



The Scope of These Guidance Leaflets

This leaflet is one of a series which give an overview of the things that might be helpful for small charities and voluntary community groups setting up facilities to enable it to continue working effectively with Trustees, volunteers, staff & beneficiaries who are unable to meet face-to-face.

They are NOT a full and comprehensive guide to all the technology available.



Please read the Disclaimer on the last page of this leaflet.



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Setting up your computer/laptop before joining an on-line group

It's YOUR home !

Always remember that when you click to join an on-line group you are inviting the other participants in the group to come into YOUR home.

So BEFORE you click to join an on-line group it is worth giving a bit of time to think about how the other participants are going to see not only you, but also the place where you live and work.

There are two particular differences between on-line group meetings and physical group meetings.

The first is that in physical group meetings the participants come into an area which you have prepared for them in a way to protect your privacy. The other is that the participants can choose what they look at.

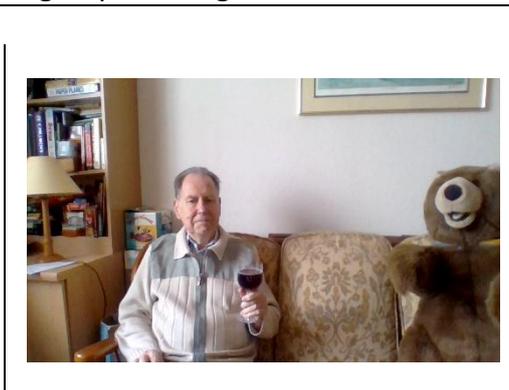
On-line group meetings take the participants into wherever your computer/laptop is being used, which might be a more private area (a study, the kitchen, or a bedroom) than you would normally take visitors to – particularly if they were “charity acquaintances” rather than personal friends. And what the participants see there is what the computer camera shows them, not necessarily what they would choose to look at.

So, when participating in on-line group meetings, whether formal (eg: Trustees or staff meetings), or informal (eg: social gatherings in times of restricted social mobility) it is wise to check what the other participants will be seeing through the “eye” of your computer camera.

And that best achieved by doing some experimenting by yourself ahead of the group-meeting. The Webcam Test website (<https://webcamtests.com/>) provides a simple way of doing that.

Checking your computer camera set-up

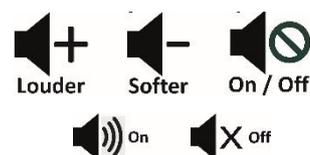
Here are some things to look out for:

	<p>If you are joining the group using a computer/laptop in a room where you wouldn't normally take visitors to your house, do remember to check that there aren't any pictures on the wall, or books on the shelf, or "dirty crockery" on the desk that you wouldn't want your group visitors to YOUR HOME to see.</p>
<p>Make sure that you are not sitting with a window behind you. The light from the window affects the camera and can make your face very dark so that it is difficult for other participants to see you.</p>	
	<p>Similarly make sure that you screen/camera isn't pointing up towards ceiling lights. Ideally, the screen/camera should be at the same height as your head when you are sitting upright. If the computer/laptop is in front and below you on a desk – try lifting it up by putting it on a "biscuit tin", or a pile of books</p>
<p>Make sure that the whole of your head is visible (<i>ie</i>: without the top of your head or your chin being cut off). And avoid sitting too close to the camera if you can. Not only is it a bit more "socially friendly" to be just a bit further away (rather than being too "in yer face!"), being too close can, with some cameras, make your face look like a balloon</p>	
	<p>Always remember that with on-line group-meetings you are effectively inviting people into YOUR HOME – even if you are the only person physically present in the room at the time. So remember to think about how you are dressed for the on-line group. If it would be discourteous to invite them physically into YOUR HOME when you are scruffily dressed, it would similarly be discourteous to invite them "virtually" into your home for an on-line group meeting.</p>
<p>And finally: Most of the above hints on positioning the camera are fine for more "formal" on-line group activities (<i>eg</i>: a Trustees' or volunteers'/staff meeting). But for less formal social on-line gatherings, try positioning the camera rather further away to create a sense of space. Make it look like YOUR HOME. And include a glass of wine, or some tea and cake on the table to create a more social atmosphere, even if there are only one or two of you (that's Hokki, our Japanese Brown Bear, who has also joined this on-line social group).</p>	

Checking your computer speaker/headphone set-up

On-line meetings software generally leaves you to use your usual computer/laptop settings/controls to enable you to hear, or not hear, what others are saying in the on-line meeting and do not provide their own controls for that. So make sure that your computer/laptop speakers are switched on or you won't be able to hear what others are saying in the on-line meeting.

