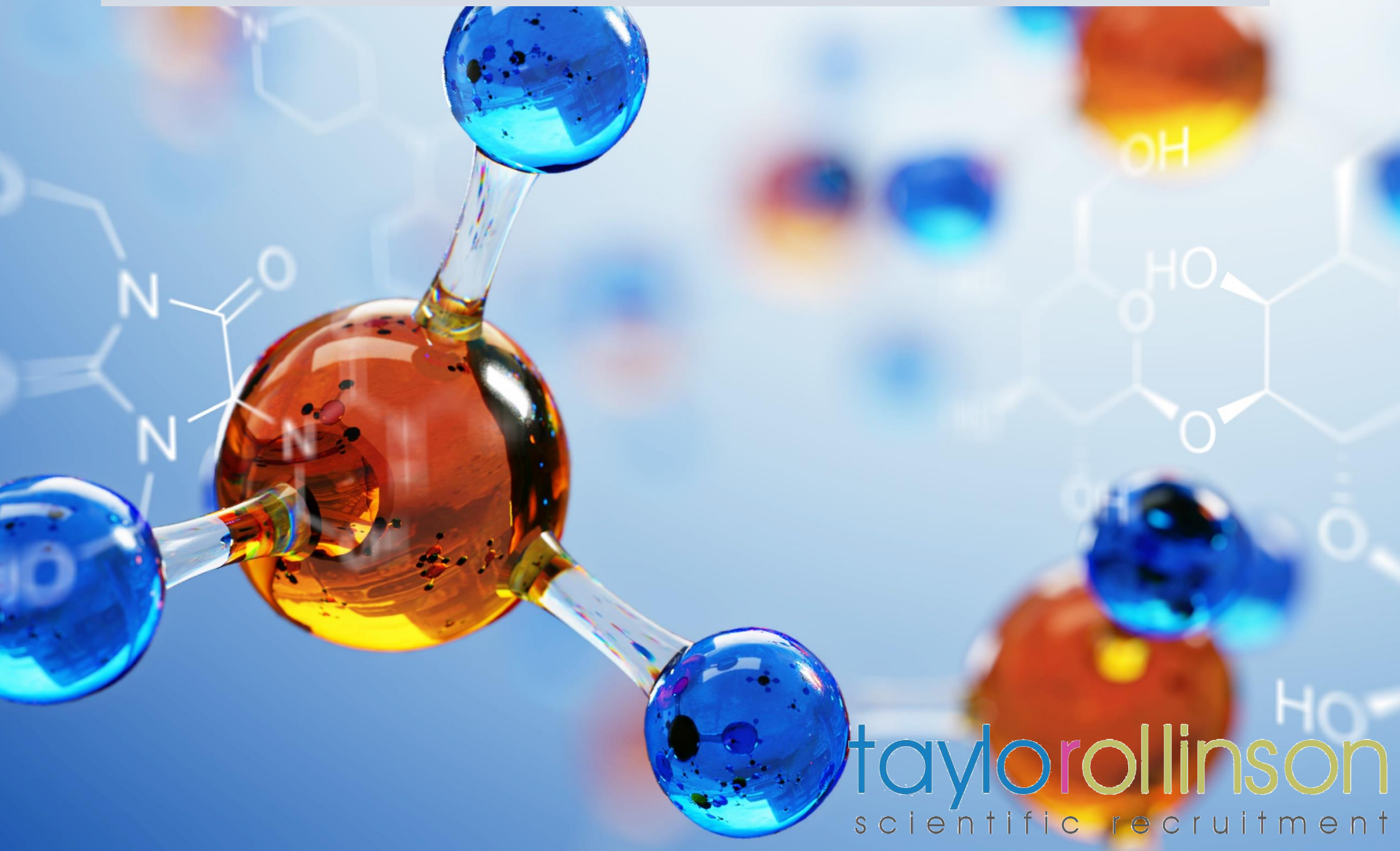


Video-Streaming Interviews



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Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic video interviews were quite rare but for busy employers/Hiring Managers they were starting to be used as an alternative to an initial telephone screening interview. However, they sat in an uncomfortable gap between a 15-30min telephone screen and a full face to face, in-person interview and didn't really have a defined advantage over either. They were seen as too much hassle to replace a quick call and not trusted enough to replace an in-person face to face interview.

