Tips on Using Zoom for Teleconferencing

Zoom is an application that has some of the characteristics of Calliflower and some features shared by *Go to Meeting* and other webinar and teleconference programs. In its simplest form, it can be used for one-to-one and small group video meetings very much like Skype. Zoom is a simpler to use, but arguably more sophisticated teleconferencing tool than Skype. It has many advantages over Skype, including the ability to show a whiteboard, agenda, or anything else you choose to put on your computer screen through a screen share feature that is much easier to use than that of Skype.

Another advantage of Zoom is that you do not have to install software on your computer that wants to update itself at the most awkward times, like when you are late joining an online meeting.

It differs from Skype in that it generally has better audio and video and is less prone to audio feedback interference. Like all communication and telephony systems it is not immune to such interference and should always be used with a headset equipped with a microphone if possible. When this is not possible, using headphones will at least reduce your contribution to the interference. I have used it for calls to Uruguay, Vietnam and Africa from North America with excellent results. If you do get a notification that your Internet connection is poor, switching off you video will usually allow you to continue with a voice-only connection.

I like Zoom, because it is much easier to set up a new meeting than with Skype. With Skype, I have to know the Skype name of all intended recipients of a meeting invitation. I must also ensure that they have accepted me as a contact and I must have their contact information. With Zoom, I simply schedule a meeting and send an email invitation to the intended attendees. This contains a link to the meeting, which they can click to join.

If they have never attended a Zoom meeting before, the link will take them to *Zoom.us* where they will be instructed to download and install a small launcher program. This will install in seconds and connect them to the meeting. If a recipient of the meeting invitation has previously installed the launcher, clicking the link will immediately connect them to the meeting.

All you have to do is click on the link that was sent to you, at the time of the meeting or a few minutes before the meeting starts. The link will look something like this:

https://zoom.us/j/8439879120

Before you say, "Omigod! I can't do that! It was hard enough trying to use Skype!" let me assure you that it is easy. You just click on the link and follow the simple instructions on screen. When you do this for the first time, you will receive instructions from Zoom.us to install the loader file on your computer or device. This only takes seconds, after which you will be asked to click OK when it appears. Do this and you will be linked to the Zoom call where you will see the other attendees on the screen. If you don't see anything but an empty rectangle it means that you arrived at the meeting before anyone else, everyone else forgot about the meeting, or they chose not to attend. If you arrive before the meeting host, Zoom will send an email to the host telling them that you are waiting.

You will notice at the bottom left of your Zoom window an icon to control audio (mute) and another to control your camera. You will not see this second icon if you don't have a camera on your computer, tablet or phone. You can turn off the camera by clicking its icon if you wish. You can also mute your microphone if you wish. You will still get the audio from the meeting.

Tips on using Zoom

Tip 1. Video requires more bandwidth than audio, so if you get a screen message that the Internet signal is unstable, you can often continue the call by turning off your camera and going voice only with no interruption of the call.

Tip 2. As with Skype or any other teleconferencing system, all of the usual stuff applies about doing all you can do to minimize noise on the call. The important thing is not to rely on your computer speakers for audio, because this can introduce feedback noise into your microphone, particularly if you are using your laptop's built in microphone. You can often get away with using speakers on a one-to-one call, but not a group call. Remember, the audio will sound worse to other callers than it does to you, if you are the one responsible for the interference. The best audio is usually achieved with a USB headset (headphones with attached microphone, plugged into a USB port). Next best is a headset that plugs into the phone and mic jacks of your device. The next best is headphones or earbuds with using the computer microphone, but this will pick up more noise at your location.

If you are using the built-in microphone on your computer, resist the temptation to type during the meeting. You may not hear it but everyone else may hear a thundering herd galloping through their head. If you must type, use a headset with microphone or earbuds with microphone as is sometimes used with a mobile phone. These microphones are best because since they are designed to sit close to the side of the mouth they do not have to be very sensitive to pick up your speech. Because they are not very sensitive they do not pick up as much background noise.

