



WRITING
NSW

How to Hold Online Meetings

If you are new to, and possibly fainthearted about the idea of holding virtual meetings for your writers' group, it's probably easier to set up than you think. While not the same as meeting face to face, many find virtual meetings preferable. It can also help keep groups together when members move out of the area.

Most writers' groups who have virtual meetings follow three easy steps.

1. They host meetings via the internet, using Zoom or Skype as platforms where group members can easily join in remotely.
2. They share work using Google Docs or email.
3. They have an established set of guidelines for the mutual benefit of the members.

These steps are explained below in more detail. Links to tutorials are included where relevant so you can learn the process visually if that's easier.

1. How to host a virtual meeting

How to host a meeting using Zoom

You can create a free account and run meetings at no cost for up to 40 minutes. Simply re-launch a meeting if you need more time. Or become a paying account holder and hold longer meetings.

Click on the following link to watch a HOW TO YouTube video, or follow the steps below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUBMNPsjERQ>

1. Open your browser and type in zoom.us
2. If you don't already have one, create a free account. (Top right of the home screen). Follow the instructions, make note of your user name and password.
3. At the top of the page, see HOST A MEETING, click on this. A box with three options will be displayed - click on 'With Video On'.
4. You may be asked 'Do you want to allow this page to open "zoom.us.app"?' If so, click "Allow".
5. A box should open with an image of what your computer camera sees - eg you (or sticky tape if you have forgotten to remove it).
6. Wave your mouse cursor over the box and you'll see some words and icons appear in the lowest area of the box. Eg "Mute, Stop Video, Security, Participants, Chat, Share screen" etc.

7. In the top right corner there are two arrows. If you click on this the screen will expand. To shrink down press ESC on your keyboard or double click on the screen with your mouse.
8. To invite others, click on 'Participants' at the bottom of the screen. On the right a new box will open. Click "Invite" at the bottom of this box.
9. A box will open inviting you to choose your email service to send an invitation. If you click one, the link to the meeting will automatically be included in the email. Alternatively you can click on 'Copy Invite Link' at the bottom left of the box. The link will be copied to your clipboard so you can also insert the cursor into an email or app and paste manually.
10. It's a good idea to wear headphones so others don't hear the ambience in your home/office, including the speaker from your computer which can create an annoying feedback loop.
11. You will be notified when someone wishes to join. The message will appear on your video screen as well as on the right side of the video box. It will say "xxxx entered the waiting room" Click on the 'Admit' logo to let them in. Continue to do this as your guests arrive.
12. You will see your guests' screens appearing at the top of your video screen. Whoever is speaking will have their image take up the main screen.
13. If you'd like to make someone else the host (if for example you wish to leave the meeting before others do), Click on 'Manage Participants' in the meeting controls at the bottom of the Zoom window. Hover over the name of the participant who is going to be a co-host, and choose 'More'. Click 'Make Co-Host'.
14. To leave the meeting simply click 'End' in the bottom right corner. You will then be asked to "End Meeting For All" or "Leave Meeting". Once you click "End Meeting for All" you have disconnected everybody.
15. The free version of Zoom allows 40 minutes so you may have to repeat this process every 40 minutes.

How to host a meeting using Skype

Skype's "Meet Now" is free and has unlimited meeting time.

Click on the following link to watch a HOW TO YouTube video, or follow the steps below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=441lx7CFQY0>

1. Go to <https://www.skype.com/en/free-conference-call/>
2. Click on blue button "Create a free video call"
3. A box will appear telling you that your video call is ready. You will see a link, below which is a button to invite others. Click on "Share Invite". A dropdown list will appear for various ways to share. Alternatively you can copy the link for later use.
4. If you choose email from the dropdown list, an email will be created with the new link in the body of the email. In the "To" line, type in the email addresses of contacts you wish to send the email to. They will use the link when it's time to join the meeting.
5. (Your contacts do not need to download anything or sign up to Skype, as they can join the meeting as a guest. They'll be asked to enter their name and hit 'Join Conversation'. They'll be taken to a page with the other members you invited, where

they can see and hear each other once you start the call. Skype may send prompts for permission to use their camera and microphone.)

6. Click on "Start Call".
7. If you already have a free Skype account, a black call screen will automatically open. You won't be able to see anything until another person logs in.
8. Or, if you have not signed up to Skype before, you will be prompted to open the Skype App. The next three steps are for you:
9. Click "Open Skype". Skype will prompt you for permission to use your camera and microphone. On the bottom of the page on the right hand side there is a series of three dots. Click on them if you wish to schedule your meeting (follow the prompts).
10. If you need to invite more people click the blue button "Add people" or look for the icon on the top right of the screen with the person and the plus sign. You can search for people to add. (Make sure you have the correct person before adding for security reasons).
11. To start the call (meeting) click the blue "Start Call" button on the top right of the screen. A black screen should open up. A message will show "Waiting For Others to Join." You won't be able to see anything until another person logs in. When they do they should automatically appear on your screen. Or you may have to click on the 'Grid View' at the top right of your screen to select "Full Screen" in order to see their video image.
12. 10. To write messages to the group or paste external links etc, click on the 'Chat' icon - it's the speech bubble at the bottom of the screen. A new box will open on the right hand side of your black screen where at the lower area you will see a box prompting you to type a message. Hit the arrow to send the message. You will see the message posted above in the box and others' messages too, as they post them.
13. 11. You can also upload files into this chat area by clicking the file icon on the bottom of the chat screen.
14. 12. It's a good idea to wear headphones with a microphone so others don't hear the ambient noise in your home/office, including the speaker from your computer which can create an annoying feedback loop.
15. 13. To end the call, click on the red telephone icon button in the bottom centre of screen.