Lockdowns and having employers working from home has forced businesses into conducting more meetings online, leading to Managers become more comfortable hosting events over video streaming platforms. This inevitably led to video interviews replacing the first stage telephone call and gradually businesses have had to embrace holding the entire recruitment process over video streaming channels, including delivering presentations and hosting virtual assessment days.

This guide looks to provide some guidance and re-assurance about what to expect from a video interview and some tips and advice that might help you ace your next video interview.

Video Streaming Platforms

Increased home-working has led to an emergence of several video-streaming platforms. The list is ever developing with new technology evolving all the time so we will aim to keep the advice as up to date as possible. However, from our experiences, the most common interview platforms at the moment are:

- Microsoft Teams
- Zoom

There are several other platforms that can be used to conduct video interviews including:

- WhatsApp
- FaceTime
- Skype
- GoToMeeting
- RingCentral

As an interviewee you probably won't have the choice of technology as each company will likely have its own preference/business subscription but most platforms generally function in a similar way. Like all good interview preparation advice the trick is "preparation" so test the system before the call to get comfortable with the technology and functionality.

You will likely be invited to an video interview through an emailed invite link – typically these are arranged by the client who will have advanced functionality through their business subscription/license such as an ability to record the video, share files and screens etc..

Test, Test, Test

When you click the link, you'll be instructed to download the software/App required to run the meeting so its important you test the link well before the meeting to make sure your laptop/tablet/phone is compatible and set-up to run the meeting. You'll then be placed into a virtual waiting room and your host will be alerted that you are waiting once they log-in themselves. The stream goes live when they start the interview and you'll see video streams of all those on the call. You can do this days before the scheduled interview to make sure you can download any software well ahead of time.

I would always recommend having a test call with somebody if the interview is going to be on a platform you haven't used before. Particularly you want to test sound, microphone and the stability of the video & stream as these are all areas that can fail. Ask your recruiter or friend to have a test call or if this is not possible (such as if it's a subscription service) ask the Hiring Manager if you can have a short 5 min call to test the software prior to the proper interview to make sure you are all set-up for the interview and don't waste time. I am sure the Hiring Manager will be impressed with your pro-activity, preparation and thoughtfulness so I can only see asking for this as a positive.

We have to re-arrange video-interviews on a weekly basis because the technology hasn't worked or the teething problems have eaten into the allocated interview time. Whilst employers are sympathetic of this; it is never ideal and can have knock-on negative consequences so it always pays to be prepared!

What Device Should I use

This depends on the quality and reliability of your device but also the format of the interview. If it's a 1st stage then you could get away with doing a video interview on a smartphone/tablet but if there's a presentation involved or if the interviewer is likely to share a screen or file then a laptop is the only option really. If your laptop webcam can be temperamental then buying a decent stand-alone webcam may be a good alternative. Some high quality photo cameras can also be used as webcams so consider this as an option too – but, as before, test your device thoroughly so you are confident the technology works well and is suitable for the nature of the interview.

If you opt to use a tablet or smartphone then make sure it's propped up in a secure position. You don't want it to fall over mid-interview and there is nothing worse than the shake from a hand-held device to give the interviewer a sense of sea-sickness!

Smartphones or tablets are also a reliable option if you are doing the call outside of a home/office environment but make sure the Wi-Fi is good (and you have enough credit if you are using mobile internet).