Well, that's about it, for joining calls initiated by someone else where you are a meeting participant.

Originating Calls

To originate calls, you must first open a free account with Zoom. If you read this far you have probably already done this. Go to http://zoom.us and give them your email address, then click the "sign up free" button and follow the instructions. It is that easy. I encourage all WHWB members to open free accounts because zoom can enhance our ability to communicate with one another and help democratize the organization. Remember that anyone with an account can initiate meetings and you can use it to talk to anyone else. Zoom is unlikely to replace Calliflower for our monthly meetings, which are primarily one-way, but it is a wonderful tool for small group meetings and particularly good for mentoring. It allows everyone at the meetings to have their say.

After you sign up with Zoom, you will have a Zoom menu item on your computer that will open a window like Fig. 1. This was taken from a Linux machine, but it looks similar on a PC, Mac or iPad if you are using one of these.

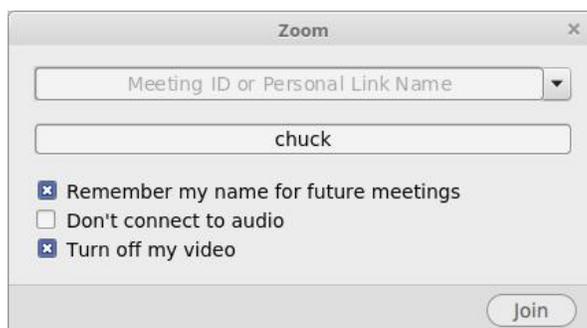Fig. 1. Zoom Join a meeting/sign in box

Fig. 2. Add Meeting ID. To join a meeting

At the end of your first meeting you may find a Zoom shortcut on your desktop and a Zoom entry in your Start menu. For subsequent meetings clicking this will open a Zoom menu window (Fig. 3. below). To join a meeting in progress, click the *Join* button and type in the meeting ID, which is the string of numbers at the end of the URL. You can choose to join with or without video. Finally, you can schedule a meeting to take place at some time in the future. Future meetings can be recurring meetings at the same time each week or month. This is handy if you are chairing a committee or are mentoring someone and meet at the same time every week.

When you open an account, you receive a personal ID number. To see that number, click on the Meetings icon at the bottom of the Zoom Window (the clock icon). This displays the meetings window shown in Fig. 4. The ten digit number at the end of the link URL on page one is a Zoom ID. You will note that the same number is at the top of the Meetings window (Fig. 4.). Think of it as being analogous to a telephone number.
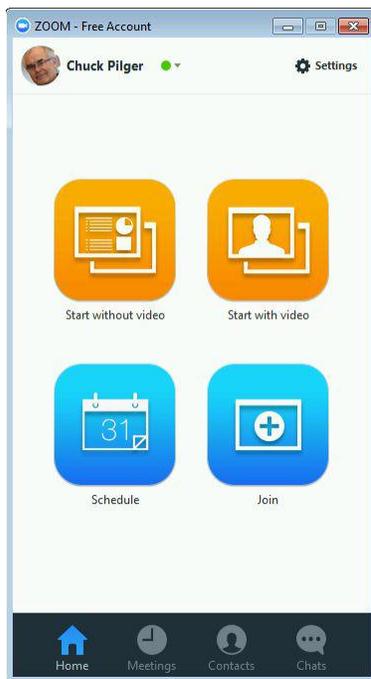
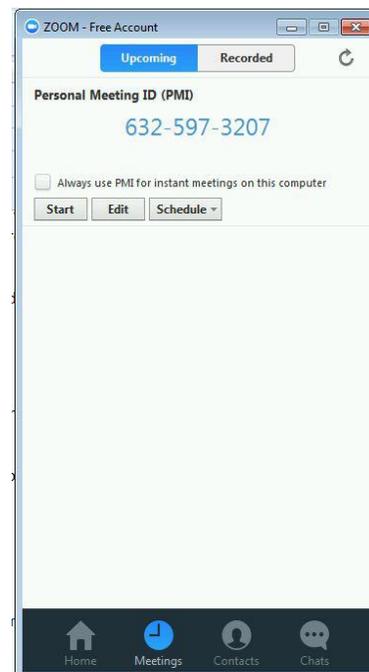

Fig. 3. The Zoom start window.

