy slurping unless your mic is muted. As noted above, if you make noises, you may suddenly be displayed full screen to the other attendees. If you want to chow down during the meeting unless it’s scheduled “virtual lunch or dinner” turn your webcam off while eating.

## In Larger Meetings, Raise Your Hand or Use Chat

As the number of attendees grows, it gets harder to manage who has the virtual floor. In larger meetings, it’s polite to raise your hand and be recognized before speaking out. The chat icon is in the bottom center of the Zoom window. Click it to open a small chat window where you can type a question or comment to the entire group or specific attendees. This is especially effective for large meetings, where the thumbnails of attendees can’t all fit on the screen at one time.

## For Business Meetings, Please Exclude Fido, Fluffy, and the [Grand]Kids

Pets and grandkids can be disruptive and distracting to you and to others attending a Zoom session, particularly one whose focus is business issues. If you can, close the door to the room where you are connecting to Zoom. If that’s not possible, be ready to turn off the camera and mute the microphone.

## Keep it PG-Rated – Recording Alerts

Zoom meetings are often being recorded. Speak and act accordingly. Particularly at business meetings or formal social meetings, civility and decorum are the order of the day. Also, meeting hosts, if recording, should let their attendees know the meeting is being recorded.

## Meeting Hosts / Presenters – Managing Your Attendees

If you are hosting a Zoom meeting (i.e. you logged into your Zoom account, set up, and started a meeting), you have some additional things you can do to manage your attendees. Take some time beforehand to get used to these extra features you can use to control things like muting other attendees’ microphones, screen sharing, whether there’s a waiting room for your meeting, the initial state of attendees’ microphones (e.g. muted) and possibly blocking access after the meeting has begun.

I hope this helps you have better Zoom experiences in the future.

A person looking at the camera

Description automatically generated