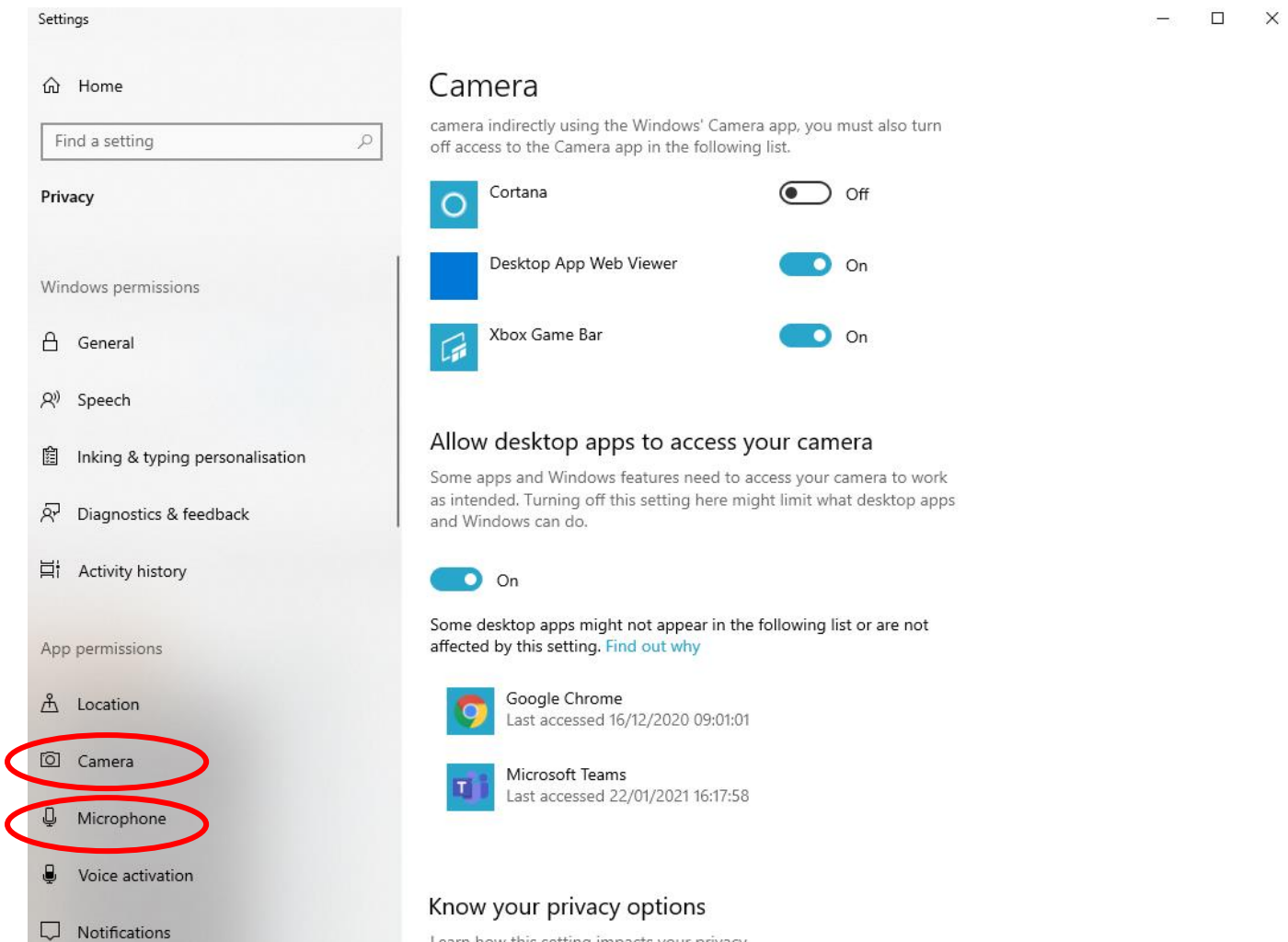
Broadband & Wi-Fi

Most people use Wi-Fi for their home laptop but if you have lots of competing Wi-Fi devices in the home then consider an old-fashioned Ethernet connection to give a more reliable internet. This won't help with broadband width so if there are others in the household using the internet, ask them to take a break or refrain from high internet usage activities such as gaming, video streaming etc..

