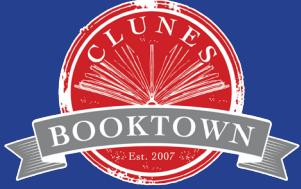


Book Clubs Hub's Guide to Remote Meetings



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Introduction

Regular in-person social gatherings are an important part of social life. But, with meeting in person becoming increasingly difficult, here's Book Clubs Hub's guide to the different platforms you can use to meet remotely.

The platforms mentioned in this guide have been ranked from easiest to set up, to slightly more complicated, but with more functionality to give you a range of options.

Note: Audio calls will use significantly less data and phone battery power than video calls. Audio calls via the telephone/cellular network will be of better quality than calls over the internet. Screen readers can be used with most messaging apps.

Key

Symbols to indicate if a platform uses:

-  Text-based communication
-  Audio-based communication
-  Video-based communication

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Text Messaging ■

Text messaging only requires you to have the phone numbers of the people in your group and a mobile phone with connection to a cellular tower. Most mobile phones will have a text messaging app which you can use to send short messages, photos and video to your group's devices over the cellular network.

It's a very accessible option for many as it doesn't require a smartphone which could be advantageous for older people or those with disabilities like vision impairment.

SMS (Short Message Service) messages sent to a large group do not require internet data and can be useful for those in regional/rural areas with poor quality 3G/4G/5G. However, you will not be able to create a group chat where everyone can see each other's messages using SMS only.

Instead, you will need to use MMS (Multimedia Message Service) messages, which require a 3G/4G/5G connection, to create a group chat where everyone can reply to each other and send and receive photos and videos. MMS messaging can be turned on in your phone's messaging settings and will need to be used by all phones in the chat.

To create a group text message chat:

1. Go to the text messages app on your phone
2. Create a new message
3. Type in a group member's phone number (or name if saved to your contacts) and repeat until everyone has been added
4. Type in a message and send it to the group – this will establish the group
5. You should now be able to send and receive messages as a group
6. If not working, make sure that all group members have MMS turned on

If your phone plan doesn't include unlimited text messaging, SMS and MMS rates in Australia can range from 20c to 80c per message depending on your carrier and plan.
Note: MMS does need an internet connection to send photos or videos.

Pros:

- Can be sent to any mobile phone
- SMS doesn't require an internet connection
- Don't need to have a smartphone
- Easy to use and set up

Cons:

- MMS messages require an internet connection
- Won't work if the 3G/4G/5G network is out of range or has unexpectedly dropped out
- Can't add or remove people from the group chat
- Have to pay per message sent (possibly to each person) if not on an unlimited plan (check with your carrier to be sure)

iMessage (for Apple device holders only) ■

If your group's members all use iPhone, you can use Apple's free iMessage service to securely send messages over the internet. iMessage works in the exactly the same way as text messaging on an iPhone – iMessages are sent in the Messages app, which is the same app you use for sending text messages, and you only need the phone numbers of your group members to contact them. How do you set up a group?

To create a group iMessage chat:

1. Go to the text messages app on your iPhone
2. Create a new message
3. Type in a group member's phone number (or name if saved to your contacts) and repeat until everyone has been added
4. Type in a message and send it to the group – this will establish the group
5. You should now be able to send and receive messages as a group
6. If not working, make sure that all group members have iMessage turned on

To tell if you're sending an iMessage instead of a text message, look at the messages you have sent to people. If the messages sent from your device are inside of blue bubbles, they are iMessages going to another Apple device over the internet. If the messages send from your device are inside of green bubbles, they are text messages and are being sent to any type of phone over the cellular network.

To see if iMessage is turned on, go to settings on your iPhone and scroll down to a tab that says Messages. Open the tab. At the top of the Messages menu you will see a switch for iMessage, turn this on and you will now be able to send and receive iMessages.

