THE VERGE

How to get started with Zoom

You can make a free account right now

By Jay Peters | @jaypeters | Mar 31, 2020, 2:51pm EDT

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Part of
The Verge Guide to staying connected

Before the pandemic, many companies were already using the videoconferencing app Zoom for business meetings, interviews, and other purposes. More recently, many individuals facing long days without contact with friends and family have moved to Zoom for face-to-face and group get-togethers.

This is a quick guide for those who haven't tried Zoom yet, featuring tips on how to get started using its free version. One thing to keep in mind: while one-to-one video calls can

go as long as you want, any group calls on Zoom are limited to 40 minutes. If you want to have longer talks without interruption, you can either pay for Zoom's Pro plan ($14.99 a month) or try an alternative videoconferencing app. (Note: there have been reports that the 40 minutes is sometimes extended — at least one staffer from *The Verge* found that an evening meeting with five friends was sent an extension when time started running out — but there has been no official word of any change from Zoom.)

HOW TO REGISTER FOR ZOOM

The first thing to do, of course, is to register for the service. You can do this either from your laptop or from your mobile phone. We'll cover the web service first.

1. Go to Zoom's signup page. You might first be asked to enter your date of birth. That's because if you are younger than 16, you aren't eligible to make a Zoom account unless it's for school.

2. You'll next be presented with a few options for creating an account. At the top, you can enter your email in the box labeled "Your work email address." If you do this, move on to step two. Even though Zoom asks for a work email, a personal email should work fine. In March, it was reported that Zoom leaked some email addresses and user photos via Zoom's Contact Directory feature because the app could think people with certain email domains work for the same company, but Zoom removed that domain-matching feature in April.

3. You can also create an account by clicking the "Sign in with Google" or "Sign in with Facebook" buttons, after which you just download the Zoom desktop app and move on to step seven.

4. If you entered an email, Zoom will send an activation email to that address. Click the "Activate Account" button in the email or copy and paste the activation URL into your browser to activate your account.

5. On the page that opens up in your web browser, you'll next be asked if you're signing up on behalf of a school. Assuming you aren't, click the "No" button and then click "Continue."

6. On the next page, fill in your first and last name and a password.

7. On the next page, you can invite other people to create a free Zoom account via email. You can skip this step if you want.

8. Next, you'll be given a link to your personal meeting URL and will have the option to click an orange "Start Meeting Now" button to start a test meeting. If you copy that URL into your browser or click that orange button, you should be prompted to download the Zoom desktop app. Follow the prompts to install the app.

9. After you've installed the Zoom app, you'll see buttons to "Join a Meeting" or "Sign In." To start your test meeting, click "Sign In."

10. On the next screen, enter the email and password you just used to sign up for Zoom in your browser. If you registered using the "Sign in with Google" or "Sign in with Facebook" buttons, click those buttons here and follow the prompts.

11. Once you're logged in, make sure you're on the "Home" tab, and then click the orange "New Meeting" button in the Zoom app. Your meeting will start.

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If you sign up for Zoom using the mobile app, the process is similar to how it is on the web. (We tested the signup process using the iOS app.)

1. Download the iOS or Android app. When you open the app for the first time, you'll be presented with the options to join a meeting, sign up for Zoom, or sign in to a Zoom account. Tap "Sign Up."

2. You'll next be asked to confirm your age.

3. Once you've done that, on the next screen, you'll be asked to enter your email address, and your first and last name. Once you do, "Sign Up" and you'll then be sent an activation email.

4. Tap the "Activate Account" button in the email you receive, or copy and paste the activation URL into your mobile browser.

5. From there, you'll be asked to complete the same steps outlined above to make an account, just from your mobile browser.

6. Once you get to the screen that has your personal Zoom meeting URL and orange "Start Meeting Now" button, tap either and you'll be taken directly to a waiting room for your test meeting in the Zoom app.

7. To open the meeting, tap the "Sign In" button at the bottom of the screen. On the next screen, enter your login information and tap the "Sign In" button.

8. Your test meeting will open up in the app.

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HOW TO INVITE PEOPLE TO YOUR ZOOM MEETING

Once you have an account, you can invite people to a Zoom meeting in a few different ways.

If you're using the desktop or mobile apps, click or tap on the Meetings tab. From there:

- On the desktop app, if you click the "Copy Invitation" button on the screen, a message with your Zoom meeting's URL, ID, and phone dial-in information will be copied to your clipboard that you can drop in an email or a text message.

- On the mobile app, when you tap the "Send Invitation" button, you'll be presented with two options: "Send Message," which will let you text your meeting URL to someone; or "Copy to Clipboard," which will copy your Zoom meeting's URL and meeting ID to your phone's clipboard.

You can also invite people to your meeting while you're already in it:

- On the desktop app, on the toolbar that shows up when you move your mouse in the meeting window, click the little arrow in the "Participants" button, and then click "Invite." When you do, Zoom will open a window where you can invite your Zoom contacts, send an email with information on how to access your Zoom meeting, copy your meeting URL to your clipboard, or copy a longer message with your meeting URL and dial-in information to your clipboard. You can also find your meeting's password in this menu.

- On the mobile app, tap "Participants" on the bottom row of icons and then tap the "Invite" button on the bottom of the next screen. When you do, you'll be able to send a text message invite, invite your Zoom contacts, or copy the meeting URL to your phone's clipboard.

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One thing to keep in mind — to help keep your account secure, you probably shouldn't share your personal meeting ID with others. If you can, schedule meetings in advance using Zoom's scheduling tool, and have that tool generate a unique meeting ID for each meeting. Here's our guide on how to do that. Keeping your meetings secure can help prevent "Zoombombings," which is when trolls take over your Zoom meetings.

Once you're up and running on Zoom, make sure to check also out our guides for how to find keyboard shortcuts, change your Zoom background (here are a few free backgrounds you can use), and record your Zoom calls.

Update June 24th, 12:15PM ET: *Updated Zoom's signup process, added new context about how to keep your meetings secure, and added a link about how to record Zoom calls.*

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How to hide your messy room for a Zoom video conference

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How anyone can videoconference with Google Meet

How to use FaceTime for group calls

How to set up a Houseparty account

How to use Houseparty to video chat with your friends

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