



## REMOTE WORKING

**More and more people are finding themselves working from home or trying to stay in touch with colleagues, volunteers and other creative group organisers remotely. Technology has improved a great deal in recent years to make this easier than ever before, but for those who are unfamiliar with this way of working, it can be difficult to adjust and understand the terminology and the wide range of software and services available. This Briefing aims to demystify the world of remote working including video and telephone conferencing, cloud storage, collaborating online and using your smartphone more effectively.**



### What is remote working?

Laptops and smartphones have replaced desktop PCs and photocopiers in many offices around the world, while international working means that instant collaboration and remote meetings are the norm for many people in the 21st century. The improvements in broadband and mobile data strength mean it's now much easier to complete tasks and communicate while out and about or working away from your colleagues and partners.

When people say “remote working” they may mean working from home on a regular basis, working while travelling by train or plane, or simply being contactable while between other things.

The fast pace of modern living means many people are expected, rightly or wrongly, to be able to respond and contribute while not in their normal office. The ease and speed of collaboration is great for getting consensus on an issue or reacting quickly, but the challenges of being ‘always on’ need to be considered in terms of the impact on people’s personal lives.

In this guide, we will explain the main tools of remote working, how to get the best out of them and share tips on making sure you are giving yourself adequate space and time off.

### Telephone Conferencing

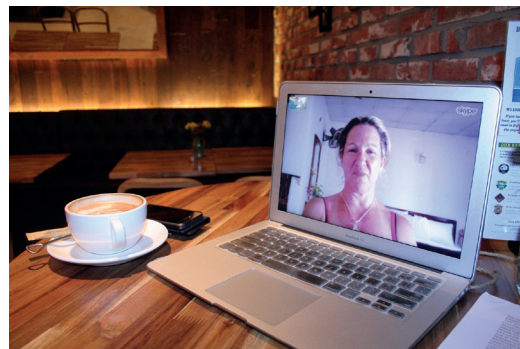
Telephone conferencing simply means having multiple people join the one call. It has been around for a long time but has become much more accessible to more people since the facilities moved online and onto smartphones. There are still lots of specialist companies offering pure phone conferencing packages for a fee, but increasingly people access this through built-in services on their phones or online. Usually one person acts as the host and provides the dial-in details to others.

You'll usually need to dial the service provider's number first and then enter a PIN or code for the particular call (or 'room') you are joining. Beware dialling international numbers for service providers as this can cost a lot over a longer call. Most providers have different numbers for different countries, so look for the appropriate number on their website if you've been provided with an international number (eg. starting with +1 for US numbers).

Once you've dialled into the room, you may be asked to record your name after the tone. This is so any callers already in the call can be notified who has just joined. It's advisable to mute your own phone to minimise background noise on the call when you're not speaking. Tap the microphone symbol on your smartphone screen to mute/unmute or your landline might have a mute button. Having someone 'chair' the call helps to keep things organised and avoid people talking over each other, as there can sometimes be a slight delay on the call. Using speakerphone might also be more comfortable than holding your phone too.

Major conference call providers include [Pow Wow Now](#) and [Conference Now](#). Most providers have a free service (paying only for the call time at local rates) and paid packages with additional features. Conference calls can also be organised through most of the major video conferencing providers such as Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts (below) and other online collaboration tools.

For a smaller group, you can also add additional callers to regular phone calls on most smartphones. Use the regular phone app, and once you've called one person, there should be an option (a symbol with a plus sign and a person, probably) to add others to the call manually. [FaceTime](#) on iPhones offers similar features, or if you have a [WhatsApp](#) group, simply tap the symbol at the top-right of the group (a phone and a plus sign) and then select up to three other members, then tap the phone symbol to start a group call.



### Video Conferencing

Many of us will remember the days when the idea of a video phone call was confined to sci-fi movies, but it's now a common part of our daily lives. Video conferences offer the chance to bring a group of people together to speak face-to-face despite being in different locations. This helps to make the interaction feel 'real', while it's also more comfortable than holding a telephone for long periods. Being able to see each other also makes it easier for a chair to see who is keen to speak next.

Many of the same tips apply here as with telephone conferencing. Keep your own microphone muted when you're not speaking to minimise the noise and potential for high-pitched feedback noises. The noise of you tapping your keyboard can come through quite loudly for others if you're not muted. There's usually obvious buttons on your screen to mute your microphone or switch your camera off if you like.