Pros:

- Free
- iMessage use end-to-end encryption meaning your conversations are secure and private without needing to use another messaging app (good explainer about its security can be found [here](#))
- Messages can be sent and received from any of your other Apple devices e.g.... iPad, Mac laptop, Apples Watch, etc
- Can add or remove people from group chats
- Can Facetime the entire group from the chat (more on that on the next page)

Cons:

- Requires an Apple device to use it
- Needs an internet connection

Facetime (for Apple device holders only) ■ ■

Facetime is Apple's free video and audio calling service that allows you to call up to 32 people for free (provided they have an Apple device and an internet connection).

If your group are all Apple users and are using iMessage, Facetime calls are very easy to make:

1. Select your group chat in Messages.
2. Click on the name of your chat (where the circles are at the top of the screen).
3. Three options will appear right below where you clicked saying: Audio, FaceTime and Info.
4. Press FaceTime to make a video call or press Audio to make an audio call (like a phone call over the internet)
5. Wait for your group members to answer
6. Chat away for as long as you like or until your battery runs out

Pros:

- Free
- Easy to set up and use
- Can be done on any Apple device (e.g. iPhone, iPad, Mac computer, etc)
- Up to 32 people can be called at once

Cons:

- Can only be used on Apple devices
- Requires an internet connection

FreeConferenceCall.com



Free Conference Call is a free conferencing service that allows up to 1,000 people to participate in a single call (up to six hours in length)

The platform has a number of conferencing services: HD audio and video calls with up to 1,000 participants, international audio calls to 78 countries, call recording, breakout rooms for small group sessions and discussions, screen sharing and drawing tools, conference recording, instant messaging, and more.

The service is free, but users can pay what they think is fair for the service if they want to. There are also a few extra paid services like a single call-in number (normally participants type in a code), a toll-free number, custom greetings to welcome participants, custom hold music and extra storage for conference recordings.

To get started:

1. Visit freeconferencecall.com and press sign up
2. Type in your email and password to create your account
3. You will now receive an email with your dial-in number, access code, host code, online meeting ID and playback number.

(Note: Your calling information will also pop-up on your screen after you create your account and can be later found when you log in on the freeconferencecall.com website)

To set up an audio call as a host:

1. Send your dial-in number to your participants with your access code
2. Call the dial-in number
3. Type in the access code followed by #.
4. Press * and enter the host PIN
5. Hang up the call when finished

(Note: To record your conference, dial * 9 1 To stop recording, dial * 9 1)

To set up a video call as a host:

1. Share your online meeting ID with your participants
2. Download the FreeConferenceCall.com app to your computer or use the FCC mobile app on iOS or Android devices
3. Open the app, press Host and login
4. Turn on the camera to show your camera's video
5. For audio, you can dial-in using the phone line or use your device's audio
6. You will now be live

(Participants will be able to see the video using the FCC app on desktop or mobile)

FreeConferenceCall.com



Pros:

- Free
- Easy to set up and use
- High quality audio
- Participant's done need internet access or a smartphone to be able to join-in to audio conferences
- Can do video and audio conferencing of up to 1,000 participants for up to six hours
- Meeting recording functions
- Can have participants in up to 78 countries
- Data is encrypted
- The FCC app can be used on iPhone, Android phone and Mac, Windows and Linux computers

Cons:

- Internet access and an internet-enabled device are needed for video conferencing
- The FCC app has to be downloaded for participants and hosts to be able to see, and participate in, video conferencing
- Potential tolls on phone calls
- Date and time for calls in listed in the American format MM/DD/YYYY

Skype



Skype, owned by Microsoft, is a free messaging and video/voice calling platform that has been used by millions of people worldwide since 2003.

Skype can be used for individual and group conversations, HD voice and video calls of up to 50 people over the internet, free conference calls, and cellular phone calls and SMS messaging (if you purchase Skype credit).

Skype can be used on mobile phones, tablets, desktop computers, Xbox and Amazon's Alexa devices, and as a website application in your browser.

Skype can be a good option for those with accessibility needs – it readily integrates screen-readers for those with vision impairments and has features like live-captions and subtitles on video and audio calls for those with hearing impairments.

