Are you ready to go live?

Back-to-School season is here and, this year, it looks a lot different than it has in the past. Your school might have introduced an online learning platform in the spring, which means you now have some experience with video classrooms, or you may be trying it out for the first time this school year. No matter how comfortable, or uncomfortable, you feel using these tools, we've pulled together a few simple tips and tricks for your video calls.

Tips for Better Video Participation:

1. Audio is just as important as video! Poor audio will remove you from the video call, and can be distracting for both you and your classmates. Even if you are muted in the classroom, poor audio will affect your ability to learn and participate. If possible, find a private place to join the call. If headphones are available, use them to minimize background noise. Let others in your household know beforehand that you'll be in class. And don't forget to turn off notification sounds on any other devices or apps.

2. Make sure your camera is steady, and stay seated in one spot for your class call. If possible, sit at a table, desk, or counter space. Avoid laying down or walking around while on your call, as this can be a distraction for others and makes it a challenge to focus on the topics.

3. Direct lighting from just above and behind your computer is best, such as a lamp or a window. Watch out for backlighting! If your light source is behind you, you will look like a shadowy blob and no one will be able to see your face. If you have a bright window behind you, try pulling the blinds or curtains shut. While it is nice to study outside, be sure you are in the shade or you will be backlit.

4. Watch out for distracting backgrounds. While a blank wall can be helpful, it isn't required. Just try to reduce clutter and avoid movement behind you from household members or pets. Also, be sure the items in the background are appropriate for your class to see. For a bit of fun, watch your favorite YouTube channel or the local nightly news and grade how well they have groomed their backgrounds to reduce distractions.

5. Make eye contact with your classmates! Eye contact is an important way to connect with those around you. And, just like in-person presentations, speaking up in the online classroom can be intimidating for many individuals. You can help to create a more welcoming class environment by facing the screen. Don't stare off to the side, look at your phone, or type in a chat during class. And try not to check yourself out during the call. The best way to eliminate concerns about your appearance or the background is to check them before the class starts. Start your camera in selfie mode to get set up before your video begins.

Notes on your device:

- Clean your device lens. We carry our laptops and phones with us everywhere. Use a soft cloth or lens cleaning wipe to clean regularly. If your images/video seem "glarey" or "soft" it is often a dirty lens.

- Some model phones and laptops have less capable cameras. To help ensure your video is strong, be sure you have plenty of light. Low lighting can cause grainy videos

SAY
Social Advocates for Youth
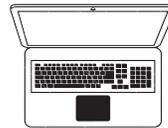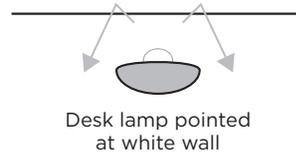
Working with what you've got

You don't need to buy anything to create good lighting on your video call.

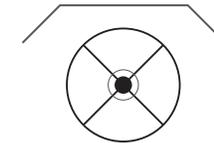1. Natural light is always easiest and most attractive.

Window with indirect light or shear curtains pulled

Window

Slightly above eye level
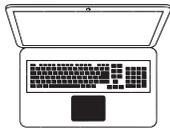
2. A desk lamp pointed against a white wall will mimic a big window.

Desk lamp pointed at white wall

White Wall

Slightly above eye level

3. A table or stand lamp positioned behind and above your computer will give you sufficient light.

Optional accessory: Trifold Display board to bounce more light forward
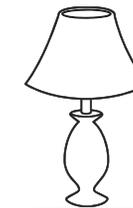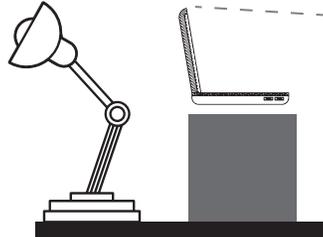
Regular lamp

Slightly above eye level