Most laptops have a camera included (just above your screen) and a light will come on next to it when it's active. They'll also have built-in microphones so you don't need to worry about this. Sometimes you'll need to click a pop-up box to give permission for the video conference to access your camera and microphone when joining a call. You might find it's useful to plug in headphones to help concentrate on the conversation if there is background noise around you. Lots of headphones now come with a microphone in the cable for phone calls too.

Remember that you can also join directly from your smartphone, which can often be easier than using your laptop or PC. Most conference software is available as a free app you can download to your phone in advance. Then you can click your invite link and it should automatically open the appropriate app.

Make sure you are connected to a good broadband network (via WiFi or by cable) to ensure you have a clear and stable connection. Being closer to the wireless router, rather than in a separate room or upstairs, can help with signal strength sometimes. Being visible is also a good idea! Most commonly, people are poorly lit. So try to switch on lights and position yourself so that your face catches the light, rather than it being behind you, which just creates a silhouette.

Major providers of video conferencing include [Zoom](#), [Skype](#), and [Google Hangouts](#) but there are many others such as [GoToMeeting](#) and [Daily.co](#). Almost all will have a free option (or free trial) as well as paid options. Zoom and Skype have free options that have some limitations on the number of participants or the length of the call. Google Hangouts is available to any registered Google user, while any charity that has registered for [G Suite](#)'s free online package can avail itself of Hangouts Meet - a slightly more advanced version that makes it easier to send invite links to external partners and non-Google users.

Some useful features included in most video conferences are chat windows (where you can type messages to share links or other information), screen-sharing (so you can show other people in the call other windows on your computer as a live video) and even the option for live subtitles. Zoom also has "breakout rooms" (switch it on in your account settings), so you can move participants into separate conversations in smaller groups.



## Cloud Storage

Traditionally, organisations kept all of their physical files in their offices, then people moved to electronic storage, but this still often relied on keeping the files on PCs in the workplace or stored on a local 'network' of PCs. Nowadays, we store huge amounts of information in what is called 'the cloud', which simply means that it is remote storage that is accessible from anywhere through the internet. This kind of storage makes it easier for anyone on a team to access regardless of their location, and means an individual can access their files from any computer or device simply by logging in to their account.

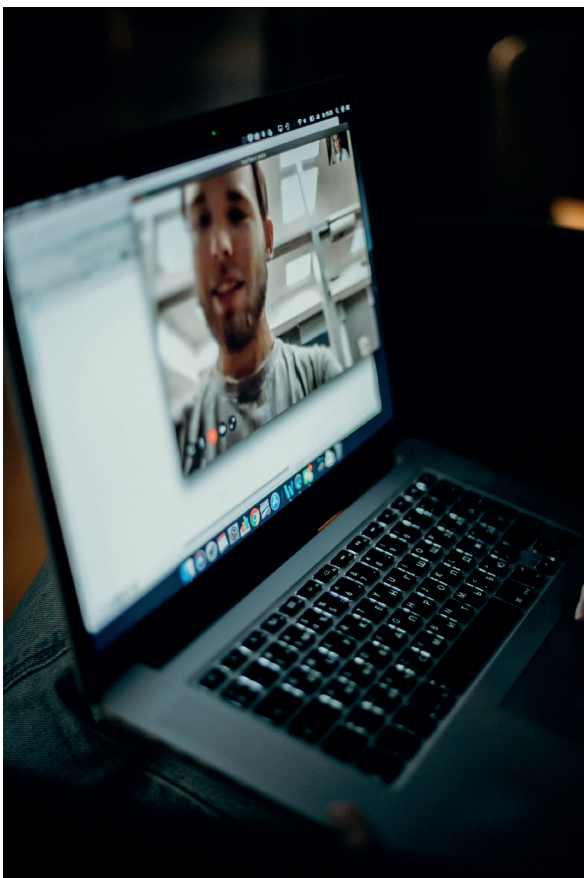
Cloud storage is built into a lot of services now - think about your email inbox and all of the files stored as attachments. Two of the advantages of cloud storage is that it avoids duplication of different versions of a document, and it avoids multiple people asking one individual to send a file. Each person can be given access to what they need and the documents update for everyone once one person has edited the contents.

The main providers of cloud storage are [Google Drive](#), [Dropbox](#), Microsoft's [OneDrive](#) and [Box](#). Again, each will provide a level of free access and then paid options with higher storage capacity. Most will allow you to directly edit files in your browser without the need to open a separate program.

They also offer 'syncing' programs that create a new folder on your computer where all of your files are stored as if they are saved in your normal folders.

This can be useful for when you need to access files without an internet connection (for example, while travelling). All the main providers will also have free mobile apps to make it easy to search, view, share and even edit files on your smartphone.