To create a Skype account:

1. Download Skype or go to My Account on the Skype website and press Create an Account
2. Type in your mobile phone number or email address and press next
3. Create a password
4. Type in your name
5. You'll receive a verification code to your phone or email
6. You'll now be signed into your account
7. Here you'll need to add a billing address (in case you need to purchase Skype credit in the future), add a profile photo (if you want) and change your username

(Note: If you already have a Microsoft account, you can use that account if you wish instead of creating a new account.)

To create a group chat in Skype you'll first need to have everyone in your group saved to your Skype contacts:

1. Ensure that you have the contact information for your group members added to your Skype contacts
2. Go to the notepad icon in the top right corner of Skype
3. Press New Group Chat
4. Type in a group name
5. Add the group members from your Skype contact list
6. Press done. Your chat will have now been created.
7. In the chat you can message, video or audio call group members, share photos, videos and files, schedule calls, create polls, and more!

Skype



Pros:

- Free
- Can be used on mobile phones, tablets, computers, Xbox, Amazon's Alexa devices, and as a website application in your browser
- Video and audio calls of up to 50 people
- Good accessibility for people with vision and hearing impairments
- Easy to set up
- Can use a phone number or email address to create a Skype account
- Can be used to make landline and mobile calls, and to send SMS messages if you purchase Skype credit
- Skype uses encryption to protect users' voice and video calls, messaging and file transfers
- Free conference calling that does not require participants to sign-up to, or download, Skype. (Skype will generate a link for you and your participants to use instead of needing to login)

Cons:

- Requires an internet connection and smart device
- Anyone can be found on Skype via their name, Skype username or email and be sent up to 10 messages before the other users approves contact – (you can turn off this feature in settings)

Signal



Signal is a free, not-for-profit, open source encrypted messaging and video/audio calling apps used by journalists, whistle-blowers, cybersecurity experts, organisations like the EU, and anyone worried about their privacy online.

Signal can be used on iPhone, Android Phone and Mac, Windows and Linux computers. You only need a mobile phone number to create a Signal account.

To create Signal account:

1. Download the Signal app to your smartphone or computer
2. Type in your phone number and press register. You should now receive a text message with a verification code
3. Type in the verification code
4. Allow Signal to access your phone's contacts to see who else you know is using Signal
5. Your account has now been created. You can add your name and a profile photo if you wish.

To create a group chat on Signal:

1. Ensure that you have all members signed up to Signal and saved to your contacts
2. Tap the pencil icon in the top right corner. Then tap the group icon (the little figures with the plus sign) to create a group chat
3. Name your group chat and add a chat photo if you wish
4. Go through your contact list to find the group members
5. Send a message to the group
6. You can now send photos, videos, files, gifs, stickers and audio messages to your group

Pros:

- Free
- Easy to use and set up
- Secure and private
- Only requires a mobile phone number
- Has a disappearing messages feature that removes messages after they've been seen
- Can be used on iPhone, Android phones and on Mac, Windows and Linux computers
- One-on-one video calls

Cons:

- No group video calls
- Can't remove group members from chats, they can only leave themselves
- Requires a smartphone and internet connection to use
- Can't logout without deleting your account

WhatsApp



WhatsApp is a free, secure, online text messaging app that allows users to send text messages and share files to groups of up to 256 people, and video call up to eight people.

The app is owned by Facebook and is used by over 1.5 billion people, making it one of the world's most popular messaging apps.

WhatsApp does not require you have a Facebook account to use it as it uses your mobile phone number as your account identifier -- think of it more like your phone's regular text messaging service in that you contact people via their phone number but the message is sent through the internet rather than the cellular network.

Getting started with WhatsApp is easy and only takes a few minutes.

1. Download WhatsApp from your smartphone's App Store
2. Open WhatsApp
3. Read and agree to the terms and conditions
4. Allow WhatsApp to access your contacts (to show you who in your contacts can be contacted via WhatsApp)
5. Allow WhatsApp to send you notifications (to show you if someone is calling you or if they have messaged you)
6. Type your phone number into WhatsApp and press Done. You should now receive a text message from WhatsApp with a six-digit code that you will need to type into WhatsApp to verify your account
7. Type in your name, add a profile photo (if you wish) and press done
8. You have now made your WhatsApp account.

