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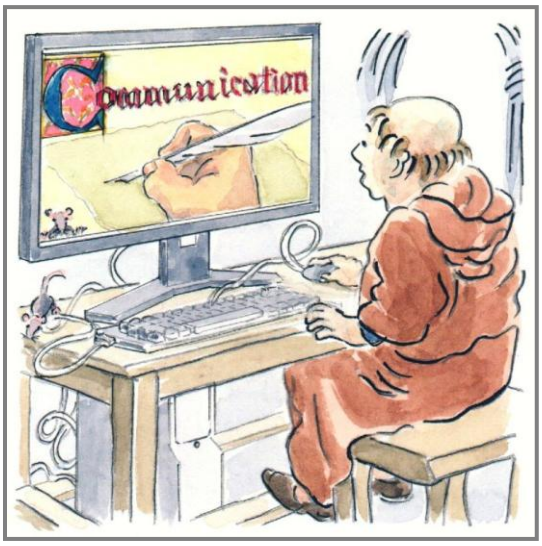

Speaking-to-camera tips

TN123 Training Notes series: Communication

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We live in times when many churches have started to live-stream services and/or record teaching sessions or small group input for platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. Although it was the Covid-19 crisis that led to the closure of church buildings and so the recording of services, these forms of communication have not disappeared. For many churches in 2026 live-streaming of all main services is now the norm.

What follows applies more to single-speaker home recording rather than live streaming a whole service but it will be easy to adapt much of what follows for services.

I have learned the hard way myself, making rather obvious mistakes. The clock chiming ten minutes into a near-perfect recording and, in the retake, the Openreach workmen arriving outside the window come to mind among other personal incidents. So here, with thanks for help from friends in my own church, are a number of tips on how to speak to camera well.

Some people have already written or recorded on this topic for *preachers*, but these notes are for everyone speaking to camera including presenters, lesson readers, notice-givers, trainers and children's church leaders. Others have written on the *technical* or *copyright* aspects of live-streaming and editing video productions. But I am assuming you are not a techie and are live streaming or recording.

These notes assume a production of some kind, rather than a video-conference using Zoom or Microsoft Teams where things can be somewhat less formal.

In all this I am acutely aware that technique must not trump authenticity or spiritual reality. There is something rather special in watching a service produced by people you know who do not have degrees in video production. You appreciate that the good news of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed but also that things might go somewhat awry!

Five tips about set-up

1 Preparation

Allow plenty of time to set up the room or church and the camera(s), whether phone, tablet, laptop or stand-alone camera. You need to be relaxed when you record *(see 16 below)* so it is best to get everything ready well in advance.

2 Landscape

No, not the view from the garden but the orientation of the camera. Always record 'landscape' not 'portrait'. Check the camera lens is clean too!

3 Script

Decide in advance how you will be reminded what to say, whether full script, outline notes, reading a Bible passage, memory, or a mixture of these *(see 21 below)*.

4 Posture

If standing, keep your feet still (by all means move your body – *see 25 below*). If sitting, a straight-back chair is best. A sofa looks more relaxed but angles you backwards too much so put a cushion behind your back to correct this. Be comfortable.

5 Test run

Try a short test before you work on a proper recording. Run it for two or three minutes, then play it back for both sound and picture. Check it against these tips or ask a trusted friend what you need to change.

Five tips about camera and light

6 Camera height

The camera needs to be level with your eyes, possibly slightly above, but ***never*** below or we see your triple chin and look up your nose (not nice!). If you are a pro you will use a tripod. If you are normal you will balance your laptop, tablet or phone on a stable (no wobble) pile of furniture or books.

7 Camera distance

Sit or stand far enough away from the camera to show not just your face but at least the top half of your body. If too close you may look grotesque and cannot use your hands for expression *(25)*. But ensure you speak clearly enough for the mic.

8 Light

You need light on both sides of your face or half of you is in shadow and half is radiant. If you only have one window in the room, experiment so that you sit to allow daylight to reach both sides of you. If outside, a cloudy or hazy day is best. But…

9 Glare

Aim to eliminate glare. A ceiling light shining on a bald head is not good news, especially when you look down to read from a Bible. Reflections, such as of a window in your specs, are distracting. Outside, bright sun can make you squint.

10 Settings

If using a phone or tablet you need to 'lock the camera settings' or the image will waver between light and dark as your gadget seeks to auto-correct. Google this for iPhone or Android if you are not sure how to do it.

Five tips about background

11 Tidiness

Keep the background tidy and uncluttered. It is best to avoid plugs, wiring, piles of paper and fussy detail plus bits of furniture just in view. Keep all clocks out of sight. Don't show props before you use them. *(32)*

12 Feature

But a completely bare background looks lifeless. So include a plant or bowl of flowers on a table, the whole of a simple picture on the wall or a short row of books (but don't show off with your nine hard-back commentaries on 3 John).

13 Text

If your editor will be overlaying text (such as a song or hymn, a Bible passage or key headings in a talk), decide with them where this will go. If it will cover much of the screen, sit off-centre and ensure a reasonably blank wall beside you (for black text).