Though cloud storage is very reliable, you should always maintain a back-up copy of important files on an external hard drive or PC.



### Collaborative Work Online

As mentioned above, one of the advantages of cloud storage is allowing everyone to work on the same version of a document. Instead of purchasing a package of software like Microsoft Office to work on documents, you can now use online versions of this software which sometimes don't offer all of the same advanced functionality but do offer the chance to integrate with other services and, most importantly, to collaborate with others.

Microsoft offers [Office Online](#) which gives access to limited versions of programs like [Word](#), [Excel](#) and [PowerPoint](#) that allow for sharing and collaboration. Google's wide range of online software is free to access and includes their own versions of common office software such as [Docs](#) (for written documents, like Word), [Sheets](#) (for spreadsheets, like Excel) and [Slides](#) (for presentations, like PowerPoint). All of these are accessible to any Google user and you can still choose to download your document as a Microsoft compatible file so you can share with someone who isn't using Google's software. Just click File > Download and then select your preferred format.

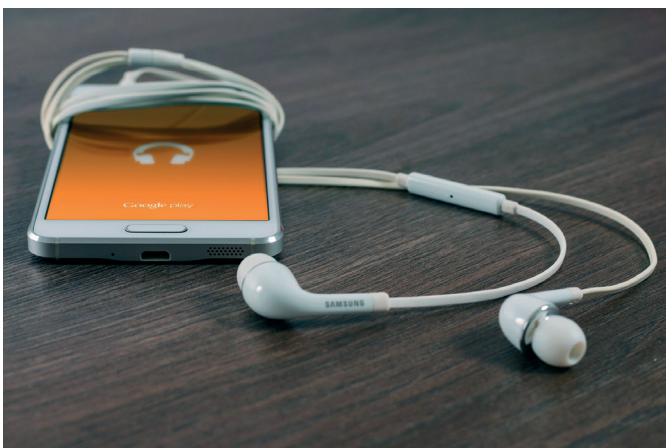
The main advantages of Google's software is that it allows for live collaboration as well as all the usual document editing and formatting. You can create a document and share it with other users (or store it in a shared folder in Google Drive). Several of you can then edit the document at the same time and you'll all be able to see each user's name and what they are doing in the document. This can allow the creation of a document among your group at lightning speed as everyone can see and contribute to the process.

There's also a chat window to discuss what you are all doing and users can highlight text and add comments for specific questions or suggestions. When sharing a document with others, you can choose to give them access to view, comment or edit. So if you want to protect the content but allow others to

input, you can give them access to comment so they can add their thoughts. Or share a finished document publicly by selecting to create a 'Shareable link' and setting the permissions to view only.

A good tip is to click into the settings from the Google Docs homepage and then select the option for 'Offline' access. This means that you'll be able to open, edit and create documents when you're not connected to the internet. Also, in the bottom-right corner of documents, you'll see a little box that says "Explore" if you hover over it. Clicking this will give you suggestions and options of things you might want to add to the document. Intuitive searching based on what you've already put in the document will help to suggest relevant research reports, images to add or automated charts based on spreadsheet data.

For speedy work, there are lots of ready-made templates for documents, reports and charts that you can use as a starting point for a finished product that looks well designed. Free mobile apps are available for Google Drive and each of the separate tools: Docs, Sheets & Slides. It is remarkable how straightforward it is to make simple edits to spreadsheets or write and format documents from your smartphone using these apps.



## Keeping in touch

A big challenge of working remotely is the lack of interaction and contact with your colleagues and collaborators. It's hard to replace the back-and-forth of face-to-face discussions, but some of the tools we've already described can help with this (eg. video chats, live document collaboration). There are also a whole range of options out there to help digitally recreate the atmosphere of a shared office or workspace.

Simple things like a dedicated [WhatsApp](#) group can help to have regular conversations and updates that can feel a lot less labour-intensive than having lots of long email threads where things get lost. As mentioned earlier, you can make group phone or video calls through a WhatsApp group too. Remember that you can adjust your settings in WhatsApp to disable notifications for groups if you find you're being pestered by endless beeps from your phone!

Services like [Microsoft Teams](#) offer tools to help manage teams and projects as well as group discussions, while [Trello](#) offers a noticeboard style system to help a team of people see what's happening with different projects, events or tasks. Think of it as a digital wall of post-it notes, with extra interactive features to schedule and delegate tasks.