To set up a WhatsApp group chat:

1. Make sure that you have the mobile phone numbers of your group members and check that they have set up their own WhatsApp accounts.
2. Press the Chats icon on the bottom right of the page
3. On this page, press the blue New Group text located underneath the search bar – a list of your contacts who use WhatsApp will appear
4. Search for your group members' names in your contact list and tap on the circle on the right-hand side of their name once found. Press next.
5. Check that you have added everyone in and that you haven't added anyone by mistake.
6. Add in your group name/subject and add in an optional chat photo (could be your club's logo, etc).
7. Press Create
8. You have now created your WhatsApp group. Here you can send messages, photos, videos, gifs, files, contacts, your location and audio messages. You can also call up to four group members by pressing the phone with the plus icon in the top right corner and selecting the group members you wish to voice call.

WhatsApp ■ ■ ■

Pros:

- Free
- Easy to set up and use
- Large user base
- Uses end-to-end encryption to keep your conversations secure
- Can send large files up to 100MB
- Groups can be up to 256 people in size
- Video chat with up to eight people
- No Ads
- Can be used on any smartphone, tablet or computer.

Cons:

- Messages are secure but WhatsApp itself is less trustworthy than other apps like Signal. In recent years the app has been subject to security and privacy issues that has caused organisations like the EU to move away from it ([read more](#))
- Can't logout of the app
- Requires a smartphone and internet connection
- Chats are backed up to your phone (via iCloud for Apple devices and Google Drive or your phone's SD card for Android devices) and not WhatsApp itself. So, if you delete the app and haven't recently backed up your WhatsApp data, you won't be able to see your chat history or messages when the data is restored
- Facebook is considering integrating WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram into one app.

Messenger



Messenger is a free online messaging and video/audio calling platform owned by Facebook, and can be used by anyone with a Facebook account

In the app, users can send text messages, photos, videos, voice messages, reactions, gifs and stickers; make plans and polls; play games; and make video and audio calls

Group text chats on Messenger can have up to 250 participants, and up to 50 people can video/audio call at once (although only six people will show up on screen at any one time for video calls). Messenger Rooms can also have up to 50 people join in and do not require a Facebook account to access.

If you already use Facebook, you can access Messenger via Messenger.com, the Messenger app on mobile devices or in the Messenger tab on facebook.com

To create a group chat on Messenger:

1. Login to your Facebook account on Messenger
2. Ensure that all group members are Facebook users and that you have added them as Friends
3. Press the notepad icon in messenger
4. In the To: section, type in the name of your group members and select them one-by-one
5. Once everyone has been added, type in a message and send it to the group.
6. Your group is now live. You can now continue to message the group or make video/ audio calls with other members

(Note: You can change the chat photo and group name by clicking on the chat's current name and pressing edit)

Pros:

- Free
- Easy to set-up and use
- Large user base
- Calls can have up to 50 people
- Group chats can have up to 250 people
- Don't have to make a new account if you already use Facebook
- People can be added or removed from chats

Cons:

- Group chat messages are not encrypted
- Messenger chats can be viewed on any device that your Facebook account is logged into
- Any Facebook user who is a friend of another chat member can be added to a group chat
- Facebook owns Messenger and user privacy should be trusted accordingly

Zoom



Zoom is an online video/web conferencing and messaging platform used for remote meetings, webinars and online training

The platform provide participants with a variety of ways of engaging with their peers including whole group video/audio conversations, small-group break-out rooms, instant messaging, screen sharing (to show others content on your computer's screen), polls and more. Participants are also able to telephone call into meetings if their internet connection is not working

Setting up group meetings requires all participants to have a Zoom account, a URL link to the virtual meeting room, the Zoom app downloaded to their device and good internet access (unless phoning in).

