

How to hold a meeting online

If you're not able to meet in person but have access to the internet, there are some great tools that you can use to “meet up” online. With **video-conferencing** you can use your computer, smartphone or tablet to host and join online meetings with your fellow Ramblers.

There are **lots of options** out there and there's no right or wrong one to choose as every area and group works differently. This quick guide gives you an **overview** of some of the more obvious providers but isn't an approved or recommended list so you're certainly welcome to try out one of the others too.

What is video-conferencing?

Whether you call it video-conferencing, online meetings, webinars or video chat, it's all about using a computer, smartphone or tablet to **call friends and family**.

There are lots of advantages over phonecalls.

- Call quality – it's usually **much clearer** than a standard phonecall
- Multiple callers - it's very easy to have **more than one person** on the same call
- Visual as well as audio – as long as you have a **camera** built into your computer, others will be able to see you too (all smartphones and tablets have cameras)
- Free (normally) – if you have wifi at home or your mobile phone package includes some data, **calls are free**.

What will callers need?

- Computer, tablet or smart phone
- Internet connection eg wifi
- Speakers and microphone - usually these are built in or use headphones

- Camera/webcam (optional) – most laptops, tablets and smartphones will have a camera already built in. If you have a desktop PC you may need a separate webcam.



A camera's **not essential** – you can still join online meetings with audio only. It just means that others won't be able to see you.

How do people join the meeting?

You'll normally send out an **invitation** from the software or website of the online meeting tool that you're using. That will include a link for people to click. When they do, if they've not used that particular online meeting software before, they'll normally be given the option of how to join: through their **browser** (eg Chrome, Safari, Firefox, Edge) or by **downloading an app**. It's all very easy and many companies now have videos and guides on their websites to help all of the new users during the lockdowns that are happening all over the world.

NB Most online meeting providers will need the person setting up the meeting to have an account but often participants won't need this.

Are these secure?

You may have read of some people who've managed to join meetings they weren't invited to. This is very rare and as long as you don't over-ride the various **security options** that are built in, it's most unlikely to be a problem.

Which online meeting supplier is best?

There are lots of online tools which are free and easy to use. Some are designed for fun, informal use while others have more business features. There's not one best one as it really depends on what you want and how confident people in your group are.



WhatsApp

You'll possibly know WhatsApp as a text or chat messaging app on your phone. It's very popular and widely used. But what's less well known is that you can make voice or video calls on it.

- + Many people already have it
- + Easy to create separate group lists eg social; committee etc
- + Minimal information needed – just a mobile phone number for each person
- Maximum of four people on a group call
- Basic functionality



Facebook Messenger

Part of Facebook, many people already use Messenger for text chats but it can also be used for video calls.

- + Many will already have and be familiar with Facebook
- + Up to 50 people on a group call
- + Video will show up to 6 people at one time
- Must have a Facebook account to use it, which not some people may not want to set up



Zoom

Zoom's not the new kid on the block – in fact, it's been around since about 2013. However, it's not been one of the more popular options. Until now. During the various quarantine/social isolation measures brought in around the world in 2020, Zoom has become very widely used with people holding "Zoom Parties". However, with this massive increase in popularity the media has highlighted the existing security and privacy problems. They're working hard to sort these but some governments and businesses have banned its use because of these issues.

- + Up to 100 people on a group video call
- + Meeting recording available
- + Multiple screen sharing – more than one person at a time can share their computer screen
- + Very popular at the moment so people may already have used it
- Time limit of up to 40 minutes per call
- Questions about data security and privacy issues may put people off
- Automatically downloads their app unless you know how to use the browser version
- Customer support is poor – if you need help, Zoom's team is particularly stretched at the moment, and even paying customers are reporting 2 weeks wait for help



Google Hangouts

Google is everywhere so lots of people are already familiar with and trust it. Hangouts gives you the basics of online meetings as well as group chat, a little like WhatsApp.

- + Easy to use
- + No call time limits
- + Screen sharing
- Maximum of 25 people on a video call
- Not many features beyond basic functionality – although this may also be a positive for some



EzTalks

This is an established online meeting provider with some good tools included in the free option. It's not one of the best known options but is easy to use and worth a look.

- + Up to 100 people on a call
- + Screen and presentation sharing
- + Whiteboard – where participants can write or draw on screen
- + Polls/Voting to make things interactive
- Maximum 40 mins call



Skype

One of the best known names, Skype has been around since 2003 and is now owned by Microsoft. It was incredibly popular at one point, until they tried to get “cool”! But recently they've gone back to their core business of good quality phone and video calls.

- + Up to 50 people on a group call
- + Can share screen/presentation
- + Subtitling option – as you speak, live subtitles appear
- + Easy file sharing
- Some people find it glitchy
- Years ago, security wasn't as good so people who've used it in the past should update their password

Cost

All of these options have free services and this is what we've outlined here. However, many also offer a premium, paid for product which will involve a monthly or annual fee.

Support

All of these options will provide customer support, even for free services. Unfortunately, the Ramblers cannot provide technical support, so do consider the skills that you have in your group if you're worried about support.