

Video-conferencing

This document attempts to explain how to set up a video conference as a way to continue U3A meetings in a time of social distancing or even self isolation.

U3A members vary from those who are IT literate to those who are not at all confident with IT. **This document is aimed at the latter** and many members may be able to skim through it to extract just the bits that they need.

It is also aimed at **Windows/Android** users. Similar methods apply to other systems but details may vary.

Video-conferencing allows you to use your device (desktop computer, laptop/notebook, tablet or smartphone) to see and speak with one or more others using the same system. Usually it will include a 'chat' system allowing you to type messages as well and for everyone else to see your messages. It may also include a whiteboard system

Hardware

If you have used your device for Skype or other systems using both a microphone and camera and you know that both work, you can skip this step and go straight to Software.

To use video-conferencing you need to have both a working microphone and camera on your device.

On a desktop computer you will need to add these as they don't normally come built-in. In normal times it is easy to get a webcam with a built-in microphone from the likes of Argos or Currys/PC World. It is possible to get them on-line but, and it's a big but, many of the most popular models are unavailable. Normally one would cost around £20-£30 for a good quality model (though they cheaper ones can be had for as little as £5-£6), but at the moment the cheapest half-way decent one that is in stock on amazon is around £50. It may be possible to use a digital camera as a webcam using the lead you use to connect your camera to your computer.

On a laptop that is not too old, you would expect both camera and microphone to be built-in.

In either case you may want to check whether both are working.

Camera

Click the Windows Start button at the far bottom right of the screen (or press the Windows key at the bottom right of your keyboard). On the program menu scroll down until you find Camera and click on it. This should bring up a window and show whatever your camera can see – probably you! If the window comes up but you don't see a picture you can try clicking the settings icon – the 'gear' at the top right to see if camera is 'on'.

Microphone

Click the Windows Start button at the far bottom right of the screen (or press the Windows key at the bottom right of your keyboard). Click on the settings button - the gear icon next to bottom on the left of the menu that pops up. Click on System at the top of the resulting list. Click on Sound - second item on the next list. Scroll down to the Input section and look for Test your microphone. If you now speak into the microphone - it may not be obvious exactly where that is located on your laptop - you should see a coloured line where the grey one is to start with. The length of the line should vary as you speak louder or softer.

Tablets – Many have a front-facing camera (a rear camera is not much help for this purpose). Many – but not all – have a microphone: you may need to check your manual to be sure.

All recent **smartphones** have a camera and, fairly obviously, a microphone and may be the surest way to video-conference. Obviously the biggest drawback is the small screen.

Software

There are a number of programs/apps which allow video-conferencing for free. Probably the best known is Skype, but this is limited for this use and has poor quality. Two rather better platforms are Jitsi and Zoom.

Jitsi

Windows (should work on an Apple computer too)

Open your web browser. At the top of the screen is the address bar containing the URL or web address of the page you are on. If your start page is Google this will say something like <https://www.google.co.uk/> . Click in this box and type meet.jit.si . You should see a page headed 'Secure, fully featured and completely free video conferencing' and below that a box headed 'Start a new meeting'. You can type the name of your meeting/group into this box and click on Go and that's it – meeting started. Anyone else in your group can do the same. All they need do is type the same meeting name into the box and they will join your meeting. (On naming I suggest something like ExeterU3ALanguage or – to save a bit of typing – ExeU3ALang.) Note that anyone can convene a meeting, not just the person who set it up originally – all you need is the name of the meeting.

All being well you will see the conference screen. You may be asked to allow access to your camera and microphone – your you should. At the bottom, in the middle are three icons. Left to right these relate to the microphone, leaving the conference and the camera. You can switch the microphone or camera on or off by clicking on these. If off the icon will have a line through it. The red, middle button leaves the conference (think of it as 'hanging up' the phone) and should switch both your camera and microphone off immediately. A number of other options are available, but you can explore these at your leisure.

What if all is not well? Jitsi is a bit fussy about your browser, that is the software you use to access the Web. In particular it doesn't seem to get on well with the Microsoft browsers Internet Explorer and Edge. You will see an orange box on the screen labelled 'Browser Warning'. If you click on it, it will suggest you use one of their [fully supported browsers](#). Clicking on this link will tell you that these are Chrome and Chromium. If you then click on Chrome this will take you to a page where you can download and install this web browser. Answering the relevant questions on the way you can install the software and entering the address (meet.jit.si) and your meeting name should get you going.

On an Android tablet or smartphone, go to the Play Store and in the search box at the top type 'Jitsi Meet'. This should take straight to the Jitsi Meet page where you can download and install the app. Give it the required permissions and open the app. Enter the name of the meeting (after the first time you can select it from a list) and away you go. Ensure that you leave the meeting at the end of it as otherwise your camera and microphone may still be 'live'.

Zoom

Zoom requires the convenor of a meeting (which might not be the Group Convenor) sign up for an account with Zoom via the web address zoom.us. A group Convenor doing this would normally only have one account, even if they convene more than one group. They then have an ID which they distribute to all the members and which is a nine digit number (so not related to the name of the group). Members go to the link provided by the convenor and join the meeting that way. (Technical note for those to whom it makes sense – Zoom requires Javascript to be enabled and scripts to be allowed: without permissions all you get at zoom.us is a blank page). Once you have connected to a meeting you have a similar screen to that for Jitsi, though with fewer obvious options.

On Android go to the Play Store and in the search box at the top type 'Zoom Cloud Meetings'. Download and install the app. Give it the required permissions and open the app. (Note that this requires more software and more permissions than Jitsi). The convenor needs to provide the ID and password for the meeting and the member can enter this. Take care to leave the meeting completely at the end as otherwise your camera and microphone may still be 'live'. Zoom has a 40 minute limitation on groups of three or more, but you can immediately re-start the meeting so this only gives a small pause – perhaps a necessary one.