14 Visual intruders

Check out who may intrude in the background such as a toddler entering the room (famous BBC example!), teenagers being, er, teenagers, an undressed partner coming out of the bathroom or a dog wanting to go for a walk. Outside, have a hedge or fence behind you rather than a long shot back to the house. *(23)*

15 Aural intruders

Beware noises off. Did you realise that some clocks are programmed to chime every 15 minutes and that your phone will remain silent all day until you start recording? Outside, beware neighbours, planes overhead, traffic and especially a gust of wind which distorts the sound.

Five tips about yourself

16 Enthusiasm

Relax! *(1)* Most of us look too severe and as though we had totally forgotten how to smile. Practise smiling! Show some enthusiasm for what you are saying or you may come across as though auditioning for a part in a horror movie. For a kids' presentation you need to be more lively still.

17 Appearance

Make sure you look and dress appropriately for the occasion. Try to avoid being too formal or too informal; or being over-dressed or under-dressed; or having a, literally, bad hair day or made up as though for a red carpet event. Don't let your appearance become your message.

18 Start/stop

When you start put the camera on, pause while smiling for five seconds, then speak. When you end, pause while smiling for five seconds and only then switch off. Then ask the editor to fade you in and out. Otherwise we see you leaning hard into camera.

19 Introductions

There may be people watching from anywhere in the world who won't have a clue who you are. So start by giving your name, saying why you are on camera and what you are about to do. "Hello! *(smiles)* I'm John Truscott, a member of Christ Church, and I want to invite you to join me as we pray together for our world." *(29)*

20 Retakes

If you are recording (not live streaming) and mess it up (as you will), stop but don't rush to rerecord immediately because you are likely to get something else wrong and then panic. Wait for a few minutes, then rerecord when you are calm.

Five tips about your body

21 Notes

If you are using script or notes your eyes can drop a little but if they move to left or right the viewer thinks you are looking over their shoulder. So sellotape your notes just *under* the camera, not to one side of it. Use large print with some highlighting; when you look back into camera you mustn't lose your place! *(3)*

22 Eyes

You don't have to look right into the camera all the time but, unless you are reading a Bible passage, you need to do so most of the time and especially when you want to make a particular point. Imagine you are looking at one known person if you find this difficult.

23 Distractions

Beware anything that moves within your sight. If you are with a live audience you can glance away occasionally; people are not aware of it because they cannot see the detail of your eyes. But on screen they notice every movement, including that quick glance at the window as you spot someone walking past outside. *(14)*

24 Mannerisms

The same is true of mannerisms in that every time you nudge your specs up your nose, scratch your face or push back your hair this is visually obvious on screen. Beware, too, overdoing facial contortions for the same reason.

25 Hands

Use your whole body as you speak if you would do this live, especially your hands. But avoid having them off screen and suddenly bringing them into sight from nowhere. Best to be far enough away from camera so they are in sight all the time *(4,7)*.

Five tips about delivery

For fuller details see Article A19 on this website, *Speaking so that people listen*.

26 **Brevity**

If you are giving any presentation, ensure that no part lasts more than about eight minutes (much less for children) without a clear change of dynamic. So a 15 minute sermon (no longer for video), should break half way through for something different. Restrict services to under an hour.

27 **Simplicity**

If giving a talk, keep it simpler than you might for a live audience. Avoid lists of sub-points and aim for a straightforward message with no more than three aspects to it.

28 **Variety**

If on screen it is all the more important to hold people's attention by varying the delivery. So keep changing speed, tone and emphases, use repetition and pauses to good effect, select powerful illustrations and demonstrate some passion.

29 **Assumptions**

It is important to remember that anyone in the world may be watching, so avoid too many in-phrases or comments that only your usual audience would understand. *(19)*

30 **Professionals**

Watch the professionals and learn lessons from them: TV news-readers, chat show hosts, any children's presenter.

Five tips about props and extras

31 **Bible**

It is fine to look down to read a Bible passage but hold your Bible up so that you are not looking hard down. Ensure you are looking to camera as you introduce the passage and immediately after the reading.

32 **Visual aids**

It can be powerful (vital for kids) to use objects as visual aids but keep them out of shot on a table beside you so you can pick them up easily without stretching across or bending down *(11)*. Hold them up near your body, not close to the camera.

33 **Pause**

If this is a recording rather than live-stream, suggest people use the pause button at key moments: to go and find a Bible, to look again at a passage, to ponder on a point just made, or to do a simple exercise.

34 Responses

If saying versicles and responses or reading a Psalm 'antiphonally', get others if possible to stand out of camera-view and speak the response sections together, rather than you doing everything solo.

35 Interviews

If interviewing, face and talk to each other, not to camera. If you need to record in different locations with two images shown on screen, one of you might face left and the other right (but then ensure the editor gets the images the right way round!). See Training Notes TN16, *Interviews in church services.*

These notes are available at https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index then TN123. See also Articles A19, *Speaking so that people listen,* plus Training Notes TN16, *Interviews in church services*, TN82, *Print or screen,* and TN145, *Illustrating what you say.*

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN123 under Communication.

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