

Video conferencing can mean different things to different people. For example, a *bridged conference call* can be audio only (you can hear, but not see, people), or it can include video such that you also see others on the call. Typically, when someone references *bridging*, however, it means there will be more than two people on the call. Some of us can contrast that to FaceTime on a mobile device. Facetime typically is used as a one-to-one video connection – also called point-to-point or end-to-end.

There are various ways video conferencing can happen. In some cases, special equipment is required. You may hear the term *codec*. In these situations, people sit in a conference room that has speakers and microphones and someone pushes the buttons necessary to make a video connection. Increasingly, however, people are conducting video calls from their devices (desktop computer, laptop, phone or tablet). The device must have a camera - and of course, most do! The device also requires software, and there are many versions available. This is really where confusion is introduced – via the software, not the hardware (i.e., the equipment) – because each software platform is different. Teams, Skype, Zoom and Webex are among the more population options.

Video conference software platforms (also called video collaboration) vary in functionality.

- Some can only connect with people on the same network (i.e., within a company). Others can connect to a wide range of platforms outside the network.
- Some allow you to share content (e.g., a PowerPoint, spreadsheet, document) and continue to see the other people on the call. Others only show the content and not the people.
- Some have chat capabilities during the call while others don't.
- Some give everyone on the call the same administrative capabilities (e.g., to share content, mute microphones, add people to the call, etc.), while other platforms give those privileges only to one person.
- Some let you annotate on the shared content and other platforms do not.

Yet, there also are consistent similarities among video conference software platforms.

- Typically, there is browser-based invitation link that is sent via email to participants. Clicking on that link allows people to join. There also may be a connection number in the invite.
- Typically, there is a way to mute your audio. Clicking on the icon - often an image of microphone – intuitively controls when your microphone is on/off. The same applies to the device's camera.
- Typically, there are options to how a person views the content and the other people during the call. For example, people may be in small boxes at the bottom of the screen whereas the content may appear large. It's not necessary to adjust the perspective, but it may be easier to view the content that way.
- Typically, there is a way to disconnect – and easily reconnect - from the call.

Here are some tips if you are new to video conferencing.

- Click on the link that's in the calendar invite before the scheduled call. You may be asked to download something, and in some cases, they may suggest you join via a specific browser (i.e., Chrome, Safari, etc.). But typically, that information is included in the instructions. Often you will see a message that says the call has not started yet – which is fine! At least you can be confident that you will be ready when the start time arrives.
- Whenever you join a call, immediately mute your microphone and keep it muted during the call unless you need to speak.
- When you unmute to speak, if you are unsure, it's fine to ask, "Can you hear me okay?"
- Similarly, if you are sharing content, you may want to verify that others see it.
- Often people will offer a thumbs-up rather than verbalize, so be prepared to acknowledge that.



- Some laptops have a 'slide' that hides the camera lens. You may need to manually move it so that others can see you.
- Try to avoid lots of movement when you are on camera because it can be distracting to others.
- Most platforms show a self-view such that you can see yourself on camera. It's a personal preference whether you like that or not. There is a setting to turn that off, if desired.
- If you accidentally disconnect, simply rejoin the same way you did initially.
- Well-lit rooms are preferable and avoid sitting in front of a window. If you appear shaded or dark, simply adjust your position until it's better.
- If your IT department or your technology partner has a Help Desk, you may want to make a practice call to them – to verify that your speakers and camera have the appropriate settings.

Being 'on camera' will feel different the first few times. That is normal. However, research shows that people quickly adapt. In fact, the majority of individuals have difficulty returning to audio-only calls after embracing video conferencing.

For more details on specific platforms, start here.

- Teams: <https://products.office.com/en-US/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>
- Skype: <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/skype-for-business-video-training-942ad6f3-1455-40f0-927d-734de242e55b>
- WebEx: <https://www.webex.com/training-online.html>
- Zoom: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/sections/201740096-Training>