

Using Skype

Of all of the newer tools out there, Skype (<http://www.skype.com>) is probably the one that you can easily make use of on a daily basis. In a nutshell, Skype is a phone service that allows users to make computer-to-computer phone calls to anyone in the world absolutely free, using your Internet connection. Imagine the possibilities. With this tool, you can collaborate and make global connections with family, classes, and professional peers using something we are all very familiar with – a phone call.

REALLY? WHAT DO I NEED TO GET STARTED?

To use Skype, all you need for basic service is a microphone and a set of speakers, but those who are regular users of Skype will quickly encourage you to purchase a headset with a noise-canceling microphone attached. The reason for this is simple. The noise-canceling microphone will get rid of a lot of background noise, and the headset will prevent the person who you are talking to from having to listen to themselves through your speakers as they are trying to have a conversation with you. Beyond this, the only other thing you need is the Skype program that can be easily downloaded onto your Windows, Macintosh, or Linux computer.

SETTING UP YOUR SKYPE ACCOUNT

Once Skype is installed, launch it for the first time, and you will be prompted to setup your Skype account. You will fill in some basic information, and decide on your Skype name. This Skype name is similar to the type of name that you might use if you were deciding on an instant messaging alias, and it is the name other Skype users will utilize to get in touch with you. (We don't recommend that you use your full name.)

FINDING OTHER SKYPE USERS

To search for Skype users, click on the magnifying glass at the top of the Skype window. At this point, a new window will open allowing you to search for other Skype users by their Skype name, email address, city, state, country, etc. When you find the other Skype user you are looking for, click "add" to add that user to your Skype buddy list.

On the other end, your buddy will get a message asking them to approve you and add you to their Skype list. If they approve you, you're in.

USING SKYPE

Skype has a few features that you will want to explore.

Phone calls - Click on a user in your Skype list and press the call button. (big green button). On the other end, your buddies Skype program will ring just like a regular phone. That user answers, (by clicking the green button) and you talk.

Video calls - If you and your buddy both have web cams, you can add video capabilities to your Skype calls (currently, Windows only).

Instant Messaging - Click on a buddy in your Skype list and press the chat button. Now, you can chat through instant messages as you would through any other instant messaging program.

Send Files - Select a user in your buddy list and press the send file button. (Blue arrow.) Skype will prompt you to browse for the file you wish to send. Select the file and send. If your buddy on the other end approves the file, it will be directly sent. An alternative to sending email attachments.

Conference Calls - You and up to four of your contacts can collaborate in a Skype conference call.

ADVANCED USES OF SKYPE

So far, all of the above uses of Skype are free. There are some additional options that can be used by paying a nominal fee.

Skype In - Skype In allows you to register a local phone number based on the city in which you live that users from land lines or cell phones can call. Now, your friends can call you on Skype via their phones. You must pay a subscription fee to purchase a Skype In number, and people trying to call you will pay regular local and/or long distance fees.

Skype Out - Skype out allows you to call friends on their landlines or cell phones from your Skype program. This service has a flat rate per minute fee.

Skype Voicemail - I think this one speaks for itself.

FINDING OTHER CLASSES TO SKYPE WITH

If you are at a loss to find other classes to Skype with, consider visiting a classroom exchange site like ePALS. On ePALS, you can search for other classes to collaborate with. Once you have chosen a class and have set up a relationship with them, tell them about Skype and invite them to join.

Using Skype With Students

The following are just some of the ways that Skype can be used with students.

Have foreign language students participate in Skype conversations with students from other countries.

Allow students who are working on a collaborative project participate in a conference call from various locations.

Use Skype to exchange documents with project partners.

Have students present their work to an authentic audience, for example, presentations to other classrooms around the world or professionals in their community.

Let parents listen in on their child's presentation.

Try setting up interviews with an author whose book your class is reading. Send an invitation to the author inviting him to join Skype and talk to your class.

Invite a guest speaker to talk to your class via Skype.

Questions? Contact brian@novemberlearning.com