Appendix: The Remote Interview

Everything in this book works whether you're sitting across a mahogany desk or staring at a webcam in your bedroom. The psychology doesn't change. The threading doesn't change. The five words don't change.

But the technology can screw you if you let it.

This appendix is short. It's technical. It's the stuff that has nothing to do with your interview skills and everything to do with not looking like you're broadcasting from a hostage situation.

Use a computer. Not your phone.

I cannot believe I have to say this in a book, but I've seen it hundreds of times. A candidate joins the interview on their phone, propped up against a coffee mug, shooting up their nostrils, wobbling every time they gesture.

If you absolutely must use your phone — turn it sideways and stand it still. Prop it against something solid. Do not hold it in your hand. You are not FaceTiming your friend. You are interviewing for a job.

But really, use a computer.

Your phone is actually your best camera.

Here's something most people don't realize: the camera on your phone is significantly better than the webcam built into your laptop. It's not even close. Your laptop webcam is a grainy, washed-out, unflattering piece of garbage that makes you look like you're on a security camera at a gas station.

Your phone camera — the one you take selfies with — is a $1,000 lens sitting in your pocket.

If you have an iPhone and a Mac, use Continuity Camera. It's built in. You don't install anything. You just mount your phone above your screen and your Mac automatically recognizes it as a webcam. The video quality jumps from "barely acceptable" to "this person looks like they're on a professional setup." The interviewer won't know why you look better than every other candidate. They'll just know you do.

If you don't have an iPhone or a Mac, there are apps that do the same thing for any phone — Camo, DroidCam, others. Quick setup, massive upgrade.

The trick: buy a $10 phone stand off Amazon. One of those little clip mounts that attaches to the top of your monitor. That's it. Ten dollars. Now your phone sits right above your screen at eye level, the camera is positioned perfectly, and you look like a human being instead of a surveillance subject.

Here's what my actual setup looks like:

[PHOTO: Kyle Mau on Google Meet — iPhone 14 Continuity Camera, wired Apple earbuds, window light]

This is a 3-year-old iPhone 14 clipped to the top of my monitor with a $10 Amazon stand. Wired Apple earbuds. Window to my left. That's it. That's the whole setup. 1080p. No ring light. No studio mic. No $200 webcam. And yet it looks like I'm sitting in a professional home studio. I'm not. It's a phone on a clip.

One thing to be mindful of: know where the camera lens is on your phone. If your phone is mounted with the rear camera facing you, the lens might be in a different spot than you think. Make sure you know which little circle is actually filming you, and position the Zoom window near it. Same principle as the webcam tip — eyes near the lens, not staring at the bottom of the screen.

Dress one level below what you'd wear in person.

This is the secret nobody tells you.

In person, you might wear a suit. On Zoom, a suit looks stiff and try-hard. In person, you might wear a blazer and dress shirt. On Zoom, that's perfect — or even a really nice polo.

One level below. That's the calibration. You want to look put-together but not like you're about to deliver a eulogy. The person interviewing you is probably in a t-shirt. Meet them closer to where they are without going all the way there.

For men: A dress shirt or a quality polo. No tie. No suit jacket unless you know it's a formal company.

For women: Same principle. One notch below what the in-person version would be.

The Apple earbuds that came with your phone are your best microphone option.

Well, they used to include them, but Apple are cheapwads now. They're like $10. Just buy a pair.

Unless you own a studio-quality microphone — and if you did, you wouldn't be reading this section — those white wired Apple earbuds are better than your laptop mic, better than your AirPods, better than any Bluetooth headset, and better than 90% of USB microphones under $200.

They're wired. Which means they don't cut out. They don't need to be charged. They don't have Bluetooth lag. They don't randomly disconnect and leave you talking to yourself for 30 seconds while the interviewer tries to tell you they can't hear you.

Plug them in. Put them in your ears. Done. One less thing to worry about. And in an interview, every thing you eliminate from the "could go wrong" list is a thing that can't derail you.

