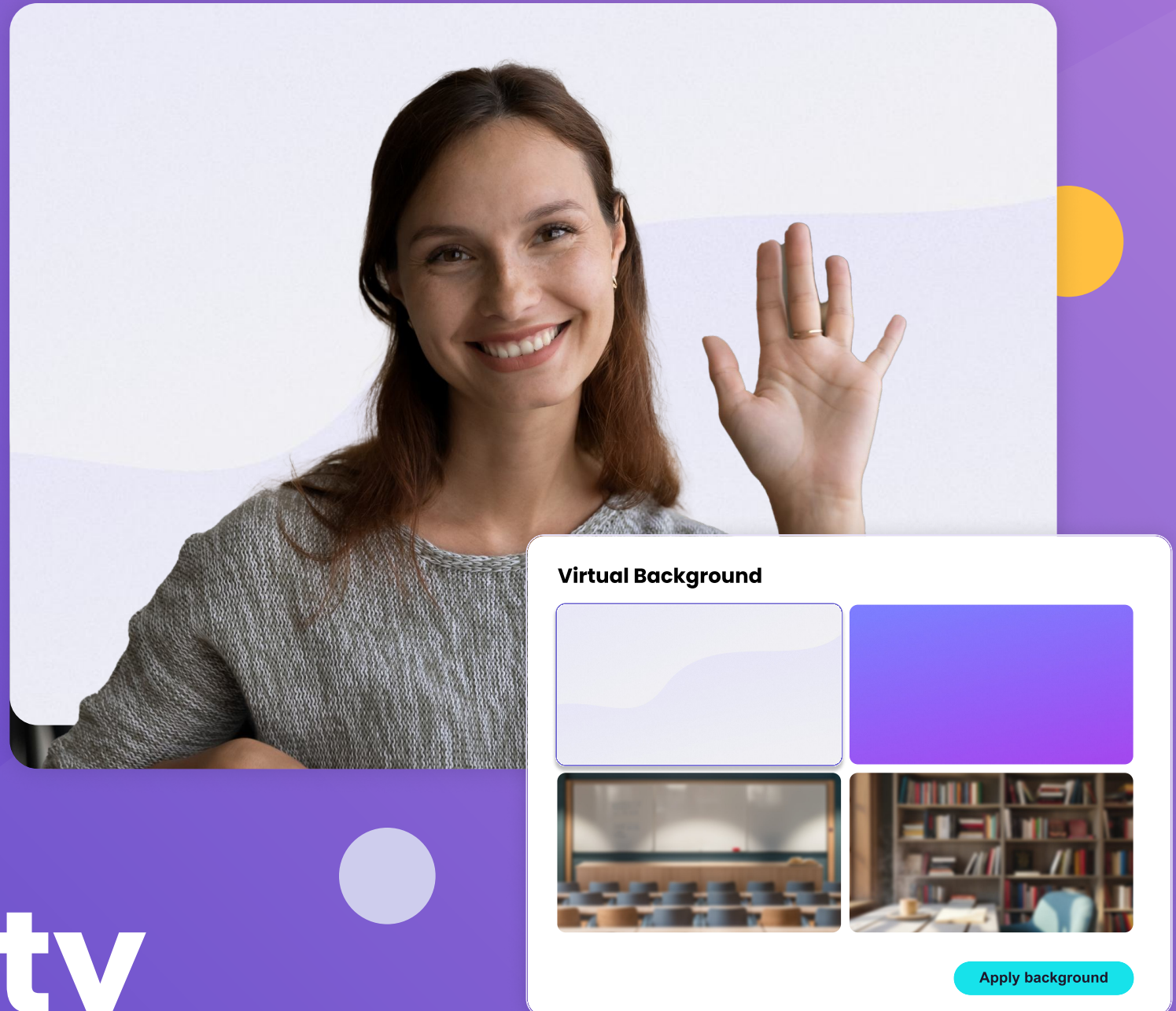


# Simple Steps To Studio Quality Classes



Students and instructors alike prefer a crisp, distraction-free video feed. Instructors want to look their best and let the lesson be the focal point, and students and families prefer to feel like they're in a classroom, not in a stranger's home.