Helpful links

<https://medium.com/@StoryADayMay/how-to-run-a-virtual-writers-group-ef43cfdc3646>

<https://bibliocrunch.com/publishing-tips/how-to-do-a-virtual-writing-group-with-skype-google-hangout-or-facetime/> (A bit outdated but still helpful)

2. How to share your work with the group

Share via Google Docs

In addition to meeting virtually, you can use the internet to connect members for housekeeping matters, distribution and feedback on each others' material.

Google Docs — and other online storage services that allow linking such as Dropbox or OneDrive — lets you to share material by posting a link into the chat window of your Zoom session.

How to link to your documents in Zoom Chat:

1. Make sure you have Google Drive or another online storage account that allows linking. If you want to setup Google Drive, go to drive.google.com
2. Create a pdf of your pages to be read in group.
3. Drag or copy your pdf into your Google Drive (or other cloud storage.)
4. Right click on the pdf file (or on a phone/tablet tap with two fingers) and select “Share”.
5. Select “Change to anyone with the link.”
6. Click “Copy Link.”
7. In the Zoom chat, paste the link.

Share via Email

In addition to the meetings themselves, emails sent prior to the meeting are a convenient way to keep things running efficiently and fairly. For example, a group that meets online weekly at 6.30pm and has a maximum of four people reading out their work, sends emails according to this schedule:

EMAIL #1: (A DAY PRIOR TO MEETING)

Each week, about lunch time the day before the meeting, someone from the group will send an email to the entire group asking who is coming and who is planning to read. You may not know immediately whether you are planning to read; if so, you have until noon of the meeting day to reply to this email. When you reply, use REPLY ALL.

EMAIL #2 (ON AFTERNOON OF MEETING)

Based on the replies received we'll issue another email on Thursday between 1 and 2 pm, just to those who've responded, telling us who is reading and who is attending.

Sometime before 5pm on meeting day each person who is reading should send their material for that night to the people on EMAIL #2. We each then download and set up to make comments on our copies of that material.

EMAIL #3 – MEETING DAY

15 mins prior to the meeting, the host issues an invitation link to the meeting. Participants follow the link in that email before the start time of 6:30pm and the host admits you to the meeting and the group can begin.

*(Thanks again to Jack Peck from **Open Genre** Group for the above)*

3. Establish Guidelines

While your meetings can now run smoothly from a technical point of view, you may consider that it's also important to establish some guidelines for the well-being of the members to:

- Promote a spirit of collegial support, and ensure that this is fostered and promoted at each meeting
- Establish a structure to assist in the timely operation of weekly group meetings
- Provide clear expectations regarding acceptable behaviour of all attendees.

Here is an example of one writing group's guidelines below. You may wish to customise to suit your group's meeting times, number of readers etc.

WRITERS' GROUP GUIDELINES

1: Respectful, Supportive & Constructive Criticism

The group promotes and represents a supportive, nurturing environment, providing constructive and helpful criticism to every member. Members behave in a manner that is conducive to that aim.

2: Quorum

A quorum consists of four people reading. Otherwise the meeting may be cancelled for that week, at the discretion of the group.

3: Meeting Time, Number of Readers, Priority

Meeting time runs from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. every Thursday. Each reader is given 20 minutes to read and to receive positive and supportive critique from the other group members. This will usually result in seven possible readers on any one night, although more may be accommodated if one or more readers don't use their full time. Priority goes to a member who needs to read for a particular reason, for example, a competition or a publisher's deadline. A person who misses out on reading is the first to read at the next meeting.

4: Use of Alloted Time

Each participating member may also choose to use a portion of their 20 minutes to share writing news and updates or share the inspirational work/quotes of other writers.

5: Mobile Phone Usage

Members are requested to be respectful of the other members with regard to use of mobile phones. If a member needs to check their messages during the meeting, or make or take a call please do so outside the meeting room.

6: Disruptive and Inappropriate Behaviour

Negative, personal, inappropriate comments will not be tolerated. If an individual member behaves inappropriately that person will be put on notice via a verbal request by the convenor on behalf of the group. Writing NSW will be advised of this action being taken.

7: Removal From the Group for Cause (See Guideline 6)

If a member is put on notice and reoffends, they will be asked to leave the group. This will be in the form of a formal request in writing/email from the convener, acting on behalf of the group. All correspondence will be cc-ed to a representative of Writing NSW.

*(Thanks again to Jack Peck from **Open Genre** Group for the above)*

And finally...

Remember you don't have to be a computer whizz to make this happen. With a bit of practice and help from others "in the room", the process will become second nature. The main thing is that you and your fellow writers can continue meeting, sharing and being inspired to write!

More helpful tips on running a writers' group can be found on our website:

<https://writingnsw.org.au/support/resources-for-writers/resource-sheets/starting-a-writers-group/>