

## Winning Edge #28 – 4 Keys to Zoom Interview Success

This is Trevor Bragdon with Commonwealth Partners' *The Winning Edge*: Tips to help conservatives persuade and win.



Since 2020, local news organizations have increasingly conducted interviews via Zoom. While this saves time and keeps you from needing to go into the studio, it also means you need to create a production studio in your own home. Don't worry. We've got you covered on this Winning Edge episode, with tips to improve your look on Zoom by focusing on lighting, camera, sound, and background.

### Lighting: The Key to a Professional Look

The biggest production value increase you can get with a Zoom call is understanding lighting and having the right amount. Too much lighting, and you'll look like a ghost. Too little, and you'll look like you're calling from your mom's basement.

To get the lighting right, you need to understand the basics of three-point lighting. This setup involves two lights pointed at you on either side of the camera and one light behind you. The goal of the two front lights is to naturally illuminate your face without creating major shadows. To fine-tune the brightness, get a [set of adjustable LED lights on Amazon](#) with a dimmer.

The third light, known as a background light, is used to light the area behind you, adding depth and separation between you and the background. Depending on your setup, you can point this light at the wall behind you or your back.

### Camera: Positioning for Success

The better your lighting, the better your camera quality will look. Most mid-range laptops and computers manufactured after 2021 have decent enough cameras to look good without needing a standalone camera setup. You can also pair your phone's camera with your computer for an even better look.

The key with camera positioning is to set it up slightly above your eye level, about 3 to 6 inches. This may mean putting your laptop on a stack of books or a box on your desk to get it to the right height. Remember, you're doing this setup for an interview, not for your everyday work.

### **Sound: Crisp and Clear Audio**

What's the point of an interview if people can't hear you? Using a microphone is a must to improve your sound quality. While you can get away with using AirPods or similar products, it's best to spend about \$100 on a dedicated microphone like the [Audio Technica AT2020](#). It's easy to use and plug-and-play for your computer. Keep it on your desk on a mic stand outside the camera shot.

Use headphones to prevent the sound of the questions from interfering with or getting picked up on your mic. In-ear headphones with a minimal profile work the best. If you're using wired headphones, consider buying an extender cord for a few extra feet of freedom. You can also use athletic tape to secure the cord to the back of your neck if you want to hide it.

### **Background: Neat and Not Distracting**

Your background should be mildly interesting but not distracting. A neat bookcase, office wall, or similar setup works well. Sometimes, you can take down pictures and make the background a little more minimal to keep it from being distracting. Make sure there's nothing right behind you that weirdly frames your head.

One important tip: don't have a window behind you—this will often cause the shot to be overexposed and make the lighting on you look bad. If there's a window in the room, you'll want it in front of you, not behind.

If you get the lighting and microphone ahead of time, setting up for your interview should only take about 10 minutes. We always recommend jumping on a Zoom call with a friend or staff member a few minutes before to test out your sound and lighting. Do this 10 minutes beforehand to ensure you have time to adjust as needed.

The next time you have an interview via Zoom, focus on getting your lighting right, positioning your camera slightly above your eye line, using a decent microphone with headphones, and ensuring your background is neat and not distracting. With these tips, you'll be well on your way to mastering your Zoom interview and presenting a professional, polished appearance to voters.