

Participating in Zoom meetings

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Introduction

What is Zoom?

Zoom is an online conference call / meeting facility. That means we can talk to each other as a group, and for those who have a webcam and start the video, we can also see each other.

Note: 'Call' and 'meeting' are used interchangeably throughout this document.

Zoom was originally designed for the business market, and it is used extensively in business, but it is also very helpful for other groups who want to meet together online.

It can also be used to share the screen of a device so that everyone can see it. This is commonly used to provide online software training, but we may think of other uses for it.

The meeting host

The person who sets up the call is called the 'host' or 'meeting organiser'. The meeting is set up using their Zoom account and they have some options for managing the meeting which other participants don't have.

Limits on the call

If the host is using a free Zoom account, meetings with 3 or more participants have a maximum length of 40 minutes. If we run out of time, the host can just start a new meeting and everyone joins using the same web link. However, during the Covid-19 outbreak, if Zoom have capacity on their network, they are waiving the time limit, so we may not have to do this. With a free account, the maximum number of participants is 100.

Types of meeting

There are 2 typical scenarios in which conference call software may be used.

The first scenario is a group meeting where there isn't a dominant participant. In this document I'll call this 'the catching up scenario'.

The second is where mainly one person is speaking and the others are listening, and perhaps asking questions. This could be a teaching session or a speech. In this document I'll call this 'the teaching scenario'.

An online exercise class is a specific type of teaching session.

Initial set-up

Equipment

Note: Normally you could join the meeting by dialling a phone number from a phone, but this facility has been removed from the free account for the current period.

You can join the meeting with just an Internet-connected device.

I recommend that you choose a place with the strongest / fastest Internet connection that you have because the video places a high load on the connection. If you can connect using a physical wire, use this. Otherwise find a place with your strongest Wi-Fi or mobile data signal.

If you have a choice of devices, I recommend that you use the one with the largest screen because you'll have more screen space to see everyone. If you have a desktop or laptop, use this. If not, a tablet. If not, a smart phone.

If you want to hear the others instead of just watching their lips move, you need headphones or speakers.

If you have headphones that you can use with your device, I recommend that you use these because it improves the sound quality for everyone.

If you want others to hear you, you need a microphone. A built-in mic is fine.

If you have a webcam, you can choose to allow others to see you.

If your device is older or not very powerful, I recommend that you close all other software that is running.

If you're using a smart phone, I recommend switching to landscape rather than portrait display- turn it on its side.

If you're using a tablet or smart phone, I recommend that you sit somewhere where you can prop it in front of you, close to vertical. For example, sit at a table with your tablet or phone propped against a vase.

If your screen goes to sleep after a period of inactivity, you may find that this happens during the call. If you know how to change the setting, this would be a good idea. Otherwise try to remember to move your mouse / tap your screen from time to time to keep it awake.

You can join the meeting with more than one device. For example, you might want to use the big screen of your desktop computer so that you can see everyone, but if your desktop doesn't have a webcam, you might use a smart phone as well so that they can see you.

If you are participating in an online exercise class, eg pilates or yoga, I recommend that you set up your big screen close to you so that you can see the teacher's demonstrations and hear them. If you have an external webcam, position this so that the teacher can see you. Alternatively, if you have a smart phone as well as a device with a larger screen, you might join with the smart phone

as well and position this so that the teacher can see you. It's better to put the camera higher up, pointing down to you.

Getting set up for your first Zoom meeting

On a mobile device, install the Zoom app from Google Play or the App Store.

If you're on a desktop or laptop, you can download and launch the client when you select the link to the meeting.

Once you've started Zoom, you'll need to enter a name for yourself. The host may be looking at your name to decide whether to let you into the meeting, and everyone will see this, so don't use something obscure. If you use Zoom again with another group, it will default to use the same name, so I also recommend that you use a name that any of your groups will recognise as you.

Finding your built-in camera

If you're using a built-in camera on your device, try to work out the location of the camera. Wave your hand in front of different parts of the screen until you see your hand filling the video stream from your camera.

Testing

If you'd like to try out your equipment or other aspects of Zoom before the meeting, you can use Zoom's test facility. Instructions are here: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115002262083-Joining-a-Test-Meeting>

Alternatively, contact your meeting organiser and ask if they would do a test meeting just with you before the main meeting.

Participating in a meeting - interacting with a group

Conference calls

As soon as you have people in more than 2 locations on a call, it becomes much more difficult to take turns to speak. My top tip is to ask a question to a named person, eg 'Mel, how are you doing?' instead of 'How is everyone?' Also, just be patient, polite and forgiving.

Calls using an Internet connection also have more time lag than calls on a phone, so try to allow for this when you speak. It also means that sound from 2 different participants, eg musicians, is unlikely to be heard at the same time, making it close to impossible for musicians in different locations to play together. If the musicians are sitting together in the same household, this is fine.

If all or part of your call is using the teaching scenario (when one person is speaking for a longer time), it is very helpful if all the other participants put themselves on mute (see below). This eliminates any background noise of shuffling etc and so allows everyone on the call to hear the speaker more clearly.

