

For best results, ask in person instead of over Zoom

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Most people underestimate the in-person advantage.

According to new Cornell research: Asking in person for help maximizes one's chance of getting a "yes." If you must ask from a distance, though, choose video or a [phone call](#), rather than email or a text, the researchers found.

Those takeaways are detailed in "Should I Ask Over Zoom, Phone or In-Person? Communication Channel and Predicted vs. Actual Compliance," published November 2021 in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. The article was co-authored by Vanessa Bohns, associate professor in the ILR School, and M. Mahdi Roghanizad, assistant professor at Ryerson University.

"If you really need a 'yes,' it's best to ask in person," Bohns said.

The findings also don't show a clear advantage of video over audio-only channels.

The researchers conducted experiments with 490 people and 1,490 respondents to their requests for help proofreading a half-page of text.

In one exercise, help-seekers asked five friends over varied channels to see which ones elicited the most compliance with requests. Those findings were compared with what help-seekers predicted would be the most effective channels.

The results did not mesh. Most people underestimated the in-person advantage, they found.

One explanation, Bohns said, is that "when we are the ones asking for something, we think what matters is what we are asking for, rather than how we are asking for it.

"We tend to think people will weigh the costs and benefits and make a

measured decision about whether to agree to something, saying 'yes' only if they really want to," Bohns said. "But in fact, people agree to all sorts of things, even things they'd rather not do, because they feel bad saying 'no' in the moment."

The bottom line, the researchers said, is that people miss out on receiving help because they ask in suboptimal ways by forgoing advantages offered by visual and audio elements.

Convenience may also play a role, Bohns and Roghanizad said. Rather than walking down to a potential helper's office, a quick email can seemingly reap the same desired result.

Participants, they wrote, "expected differences in the effectiveness of seeking help through various communication channels to be quite small, or nonexistent. However, when participants actually made requests, the differences were quite large. Ultimately, help-seekers underestimated the relative advantage of asking for help face-to-face compared to asking through any mediated channel."

"Help-seekers also underestimated the relative advantage of asking through richer media channels compared to email," they said. In other words, if a face-to-face ask isn't possible, ask by Zoom or phone versus email or text.

More information: Preprint: www.researchgate.net/publication/358111111
[vs Actual Compliance](#)

Provided by Cornell University

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