



NINESTJOHNSTREET

FAMILY

How to make your remote advocacy less remote!

I well remember the far-distant days of the BVC, when we had to “perform for the cameras” as jobbing actors adopted the role of “shifty witness” and we were videoed cross-examining them. It didn’t feel “real”, it immediately raised the anxiety index; remote hearings risk feeling a bit like that.

Fear not, much as Alexander Graham Bell encountered horror in certain quarters when he introduced the new-fangled telephone with the magic of voices travelling down wires, things can and do become routine.

With this in mind, I thought I share a few thoughts and tips on video-hearings:

Settling in

- Don’t leave your first attempt at a remote hearing to your first hearing, as that might be invoking The Fates. Try one out with a colleague to make sure you are familiar with the functions and ask them for feedback about how professional you are looking and sounding.
- Get your presentation on screen right, not for your second career as a model, but rather so that your full face is in the screen, your standard lamp doesn’t appear to be growing out of your head, your copious wine rack is not in full view to all and sundry.
- Better yet on Teams and Zoom, you can “fuzz out” your background (or in Zoom’s case place a specific background), so you might consider this as an option; a plain background is inevitably less distracting, and we are inherently distractable beings.
- Experiment with the light in your room, don’t sit in full sun, don’t sit so that the webcam is looking out of your window.
- Wearing trackie bottoms is all very well and comfortable, but do bear in mind the risk that if you have to get up – small child invading the room or whatever - your sartorial shame will be exposed, this then might throw you off your stride.



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- Bribe your children to come off the internet, to thus maximise your prospects of better bandwidth (shame you can't do that with the entire neighbourhood, but there we are).

Once you have the above sorted, you will feel more professional and ready to go, although if anyone has any tips as to how to stop my dogs barking when they hear the post falling through the letterbox, do let me know!

And so, to speak

- The inevitable short delay engendered by video-hearings means there will be times when you end up talking over each other; learn to pause, not always to try and fill any perceived pauses and accept that when it happens, it's not the end of the world; no doubt judges will be sympathetic.
- Your voice will initially sound unusually loud and formal in the surrounds of your kitchen/bedroom/cellar but stick with it. Fear not, this will wear off in time and after all we are still in a court setting so formality needs to be maintained.
- As much as you can, look your web-cam "in the eye", not for your own benefit but for the benefit of those watching; it creates a connection which encourages people to listen.
- As I was always taught, you're not paid by the word – a lesson we could all take to heart on a daily basis in even the best of times. If ever there was a time for succinct clarity, it is now – hone that cross-examination folks.
- As in any physical hearing, keep your eyes on the judge to gauge their reaction to what you are saying – seems obvious but then again some people don't seem to do it in a physical hearing!
- Similarly, as you would in a physical hearing, watch the body language of your witness, as well as listening to what they say.



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- If World War III is breaking out in an adjacent room and you need to go and instil order, or the door bell goes with a much needed delivery, ask for a short break, again judges are likely to be understanding and it will ruin your train of thought if you don't respond as required.
- Again if your IT fails through broadband width issues or whatever, take a deep breath, try again, you won't be the only person experiencing these problems, we are all on a steep learning curve and sometimes things will go wrong.

Finally, dare I say enjoy this as a new challenge? Perhaps that's too far, but for those of us fortunate enough to remain well and not to be tending to or worried about ill loved-ones, this is an opportunity to learn new skills and refine your advocacy – embrace it!

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