
Lights, Camera, Action! Tips for Video Interviews

Monday, April 20, 2020

Author(s)

Allison Tolbert

AAAS Science & Technology Policy Finalist Interview Week has officially begun!

Typically, this week would be full of in-person interviews, trying to figure out the Metro, and falling into bed at 9 pm because you are mentally wiped. However, these are not typical times. We are in the midst of a pandemic where the whole world is working to slow the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and reduce cases of COVID-19. This means that STPF finalists will not be flocking to DC or meeting their potential coworkers in person, but having their interview over the phone or via a video conference platform. In the end, this could actually be a benefit to the finalists by allowing them to participate in more interviews than normal. It is possible to have back-to-back interviews with the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health without worrying about how to get from Alexandria VA to Bethesda MD in under 30 minutes.

While all of the finalists had their semi-finalist interviews via computer, here are some video conferencing tips to keep in mind as you prepare for this week.

Dress Professionally, but Comfortably. We have already heard horror stories about people presenting on a video conference without a shirt and not realizing their video was active. It is doubtful that any finalist will make a faux pas like this, but make sure to dress as if you were interviewing in-person. This will help you make a good impression and hopefully put yourself in an interview mindset. That being said, you will be in front of your computer most of this week, so make sure that your outfit is comfortable. If you want to be professional from the waist up while also wearing pajama bottoms and fuzzy socks, that is perfectly fine as long as you do not stand up in the middle of the interview.

Clean Your Background. In the age of social distancing, you may be limited on areas in your home where you can have your interview. Everyone is dealing with this same problem, but do what you can to ensure your background is clean. Bookcases, a nice piece of artwork, or even a blank wall are solid choices. Try to keep your bed out of the picture. If you want to use a virtual background, select an appropriate photo and test it in advance. Be aware that specific movements and even clothing colors can cause parts of you to disappear and reappear, which will be distracting to others on the call.

Raise Your Computer to Eye Level. Stack your computer on a couple of old textbooks or a box and add a sticker, a piece of a post-it note, or even googly eyes next to the camera. Your head will now be in a more natural position and not appear to be talking down at the table. Remember to focus on the sticker when you speak since it will give the impression that you are looking the interviewer in the eye.

Add Good Lighting. It would be a shame to have everything ready to go for your interview and suddenly no one can see your face due to poor lighting. To prevent this, set up a lamp near your computer to illuminate your face. Natural sunlight may also work, just keep in mind what it's showing in the background!

Test Run Everything. Before your interview, make certain that everything is ready to go by doing a dry run on the video conferencing platform. The easiest way to do this is to sign up for a free Zoom account and start a meeting using your Personal Meeting ID. You could also use FaceTime if you have a Mac, but be aware that your image is typically displayed in portrait mode while video conferencing meetings are in landscape mode. If you have more time, schedule your own meeting with friends or family where you can test everything and get feedback. Whatever you decide to do, try out your microphone and earbuds to verify that everything is working properly. Consider having the interview with only one earbud in so that you can manage how loud you are speaking. Be careful not to fidget and move around, especially if you happen to be in a rolling chair.

Finally, make sure to build in breaks between interviews. This will allow you to decompress and write down initial thoughts and impressions you had about the office or the interviewers. You can then put it out of mind as you prepare for the next interview. Having these notes will be very helpful when it comes down to ranking next week! Good luck!

Image: Allison Tolbert

Source URL: <https://www.aaaspolicyfellowships.org/blog/lights-camera-action-tips-video-interviews>

List of links present in page