

## **ResilienceCon Online:**

### **Tips on Setting Up Your Space: Lighting, Backdrop, & Clothing**

All the below suggestions are designed to work with the camera and make sure that people can easily see your face. It is challenging but not impossible to make a good human connection over a screen. This is a chance to be an actor for a day.

In terms of setting the scene, the most important guideline to remember is that cameras are not as good as eyes. They don't pick up as much light and they can't handle contrast as well (too much or too little). So, we must help the camera and work a little harder to look "natural."

Although these are of course optional. If you can consider them, they may help you connect with the audience and help make your presentation more memorable.

#### **Lighting and camera considerations**

1) ***Avoid backlighting.*** Probably the single most important seat to avoid is one that creates backlighting. This means having a window or other bright source of light behind you. Cameras will not be able to translate the contrast between you and the surrounding light, and the result is that you will appear almost in silhouette on the screen.

Unless you have high quality blackout curtains or blinds, closing curtains or blinds won't help.

2) ***Be sure you have relatively bright (but not harsh) light.*** It is also good to make sure that you have enough light so that people can easily see your features. If the light is casting dark shadows on your face, then that is too much. There should be enough light to see the contours of your face and for you to appear 3-dimensional, so some shadowing is good. It's best if light is coming from above (bright light from the side will also create strange shadows).

3) ***Consider the tone of your light.*** Sometimes I will hang a pink scarf over a light to give the light in my space a more flattering rosy glow. I also make sure I don't have too many open documents with lots of white light on my computer.

4) ***Consider the position of your camera.*** For most people, a camera position at or slightly above eye level is most flattering. It's best to avoid sitting your laptop/camera on your lap or on a low table, which will tend to highlight your nostrils and the space under your chin. It's better to position the camera to feature your eyes, eyebrows, and mouth so that people can follow your facial expressions (those do most of the heavy lifting there).

5) ***Sit at least a couple feet from the camera.*** It's better to have a video shot that includes your upper torso and will allow people to see your hand gestures.

#### **Backdrop**

1) ***Think of your space like a set. You have been cast in the role of scholar. What makes you look like a scholar?***

Every time I do any kind of video interview that involves a formal cameraperson or a/v tech, they always ask for books. Once, when I was interviewed for television, I made a special effort

to reserve what I think is one of the nicest rooms on campus, in the library. The cameraman arrived and the first thing he said was, “I thought there’d be books.” He asked that we move. I finally re-arranged my office so that there is a bookcase behind my desk and now, a/v people say, “Oh, it’s nice there are books behind you.”

2) ***Blank walls and blank doors are not exciting.***

3) ***Consider adding props to communicate your personality or values***, again helping to make a more lasting impression and/or reinforcing the take-home message of your talk. A few months ago, I added an RBG doll to my bookcase and I’ve gotten a few comments on that.

4) ***We do not forbid virtual backgrounds, but we do not recommend them.*** Virtual backgrounds often can’t keep up with movement, cutting off arms or hair or other body parts in ways that can be disconcerting to the viewer. A plain background is better than a virtual one. If you really want to use a virtual backdrop, consider one consistent with all of the above and that reinforces your presence as a scholar and expert. If you do use one, be sure not to wear green!

## **Clothing**

It’s easy to search for clothing tips for video or television, and you can find a lot of good info that way. Here’s a summary of key points, again mostly having to do with coping with the limitations of cameras.

1) ***The classic choice is a solid blue*** that is not too dark or light. Other cool tones such as green or gray are good choices, and neutral browns can work too.

2) ***Avoid prints***—they can create optical illusions on video. Stripes are most prone to distortion.

3) ***Avoid reds and oranges***—they can “bleed” on camera and can be tough to pull off.

4) ***Be cautious with black.*** Black might seem like a tempting choice, but you might try it first. Black can flatten shadows and make you seem 2-dimensional. It also creates more contrast with basically any other color, which is harder for cameras to handle.

5) ***Layers will add, well, layers.***

6) ***Consider the contrast with your background.*** You don’t want to match the background and look like you are part of the wall or the furniture. I picked a purple dress for my TEDxUniversityoftheSouth talk, but on film it looked similar to the black background curtains. They asked me to change. I switched to a blue dress, which made the director happy.

7) ***For jewelry***, the main consideration is that it won’t touch your microphone, that can create a clicking or other noise that can be quite distracting.

8) Probably the most important consideration is that ***you want your clothing to complement your face*** and not distract from it or create another point of interest on a small screen.