Participating in a meeting - Zoom basics

Joining a meeting

A web-link for the meeting will have been sent you. Select the link and click on 'Join a meeting'. Depending on what options the host has chosen, you may need to wait for them to let you in. They should be able to let you in within a couple of minutes, hopefully less. If you feel you've been forgotten, try phoning them separately from the Zoom call.

Finding the controls

If you don't move your mouse / touch your screen for a while, the controls (icons) disappear. Simply move your mouse / touch your screen to make them reappear.

What you see on the screen

Each person in the meeting is represented by a rectangular box. This either has their name in the centre, or the video from their webcam with their name in one corner.

There are several different ways of arranging the boxes. These arrangements are called 'views'.

If no one is sharing their screen, there are 3 options:

- Speaker - this is the default layout and it has a large box for the person who is speaking and much smaller boxes for the others. When the speaker changes, the main box changes. This is usually the best option for the teaching scenario.
- Gallery - this has the same-sized box for everyone and the boxes don't move about. This is good for the catching-up scenario where the speaker keeps changing, but only really if you can see all the boxes on one screen.
- Mini - this gives you a small Zoom window which is on top of whatever else you have open. This could be useful for some teaching scenarios where seeing the speaker is not very important.

So changing your layout to 'Gallery' is strongly recommended for chatting as a group if you are on a desktop or laptop, but it may not be an improvement on an iPad if there are more than 9 participants, and may not be an improvement on a mobile phone if there are more than 4 participants.

To switch to gallery view:

- On a Windows or Mac desktop or laptop machine - select 'Gallery View' in the top right corner - you can see up to 49 participants at once
- On an iPad - tap 'Switch to Gallery View' in the top left corner - you can see up to 9 participants at once
- On an Android or iOS mobile - swipe left to switch to gallery view - you can see up to 4 participants at once, swipe left again to see other participants, swipe right if you want to go back to speaker view

If someone is going to speak for a longer time, or wants to show you something using their video, it may be helpful to use speaker view so that their video is larger on your screen.

More detail including images: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360000005883>

Audible or not

On each participant's box, there is an icon with a microphone / loudspeaker. If the microphone has a line through it / the loudspeaker has an x next to it, it other participants cannot hear this person, called 'muted' or 'on mute'. If there's no line / no x, the person can be heard by others in the meeting, called 'unmuted'.

Separately from the icon on each participant's box, there is a microphone / loudspeaker control where you can mute or unmute yourself.

In the teaching scenario, the meeting usually runs better if the main speaker is unmuted and all the others are muted. In the catching-up scenario, we want to hear each other. So for catching-up, please unmute yourself. But you can mute yourself at any point, for example if you have a coughing fit or want to swear at your partner.

To mute or unmute:

- On a Windows or Mac desktop or laptop machine - select the microphone control at the bottom left
- On an iPad - tap the loudspeaker control in the middle section at the top of your screen
- On an Android or iOS mobile - tap the loudspeaker control at the bottom of your screen

Note that the meeting host can also mute and unmute participants. If they try to unmute you, you will be asked to confirm this, so they can't force you to be unmuted if you have a good reason for staying on mute.

More detail including screenshots: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/200941109-Attendee-Controls-in-a-Meeting>

With or without video

You also have a control for the video, showing a video camera. If there's a line through it / an x next to it, you're not visible to others. If there's no line / no x, you are visible. This is independent of whether others can hear you or not. As with the audio, you can turn your video on or off at any time. So, for example, you can turn it off if you suddenly realise that you're still in your pyjamas, or your kids start fighting in the background.

To start or stop the video stream from your webcam:

- On a Windows or Mac desktop or laptop machine - select the video control at the bottom left
- On an iPad - tap the video control in the middle section at the top of your screen
- On an Android or iOS mobile - tap the video control at the bottom of your screen

More detail including screenshots: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/200941109-Attendee-Controls-in-a-Meeting>

Chat

As well as the voice channel, we can use keyboard-based chat. This is very useful for asking questions in the teaching scenario. In the catching-up scenario, it can be really useful to communicate with someone who has joined the call but seems to be struggling with their audio equipment. So if this is you, look out for a chat message, or be pro-active and send one. And of course you could also type emojis or quick comments or questions etc while someone else is speaking.

To open chat:

- On a Windows or Mac desktop or laptop machine - select the chat control in the middle section at the bottom
- On an iPad - tap the Participants control in the middle section at the top of your screen and choose Chat
- On an Android or iOS mobile - tap the Participants control at the bottom of your screen and choose Chat

More detail including screenshots: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203650445-In-Meeting-Chat>

Leaving the meeting

At the end, the host will end the meeting. But you can also leave at any time.

To leave the meeting:

- On a Windows or Mac desktop or laptop machine - select the red Leave Meeting control in the bottom right corner
- On an iPad - tap the Leave Meeting control in the top left corner
- On an Android or iOS mobile - tap the 'Leave Meeting' control in the top right corner

More detail including screenshots: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/200941109-Attendee-Controls-in-a-Meeting>