For those reasons, instructors have found the following strategies to be helpful in creating a studio-quality experience from their home, office, or classroom. Varsity Tutors has also partnered with a new livestream platform (BigMarker) for the Livestream Class recordings, and we wanted to share with you some of the technical features of the BigMarker platform that are available to you within your Livestream Classes.

## Backgrounds: Thematic, Professional, or Virtual

In any educational setting, the students benefit the most by being the center of attention. Alas, in a Livestream Class the livestream instructor is the only one on video, putting them and the rectangle that surrounds them, in the spotlight. Students often report being distracted by what's behind the instructor, whether it's interesting (pets, artwork), distracting (clutter, other people), or overly familiar (seeing any stranger's bed or laundry is off-putting). Accordingly, students universally respond well to three types of backgrounds:

### 1. Thematic

Many instructors plan visual demonstrations as part of their lessons, and therefore prefer not to use a virtual background. Based on feedback we have received, students love when the background is similarly thematic: art supplies for an art class, science posters for scientific demonstrations, etc.. These backgrounds can delight and engage students—but they can be difficult to set up, so know that you have other options available to you through the BigMarker platform for Livestream Classes.

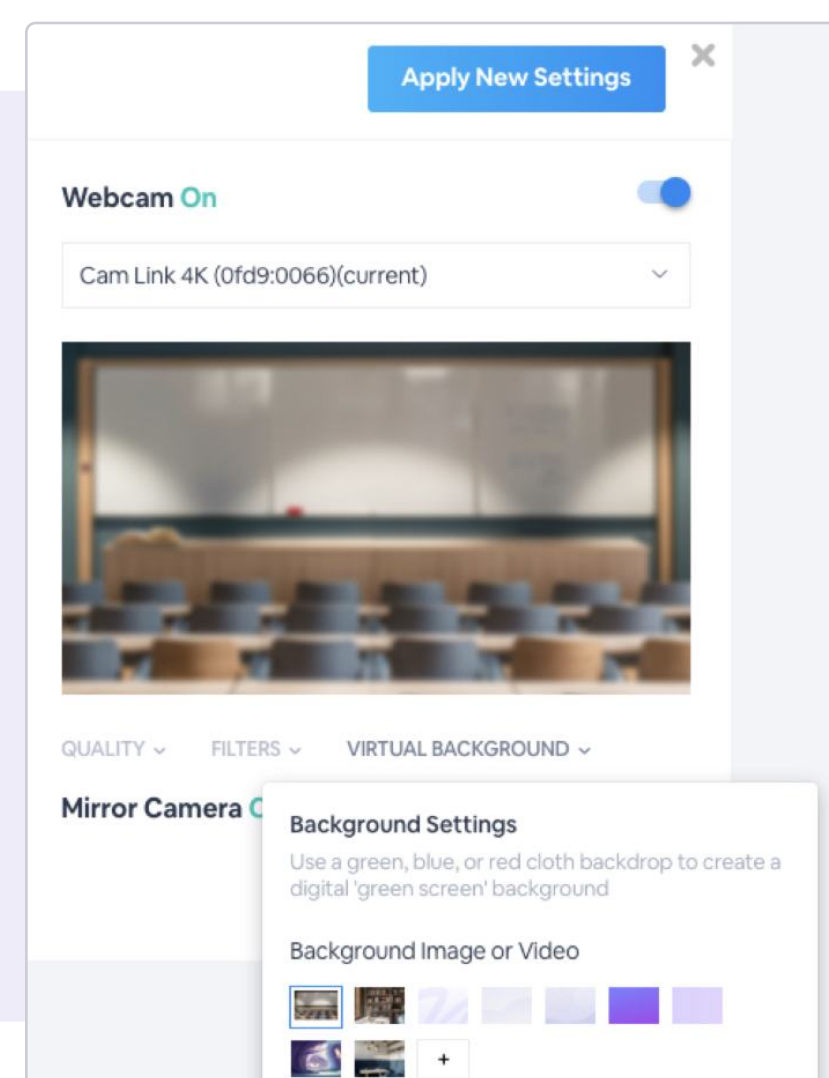
## 2. Professional

Like you may see when experts are interviewed on the news, a well-framed background that looks like a professor's office or teacher's classroom gives students the confidence that they're learning from a true professional. Conversely, even clean, clutter-free backgrounds can include distraction, such as a door or an electrical socket, but the BigMarker platform has other options available for you to use.

## 3. Virtual

The easiest way to ensure that a background is not a distraction? Replace it with a virtual background. When you preview your camera—or change settings—in BigMarker, you have the option to select a virtual background that fits the style of your class and your instruction.

**Simply put: students and parents have reported finding backgrounds more distracting than delightful, so know that you always have the option to select a virtual background directly from the BigMarker interface.** Both before you join the classroom and any time you click on "settings," you will find several virtual background options available immediately below your webcam preview window, with options ranging from professional classroom/office settings to whimsical colors and patterns. The following screenshot illustrates how to access the platform's virtual backgrounds once you've clicked "settings."



## Lights, Camera, Action

Students also report being distracted or intimidated by the angles and lighting of certain video feeds. When an instructor appears to be teaching from the shadows (not enough light in front of them) or looking downward from a towering height (camera too low), some inadvertent "Hollywood magic" can turn the friendliest, most helpful instructor into a villain.

