**Zoom good practice**

We’ve all been using Zoom for many months now. Most of us came to it without any training and we’ve just got on with it. Given that it looks like we’re now facing plenty more months of Zooming it seems sensible to offer some suggestions for good practice to stay sane. This is not a set of rules for use in Zoom meetings, but suggestions that may help to make your Zoom experience better.

**Why are Zoom calls so draining?**

There are plenty of articles on the internet about why Zoom calls seem to be so exhausting. Suggestions for why this include the following

* Our minds are confused by the experience of apparently being present with people, but not being physically present.
* The delay inherent in internet communication means that the responses we normally get from our listeners don’t come on cue, which causes anxiety.
* Most people don’t enjoy the experience of looking at their own face for long periods (you can do something about this – see below).
* The experience of having 6, or 12 or 20 faces in boxes on a screen staring back at us is not the usual meeting experience.
* You have to look at the camera in order to make it look like you’re looking at someone.

This is not a comprehensive list, but the aim is simply to reassure you that, if Zoom meetings leave you feeling tired, you are not alone and there are good reasons for this.

So what can we do?

**Technical fixes**

There are a few features of Zoom that you can use that might make your Zoom experience less tiring.

1. Turn off ‘self view’ so that you do not see your own image. You can do this by finding the three dots in the top right hand corner of the box with your image – move the cursor there and they will appear. Then right click and select ‘Hide self view’ from the drop down menu that appears. (You can recover self view by going to the View button in the top right hand corner. Click on that and select ‘Show Self View’ from the drop down menu that appears.)
2. Use the spacebar to temporarily unmute. If you’re stressed about accidentally unmuting yourself, or find the processing of unmuting time consuming and irritating, you can unmute by holding down the space bar on your keyboard. When you release the space bar you will be muted again.
3. Use the ‘Touch up my appearance’ feature. Zoom can even make us look better – this may be something you want to try if you’re stressed about your appearance. To do this click on the up arrow (^) by the video button and select Video settings from the menu that appears. Then click on the box next to ‘Touch up my appearance’. You can even control the extent to which your appearance is touched up!
4. Hide the mess in your house by using a background. To do this click on the up arrow (^) by the video button and select Choose virtual background. You can then choose from a small selection of backgrounds, or you can add in your own photo as a background by using the plus (+) button to the right. (Some guides to Zoom good practice suggest that it is best to use a plain background as this helps to reduce visual distractions.)

**Other suggestions**

Other possibilities that might help include the following.

1. Make a phone call instead. Obviously this is only really an option for one to one meetings, but it is worth remembering that phoning people is still an option and can get you away from your computer screen for a while.
2. Avoid multitasking. Checking your emails while also Zooming can add to the drain on your energy. It may work for you in boring meetings or parts of meetings where your attention is not really required, but generally your brain will function better if you stick to the task at hand.
3. Accept that you don’t have to look at people all the time. You could turn your screen to one side or even switch your video off for a while to give yourself a break from being visible. This needs to be done with respect for others, as it can be distracting when one person is never visible in a meeting for no apparent reason, but giving each other permission to switch off video from time to time can give us a break from feeling that we have to look our best and be 100% on our game all the time.
4. If you have a Zoom pile up, make sure you get a break between Zoom meetings. And don’t use it to check email! Do something completely different instead – listen to music, look out of the window, get two minutes outside or do something that takes you out of the Zoom/work zone for a few minutes.