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Setting up and managing video conferencing meetings



What is video conferencing?

Video conferencing is a live audio and video conversation between 2 or more people in different locations, conducted using phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer. Some video conferencing services also allow you to share files, pictures, or each other's screens. Many devices have video conferencing functionality built in (such as Apple's FaceTime and Google's Duo), and many popular apps also provide this service (such as Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook). There are also standalone video conferencing apps that you can download; popular titles include Zoom, Skype, Houseparty and Microsoft Teams. Regardless of the type of service you use, this guidance is applicable to all video conferencing services. For more information about the security features of a specific service, please refer to the service providers' **official** support site.

Downloading video conferencing software

If you're downloading standalone video conferencing software, make sure that you:

- **Only download the software from trusted sources.**

This means using your phone or tablet's app store (such as Apple's App Store or Google Play), or downloading the software from the service provider's **official** website.



Be wary of following advertised links at the top of search results pages (they will typically include the word 'Ad' at the beginning of the address or description of the website), and adverts for video conferencing software within websites.

These may contain links to sites that are not always legitimate, and can be used to scam people. You should also treat any unsolicited links you receive that refer to video conferencing software with caution.

- **Check online to understand what app is right for you.**

In most cases, the 'free' version of a video conferencing service will provide good enough functionality and security for personal use, provided you've set it up correctly.

Premium versions of the same product may offer additional features and usability. You should consider paying for these versions if you feel you'd benefit from extra features. With so many products available, you may want to carry out your own research beforehand - using tech websites or other trusted sources - to find out which one is right for you.

- **Check the privacy settings.**

You should make sure that you understand what (if any) data the service will access during operation. You may have the option to opt out of sharing data.

Setting up video conferencing services

- **Make sure your video conferencing account (or the device or app you are using for video conferencing) is protected with a strong password.**

If you need to install the video conferencing app, you'll have to create an account for it. Make sure that the password you use is different to all your other passwords, and difficult for someone to guess. You should also set up two factor authentication (2FA) for the account (and for your device and other apps if available), as this provides an extra layer of protection and can stop criminals accessing your accounts (even if they know your password).

- **Test the service before making (or joining) your first call.**

Most services have a 'test' function to ensure your microphone and camera work correctly,



and that your internet connection is fast enough. You can also use the test function to learn how the service works. As a minimum, make sure you know how to mute your microphone and turn off the camera. This will give you more control over what you share with others.

- **Understand what features are available.**

Many services allow you to record the call, share files, or show what is on somebody's screen. Find out how to tell if the call is being recorded, what exactly is recorded (audio, pictures, messages), and who can access the recordings. There may also be additional controls to manage who can join the call.

Hosting and joining calls

It's important that you can control who can join your video conferencing call. For specific instructions, refer to the support website of the service you're using. However, the following general rules apply:

- **Do not make the calls public.**

Connect directly to the people you want to call using your contacts/address book, or provide private links to the individual contacts. For some video conferencing services, you can set up the call so that a password is required in order to join. This adds another layer of protection. Do not post the link (or the password) publicly.

- **Know who is joining your call.**

If you are organising the call for your family or friends consider using the lobby feature to ensure you know who has arrived. This is especially useful if individuals are joining the call via an unrecognised phone number. Make sure people are who they say they are before they join the call (the password function described above can help with this).



- **Consider your surroundings.**

Take a moment to think about what your camera shows when you're on a call. Would you want to share that information with strangers? Consider blurring or changing your background -you'll find instructions on how to do this on the support website for your video conferencing service. Make sure that **all** your devices and applications (not just the video conferencing software) are kept up to date. Applying software updates is one of the most important things you can do to protect yourself online. Update all the apps (and your device's operating system) whenever you're prompted. It will add new features and immediately improve your security.

Hosting the meeting

- **Planning and Preparation**

A successful group meeting will give everyone the chance to speak, so ask people beforehand of subjects they want to discuss and either send out an agenda or have an idea of certain topics that you will bring up during the meeting.

Also, make sure to send log-in information (access codes, URLs, and call-in numbers) at least a day in advance so that participants can test for any software downloads needed. You may also want to ask participants to log in at least 15 minutes prior to the start to test connectivity. When group members arrive at the meeting greet them individually and check that they can see & hear everything correctly.

- **Stay Focused**

Online meeting attendees can call or log in from anywhere. To minimize background or "road noise" (you don't want your child, pet, or ringing phones to become the focus) you can opt to "mute all attendees and only unmute people one at a time. You can create rules at the beginning at the meeting by asking members to raise their hand to speak so you can make sure each person has the opportunity to open up.



Keep the focus of the meeting on one or two topics. If you must cover more items, then give people time to stretch, take a bathroom break, or replenish their coffee. Keep each segment of the meeting short - no longer than 40 minutes. If someone has serious issues to discuss that may take some time suggest for them to stay on the meeting with yourself longer than the others or to have a phone conversation at a later date.

Etiquette

Give your full attention to the participants as you would if you were in the same room. Don't be distracted by e-mail, Web surfing, or texting. Try not to eat or drink so that you can be prepared if questions are directed to you. Assume when you walk into the room that the microphones are already live to other locations! This helps prevent any extraneous pre-meeting conversation from being broadcast when you might not intend it to.

Video -conference meetings should actually move at a slightly slower pace than a typical meeting due to a two to three second delay for most systems to communicate. If you're leading the meeting, make sure there are sufficient pauses after asking a question. If you are a participant, bring attention to yourself before addressing the group by signaling with your hand or saying "question" or "comment" and then waiting a couple seconds before continuing. Members should also make eye contact by looking into the camera. It will make conversation among the participants more natural. The following is a quick cheat sheet on etiquette:

The 8 Do's of Video Conferencing Etiquette

- Do be courteous to other participants
- Do speak clearly
- Do keep body movements minimal
- Do move and gesture slowly and naturally
- Do maintain eye contact by looking into the camera
- Do dress appropriately
- Do make the session animated
- Do be yourself and have fun!



The 7 Don'ts of Video Conferencing Etiquette

Don't make distracting sounds

Don't shout

Don't make distracting movements

Don't interrupt other speakers

Don't carry on side conversations

Don't wear "noisy" jewellery

Don't cover the microphone

Engaging members

Start the meeting by breaking the ice by going around the "virtual" room and asking everyone to introduce themselves and share something about their weekend, or talk about something they're looking forward to, to add a social element to the proceedings. "Everything you can simulate from face to face encounters is good."

Ask questions frequently both to engage remote participants and to keep a personal connection going. Ask a specific person a specific question. Asking open-ended questions to a large remote audience will often result in "dead air" and then multiple people talking at once.