To help students see you in the light they prefer, you may consider the following:

### 1. Camera Angle

When an instructor's camera is at the same level as their eyes, students can see their eye contact as collaborative and sincere. Getting the camera to eye level can be as simple as stacking a laptop on a few books, or experimenting with a portable webcam that can be mounted or placed on something at eye height.

## 2. Lighting

Instructors are hard to see in the shadows when most of the light in the room is behind their back, and easy to see when light is in front of their face. Consider moving a lamp or ring light behind your camera so that your face is well-lit, and experiment with closing curtains and turning off lights to avoid having a majority of light behind you. If a light in front of you is causing too much glare on glasses or interfering with your vision, you may experiment with angles that still keep light in front of you, but not shining directly at you.

## Focused Delivery

Students love a class interface that allows them to focus on their teacher and the lesson content. To that end, instructors have found the following to be helpful:

### 1. Foregoing headphones and headsets.

Since the livestream structure does not involve student audio, instructors do not need headsets and students do not feel distracted by a headset blocking their instructor's face or by looking at the newest AirPods. For higher quality audio input, instructors find that a lapel microphone or inexpensive podcast microphone work quite well.

### 2. Sharing files, not screen.

The BigMarker classroom allows you to upload slide decks and documents that you can then annotate directly in the classroom, helping you avoid toggling between browser windows and keeping all focus in one place.

### 3. Sharing one tab at a time.

Students are often distracted (and instructors occasionally embarrassed) when a screenshare includes multiple browser tabs and bookmarks. If you do share your screen, you are able to share just the individual tab you want students to see, protecting your own data privacy and keeping students focused on exactly what you want them to see.

### 4. Pausing/muting notifications.

Both on the device you use to teach and on any devices around you, it is likely that an incoming message or push notification will occur during class. Students find themselves easily distracted by chimes, rings, and Alexa's voice, for example, and far prefer classes free from unintentional interruptions.

## All The World's A Stage

In a Livestream Class, students will see anything you put on screen and hear anything your microphone picks up—and that's all they will see and hear, too. With that in mind:

### 1. Students prefer when their instructor stays on camera.

When the instructor's camera turns off, they report wondering if class is still happening and feeling as though the teacher is gone.

### 2. What happens on camera is part of the show.

Families report that when instructors are frustrated by technology or students, students carry a negative opinion about the class and topic as a result. Instructors who stay "in character" when on camera receive the most consistently excellent student feedback.