Zoom is free for meetings of up to 100 people for 40min at a time. For meetings longer than 40 min or with over 100 people, a pricing structure then follows:

- Pro: \$20.99 AUD per month, per host for meetings of up to 100 people and 24 hours in length
- Business: \$27.99 per month, per host (min 10 hosts) for meetings of up to 300 people and 24 hours in length
- Enterprise: \$27.99 per month, per host (min 50 hosts) for meetings of up to 500 people (or 1,000 people with Enterprise Plus)
- Check out the plans here: <https://zoom.us/pricing>

To get started with Zoom:

1. Download the Zoom app to your computer (or the Zoom Cloud Meetings app if using a phone or tablet)
2. Go to the zoom.us website and press Sign Up, It's Free to create your account
3. Type in your email address. You should now receive an account activation link in your inbox
4. Type in your name and password and press next
5. Invite your group members to create their own Zoom accounts if they don't already use it (or press skip)
6. You will now be given a personal meeting URL link. (This link is where your meetings will be hosted and should be sent to all group participants before your first meeting)
7. Click the link. You should now be redirected to a website that will ask you to open the Zoom app – press allow or yes (depending on your device)
8. You will now join the meeting
9. Press Join With Computer Audio to connect your computer's microphone to Zoom to let others hear you (if on desktop)
10. Your meeting room is now ready to go

Zoom



Pros:

- Free version can have up to 100 people for 40 minute meetings
- Lots of functionality – big group meetings, smaller group break-out sessions, instant chat messages
- Can be used on desktop computers (Mac, Windows and Linux), Apple iOS devices and Android devices
- As of May 2020, all meetings now have AES 256-bit GCM encryption, require a password to join and have waiting rooms to prevent unwanted guests
- Meetings can be phone called into when internet connections are poor
- Useful host controls like muting other participant's audio, etc
- Fun virtual backgrounds can be added to spice-up video calls (or to protect privacy)
- Easy to learn once signed into the platform
- Meetings can be recorded for later viewing in paid plans

Cons:

- Paid pricing structure
- A little tricky to get set up
- App downloads required to use
- Encryption is not end-to-end (important to remember if discussing potentially sensitive information)
- Internet connection required for video calling
- Recordings provide a transcript of the group chat (and potentially private peer-to-peer messages) to hosts

WebEx Video Conferencing



WebEx is an online video conferencing, meeting, instant messaging and productivity platform owned by CISCO

The platform enables users to make HD video calls where participants can share screens, dial-in via phone call, instant message and more

WebEx can be used for free for video conferences of up to 100 people for an unlimited time. Participants can also call-in via phone for improved audio.

Paid versions of the platform are also available for businesses that require additional features like cloud storage, conferences of up to 200 people, customised branding, etc. See those plans here.

To make a WebEx account:

1. Go to webex.com and click Sign Up
2. Type in your email address
3. Type in your name and confirm that you are in the correct country. You will now receive an email that will ask you to click a link to create a password
4. Create your password
5. Your account has been created. You can add a profile photo if you wish

To start a meeting as a host:

1. Log into Webex
2. Send group participants a link to your WebEx room (at the top of the WebEx home screen) – participants don't need to have a WebEx account to use it
3. Start the meeting via the WebEx desktop app (which you will need to download) or the web app in your browser
4. You will now be in your meeting room where you can choose your audio source (you can dial-in for better quality audio), turn on your camera and begin the meeting
5. Your meeting is now ready to go

Pros:

- Easy to set-up and use
- Free version can have calls of up to 100 people for an unlimited amount of time
- Participants can call-in via phone
- Can schedule calls that will send a reminder to attendees
- Participants don't need to have a WebEx account to be able to use it
- The platform can be used via a user's browser using the web app or as a downloaded app on Mac, Windows and Linux computers, and Apple iOS devices and Android devices

WebEx Video Conferencing



Cons:

- Video conferencing is only one part of WebEx and can be a tricky to find on the website
- Corporate-oriented app
- Call-in calls may have tolls associated with them
- No fun virtual backgrounds

Other Popular Platforms



There are now a plethora of platforms that people use to communicate. Below are some of the other popular apps, not covered in this guide, that you could also use for remote meetings.

Messageing and Video/Audio Calling Apps

- Google Hangouts
- House Party
- Viber
- SnapChat
- Discord
- Google Duo
- Line
- Telegram
- WeChat (mainly used in China)

Popular Paid Conferencing Apps:

- GoToMeeting
- Google Hangouts Meet
- BlueJeans
- Lifesize