Most computers use the Function Keys (the top row of keys on the keyboard) to control the speakers. They typically are identified by icons like those shown to the right. And whether the speakers are currently on or off is generally indicated by an icon in the bar at the bottom-right of the screen.



If you wanted to use headphones rather than the computer speaker there is no reason why you should not do so. It used to be necessary to avoid feedback (that nasty whistle that can sometimes happen) but modern software technology means that it is no longer necessary to use headphones to prevent feedback and many people do not bother now.

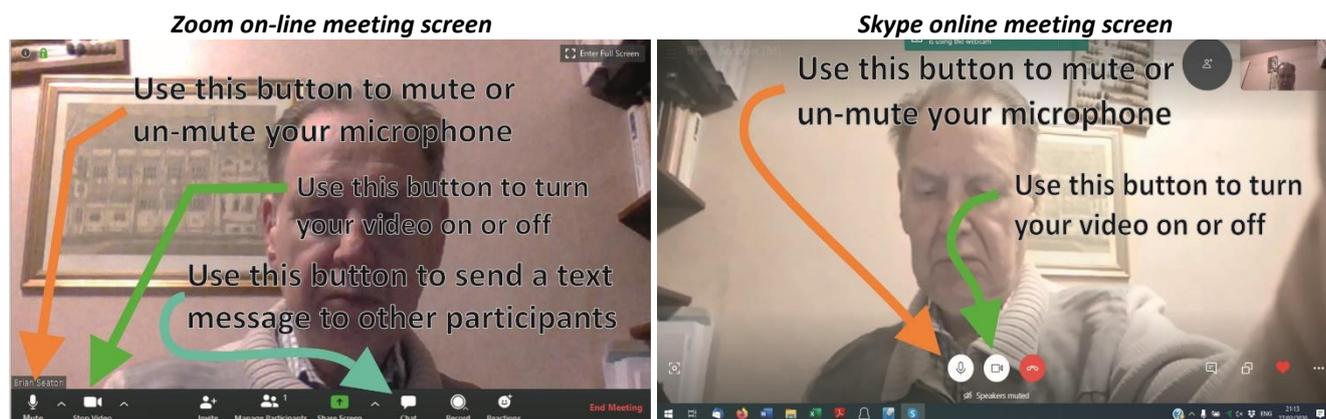
Checking your computer microphone set-up

Background noise – the car going by, the aircraft flying overhead, the vacuum or washing machine in the next room – can be a problem. Particularly if there are lots of them when there are lots of participants in the on-line group-meeting, each with their own background noise. For larger meetings the host will normally mute ALL participant's microphones centrally and only switch individual microphones on when a participant has indicated that they wish to speak.

Fortunately modern on-line meetings software is pretty good at ignoring low-level background noise. But a sudden cough or sneeze, the doorbell ringing, or children running into the room do get picked up and "shared" with all the other participants in the meeting.

So it is good idea to make sure you know where the "mute" button is on your computer/laptop so that you can quickly switch your microphone off if the room you are in suddenly gets rather noisy.

In Zoom the microphone control button is in the left hand bottom corner of the screen (yellow arrow). If the icon bar is not visible, move the cursor to the bottom of the screen and it will appear. In Skype the microphone button is the left of 3 icons in the bottom centre of the screen (yellow arrow). If the icon is not visible, move the cursor to the bottom of the screen and it will appear.



Both the Zoom and the Skype on-line meeting screens also include an icon that you can click on to close (and re-open) the video link – eg: if something starts happening in the room where you are that you don't want to disturb other participants or them to see.

And if at any time you want to leave the on-line meeting in the case of Zoom you click on the "Leave meeting" message in the bottom right-hand corner of the icon bar, and in the case of Skype you click on the white phone in red circle icon.

Pre-meeting set-up and testing.

If it is your first time using on-line group meeting software it would be useful to have a pre-meeting set-up and testing session to make sure that you are able to use the software efficiently. This will also avoid wasting the time (and patience ?!) of other participants if it means that the host doesn't have to spend time sorting difficulties out before the meeting can start.

So, if you are not entirely sure and happy with using the software, do ask if your host is willing and able to provide you with an introductory session just by yourself. And if the technical difficulties mean that you can't initially communicate with the host using the on-line meeting software it might be possible to solve the problems with a 1-1 telephone call while you are setting your computer/laptop up.



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