Fig. 4. The Zoom meetings window.

If you click on that link when its owner is having a meeting, you will join the meeting. If no meeting is in progress, but one is scheduled to begin shortly, you will be asked to wait for the host to join. They will get an email telling them you are waiting. If you type an invalid number, you will get an error message that the meeting is invalid.

Your personal ID number enables you to schedule your own calls and invite people to your meetings. You can schedule future meetings, initiate spontaneous meetings or join other people's meetings from the Zoom home window that opens when you start Zoom (Fig. 3).

Everything is fairly self-explanatory and intuitive. Feel free to browse around and see what the controls do. If you have ever attended a Zoom meeting you probably realize by now that this set of instructions are unnecessary. If you have any questions, the best approach is to open a free account and then arrange a call with someone who has a bit more experience with it. Just send them a link like the one above, with your personal ID and include an agreed time for the meeting. Alternatively, send me an email suggesting a time and I will set up a call to you. I would be happy to walk anyone through the application and demonstrate its features, because I really want to encourage more communication among members.

Zoom allows you to schedule meetings and add them to your Outlook or Google calendar if you wish. You can set a reminder so that you will be reminded as the meeting time approaches. I usually forget to do this myself.

Zoom is a truly amazing application and an excellent choice for small group and mentoring meetings with high quality audio and video. You may want to also use it for personal meetings with friends and family members who may be on the other side of the world.

Limitations of the Free Account

I have found few limitations to the free account for my purposes, but I know of two that you should know about. The first is that you are limited to 100 people on a call for the free account. This is unlikely to be a problem for most of us.

The second limitation is that while 2 people having a one-to-one meeting can talk for as long as they wish, up to and beyond the limit imposed when the meeting was scheduled, groups of 3 or more people can meet for no longer than 40 minutes. This is not really a problem. If you wish a longer meeting, simply schedule two meetings back to back with the same meeting ID. If I, for example, schedule a meeting from 1:00 to 1:40 pm, and a second meeting from 1:41, to 2:30, when the first meeting finishes, all that is required is to click on the same meeting link again and continue. Depending on the number of participants, this can introduce a break of 10 seconds to a minute. It might be best to formally break the meeting at about 40 minutes – at the end of an agenda item if possible, then have everyone join the second meeting. If you want to, schedule a 5 or 10 minute break to stand up and stretch, pour another coffee, or visit the bathroom.

This interruption may be a showstopper for some people, but I have not found it to be a problem. It is not even necessary to schedule two meetings back-to-back in order to extend the meeting length. Just have everyone log off at the 40 minute mark and log back on a minute or two later using the same log-in link. This will start a "new" meeting with another 40 minute time limit. I don't know if it is possible to do this indefinitely all day, since my group meetings have all been less than 80 minutes.

This break is an excellent place for people who don't have to be at the second half of the meeting to make a graceful exit and simply not rejoin. Lengthening your meetings is possible because there is no constraint on the number of meetings you can have in a day as long as they do not overlap.

It is also possible to password protect meetings or to require that all participants have a Zoom account. In these cases, the participants must provide their ID and/or the password in order to join the meeting. This can result in unexpected difficulties, at least in my experience. I prefer to keep my meetings open, using the same ID for all of them. This has always worked flawlessly. It allows anyone who knows the meeting ID to join the meeting without any further hassles.

If you haven't tried Zoom and would like to video conference, I suggest that you try it. I think you will find it superior to Skype for most purposes and I suspect most will find it more convenient to use. The people you wish to meet with do not even have to have a Zoom account. They just have to click on a link in an email you send them. If you are interested in trying Zoom, send me an email and I will invite you to a call. If you would like to learn more about Zoom before (or after) jumping in, check out their webinars at: https://zoom.us/events.

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