Common Problems

The most common problems we hear about is nearly always related to video, audio or poor connections. As most video interviews tend to be via Teams I'll use this platform as an example of how you can set-up the audio-visual controls but the functionality/icons are similar across most video-streaming platforms. The below description is for a pc/laptop.

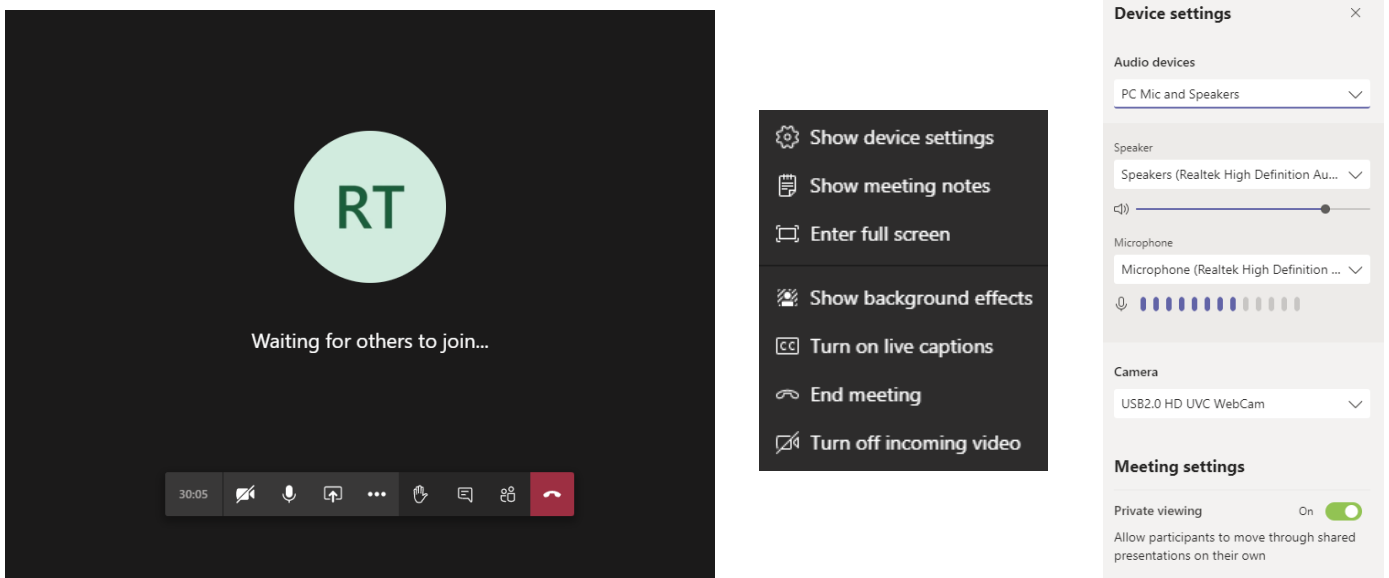
When you first download the software you'll be asked to give Teams permissions to use the camera and microphone – its essential you accept, but don't worry as you can also do this once the software has installed via settings/Privacy/App Permissions or remove permissions if you want:



Click the different audio and visual systems to give/deny permissions.

Teams demo

Once you click the link to start a video call you'll initially get put into the virtual waiting room where you'll be able to test and change the settings using the below in-screen panel whilst you wait for the call to start:




Video: On:  Off: 

If highlighted the video is on – if there is a line through this icon then it's off (and you'll just see your initials with no background. Sometimes the video won't engage until the meeting starts so when your host does join make sure you switch it on. If your graphics card/webcam is a bit temperamental it may randomly switch-off mid interview. If this happens just click the icon to switch back on.

Audio: On:  Off: 

As with the video, sometime the audio will mute until the meeting starts so make sure this audio is on when your host joins.