No fake backgrounds. Ever.

You know the ones. The fake bookshelf. The fake beach. The fake office that looks like a stock photo from 2015. The fake blurred cityscape.

They all look terrible. The edges of your body shimmer and glitch. Your hand disappears when you gesture. Your hair does something weird every time you move. It looks like you were cut out of a magazine with safety scissors and glued onto a postcard.

The interviewer notices. They might not say anything, but they notice. And what they're thinking is: what is this person hiding behind them?

A blurred background is fine. Actually, it's preferable to most real backgrounds. Blurring says "I'm a real person in a real room and I've chosen to keep the focus on me." That's professional. That's clean.

A fake background says "I downloaded this from a Zoom settings page and hoped you wouldn't notice." Everyone notices.

Don't sit in the dark.

I'm not going to tell you to buy a ring light. I'm going to tell you to be a normal person.

Face a window. If you don't have a window, turn on the overhead light and put a desk lamp in front of you. That's it. The goal is not to look like a YouTuber. The goal is to not look like you're hiding in a cave.

If the interviewer can't see your face clearly, they can't read your expressions. And if they can't read your expressions, they can't connect with you. And if they can't connect with you, you're not getting hired. It's that simple.

Position the interview window near your webcam.

This is the single most important technical tip in this entire appendix.

When you're on Zoom, you naturally look at the person's face on screen. But the camera is at the top of your laptop. So to the interviewer, it looks like you're staring at their chest. Or worse — at your own face in the corner.

Drag the Zoom window to the very top of your screen, as close to the webcam as possible. Now when you look at the interviewer's face, your eyes are almost looking at the camera. It's not perfect eye contact, but it's close enough to feel natural. You're not staring them down and you're not staring at your desk.

Small adjustment. Massive difference in how you come across.

Your room is sacred.

Close the door. Tell your roommate. Tell your spouse. Tell your kids. Tell your dog.

Nobody walks through that room during your interview. Nobody.

I interviewed a candidate once whose dog climbed onto her lap mid-interview. Another one had a kid burst through the door screaming. In both cases, the interview was effectively over. Not because I'm heartless — because it told me something. You knew this interview was happening. You had time to prepare. And you couldn't arrange 45 minutes of uninterrupted space.

If you can't manage the logistics of one interview, how are you going to manage the logistics of the job?

Noises happen. A siren outside, a neighbor's lawnmower, your building's fire alarm test — those are fine. Laugh at it. "Well, apparently the building has great timing." Spin it. That's a human moment.

But a kid running in or a dog on your lap is not a funny moment. It's a preparation failure. And the interviewer is silently noting it.

When tech fails — and it will — fix it and move on.

Your internet will cut out. Your audio will lag. Your screen will freeze. It happens to everyone. It's happened to me mid-interview more times than I can count.

Here's what to do: Fix it as fast as possible. Apologize once. Move on. Don't apologize five times. Don't spend two minutes explaining that your router is old. Don't narrate the troubleshooting process.

"Sorry about that — my connection dropped for a second. I'm back. Where were we?"

That's it. Twelve words. Done.

Have a backup ready. If your wifi dies, jump on your phone's hotspot. If your computer crashes, join from your phone. If all else fails, call them and say "my tech gave up on me — can we do this by phone or reschedule?" Being resourceful in a crisis is a better demonstration of your capability than 45 minutes of rehearsed answers.

Same rule applies when you say something dumb. It's the same recovery. Acknowledge it, correct it, move on. Don't dwell. The interviewer will forget it in 30 seconds if you let them. They won't forget it if you spend the next five minutes apologizing for it.

One last thing.

None of this is the interview. All of this is the stage. The lighting, the camera, the microphone, the background, the outfit, the room — those are the stage. The performance is everything in the other 14 chapters of this book.

But a great performance on a bad stage gets remembered for the wrong reasons.

Set the stage. Then forget about it and be the person in The Chair who makes the interviewer say "that's the one."