

Meet Now: How to use Skype's free Zoom alternative for video calls

Skype's free group chat feature is here to compete with Zoom, but there's a catch.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Skype stepped up its free video chat service offerings with a new feature called Meet Now, which lets you start a chat or meeting without having to sign up for an account or download the app to your desktop. This is Skype's way of competing with Zoom, which saw a massive surge in users after coronavirus lockdowns and quarantines started -- but has also faced a number of security issues, including uninvited guests "Zoombombing" meetings.



Skype is owned by Microsoft, which has its own video chat platform for businesses called Microsoft Teams. But Skype's Meet Now tool seems to be aimed both at consumers who want to chat with friends and family, and small businesses looking for a cheaper alternative.

There is, however, a catch. Meet Now is great for using on a laptop or desktop browser (it's supported by the Microsoft Edge and Google Chrome browsers, but not Firefox). But if you're using it from a phone, you still need to download the Skype app -- though you don't need a Microsoft account, according to a company representative.

All of Skype's usual meeting features will work on Meet Now calls, including the ability to share your screen, record a call, turn on the background blur feature and use the chat function.

The meeting links have no expiration date, so you can create them ahead of time and have people join any time, according to Skype. As long as you have the link, you can start the call, whether you created it or are just a participant. Links can be used again in the future -- once you have it, you can use it to join the chat any time you want.

How to use Skype Meet Now to video chat

Go to Skype's new Meet Now landing page.

Click **Create a free meeting**. A box will pop up with a unique link, and the options to **share it** by copying and pasting or via Outlook or Gmail.

Start your call from that same box by clicking **Start call**. This works like other Skype calls, in that you won't be able to see anything until the other person logs in.

When the call opens, you'll be asked to **join as a guest**, or to **sign in to your Skype account** if you have one.

If you choose to join as a guest, you'll be asked to enter your name and hit join. You'll be taken to a page with the other members you invited, where you can send chat messages or start the call. Skype will prompt you for permission to use your camera and microphone.

If you sign in to your Skype account, you'll see the chat box and the prompt to start the call via the Skype app.

Learn more about how Skype and Zoom match up, how to make your video calls less weird and other Zoom alternatives for video chatting.

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