More Options: 

The above "more options" icon will enable you to manage other settings and check the audio and video devices. If you want to check the microphone, video and audio click on the "Show Device settings" cog which will open a new panel on the left of the screen (see above) where you can change audio/mic/camera settings to whichever device you prefer. We would recommend using a high quality headset/headphones rather than relying on the laptops own speakers and microphone but test first to see what give the best quality sound. We sometimes get asked whether big over-ear headsets (eg those used for gaming for example) would be appropriate and I would say yes providing the audio/mic quality is superior.

You can also add in a digital background here but see below advice about this.

Your Surroundings

Needless to say what's behind you will be visible to all so consider what the interviewer will be able to see. Several of the leading video streaming platforms have got wise to this and provide home-barassment digital background to superimpose a virtual office behind you. These do have their uses if you are doing the interview in an area/environment where you can't tidy up or it's not appropriate. However, there can be some advantages to showing off your house/room if it is akin to your interests on a CV and it gives you a bit of character that you just can't get from a digital background. It can create talking points and give you a bit of character - just be careful how much character you want to give away 😊.

Light

Often overlooked but probably one of the easiest hacks to consider on a video interview. There are reasons why every TV production interview pays for somebody to hold a light and silver reflection board in front of a presenter – light makes you look good! You can buy specialist lights that stand in front of your laptop and do a great job but are an expense so simply having a table light pointing towards you from behind the laptop can have a big effect (obviously don't have it dazzling your eyes like a police interrogation!). Avoid bright lights behind (such as sunny windows or ceiling lights) as this casts a shadow over your face.

What to Wear

Treat this as a formal interview so a smart, professional & appropriate outfit for the role is best. Don't cut corners, so an ironed shirt will stand out a mile and if you are going to put a suit on – put the full suit on and don't sit there with no trousers on as there will come a time where this will catch you out! Be aware of patterns as some fuzzy patterns/checks don't always cope well with frame speeds on video streams – always test your appearance with a video call with a friend. If in doubt, always dress-up as there is nothing worse than feeling under-dressed for an interview – it just suggests you aren't bothered about the job!

Etiquette

When to start the call

As with any interview or meeting it's important to be on-time. The way most platforms work is your host will be notified as soon as you click the link to enter the interview. It's important not to arrive too early as your host might be in the middle of other things and getting notifications of you waiting may be a distraction. I'd recommend 5 minutes before the interview is scheduled would be an appropriate providing you are confident all your settings will work. If you are using the platform for the first time then I'd suggest clicking the link a day or two before the interview so you can download any software and test/optimised the settings so you are comfortable using the platform.

Video or Not?

This is a video interview so always have your video on – even if your host has theirs switched off, but don't forget that just because you can't see your host, they will still be able to see you.

Distractions

Video streaming from home is bound to through-up some unexpected distractions. Be it kids walking in unexpectedly or partners returning from exercise in inappropriate clothing – we've heard it all. Even if you are alone there's bound to be something that happened such as a home delivery, phone call or picture falling off the wall. The worst thing you can do is pretend it hasn't happened but equally act as you would in a person to person interview, so don't answer the door or take the phone call! – just apologies for the distraction and focus on the interview and deal with the distraction after the meeting has ended! If the worse does happen, embrace and acknowledge it, make a joke of the situation and move on. Everybody is more tolerant to these types of unwanted distractions and it's how you deal with it that can define things.

Presentations

Presentations as part of video-streaming interviews creates a new dynamic but are actually very easy. It depends on the functionality of the platform being used but most business focused streaming platforms have the ability to share screens and this is generally the way most are run.

Other platforms that are less business focused generally allow file sharing so you can simply share your presentation file and they can open up in a different window or if this isn't an option just email it over so they can open up in a new window.

You do lose the opportunity for proper eye contact which is a big negative so try to keep the audience as thumbnail images in the corner of the screen so you can get some body-language feedback on your slides.

As with most of the other advice in this document, if you know you are going to have to give a presentation then arrange a practice run so you know how it's going to work.