[Slack](#) is currently one of the most popular platforms for teams to interact digitally. Essentially it is a messaging platform but with means to organise discussions. An organisation or group can register as a 'Workspace' and then invite users to join. Conversations are divided into 'channels' and 'direct messages'. Channels can be public (open to all users in your workspace) or private (only open to those invited by the administrator). Direct messages are private and can be between just two people or a small group. Channels are labelled with a hash symbol before the name. By default, every workspace will have a #general channel



(for everyone) and a #random channel (for non-work conversations and pictures of your pets). You can create new channels for particular projects or teams, like #conference or #fundraising, to help keep the discussions focused.

The free package is quite generous on Slack and allows lots of users to join, while the mobile app is incredibly quick and easy to use on the go. It can also integrate with other software like Google Drive and Zoom. A good tip is to spend a little time adjusting your personal settings to set restrictions on the notifications you receive (eg. mute certain channels, schedule daily quiet times, or stop notifications while you're on holiday).

## Keeping safe

As with anything online, you need to exercise caution when using unfamiliar websites and avoid sharing important or sensitive personal information. Most of the well known service providers mentioned in this guide are secure and reputable but users should still be cautious, especially with free services.

Your internet supplier and your bank will normally have detailed guidance on staying safe online and avoiding common fraud schemes. Never share your bank details or other sensitive information unless you're sure it's safe. Always look for the little padlock symbol on the left of the website address bar in your browser before inputting card details to make a purchase.

Additionally, it's important to consider safeguarding for children, young people and adults at risk as you would with physical events and meetings. Make sure that appropriate steps are taken to manage online gatherings and make sure these groups are properly supported. Make use of guidelines from trusted sources like the ones below:

- [Get Safe Online](#)
- [Childline](#)
- [NSPCC](#)

- [Safeguarding in Schools](#)
- [SWGfL](#)

## Tips for working from home

One of the hardest parts of working remotely, especially in your own home, is finding ways to manage your time and energy in a way that allows you to both focus on your work and switch off properly when you're done. Everyone finds their own rhythm and things that work well for them but we have gathered some tips from those who have experience working at home.

**Routine** - A regular schedule can be extremely helpful. It's easy to be distracted by other things in your home. Give yourself a clear timetable that allows for focused work and regular breaks. Try to avoid blurring between work and personal time.

**Calendar** - A shared calendar, such as [Google Calendar](#), can be useful in keeping you organised, as well letting your colleagues know when you're available, when you're busy in another meeting or call, and when you've finished working for the day. When working remotely, it can be very helpful to know when colleagues are free for a quick 'check in'.

**Breaks** - Always take a proper lunch break! It's important to give yourself time to rest and eat properly and avoid your screens. Regular tea/coffee breaks are good too - you don't need to feel guilty. Take a walk outside for a short time each day to ensure you don't feel too cooped up indoors. It helps to clear your head and return with greater focus afterwards.

**Space** - If possible, try to work in a dedicated space which acts as a home office so your work stuff does not spill over into your personal or living space. If that isn't possible, try to make sure that you pack away your work materials at the end of the day so you can feel as if you have 'left the office'. It's also really important to make sure your working space is comfortable and safe for your own

health. See Briefing 144 in Further Reading.

**Clothing** - Lots of people find it's useful to change clothes (or shoes) to help define their work time and their personal time. Pyjamas are comfortable, but you might well feel more like you are in work mode if you feel dressed for it during the day.

**Entertainment** - The radio helps to add a little buzz and background conversation if you're feeling a bit lonely, but at other times you might want something less distracting. Instrumental music is great for focusing on other things like reading. Try classical music stations or search for playlists on music streaming services that are themed on concentration or focus.

**Boundaries** - If there are others in your home while you're working, it can be difficult to get peace. It's useful to establish some reasonable boundaries and ask others to respect your working time and not distract you without good reason.

### Further guidance and tips

Creative Lives resources:

- [Digital skills toolkit](#)
- [144: Health & Safety for Lone and Remote Workers](#)

Links to online tutorials by major service providers are below. Most are YouTube playlists with a series of short videos demonstrating how to set up accounts, start using the service and use basic features.

- Pow Wow Now - [How To Use Our Service](#)
- ConferenceNow - [Customer Help](#)
- Zoom - [How To Use Zoom](#)
- Skype - [How To videos](#)
- Google Hangouts - [Help & Support](#)
- Google Hangouts Meet - [Detailed Tutorial](#)
- GoToMeeting - [GoToMeeting 101](#)
- Daily.co - [Help section](#)
- Google Drive - [Help centre](#)

- Google Drive - [In-depth tutorial video](#)
- Dropbox - [Tutorials](#)
- OneDrive - [Microsoft training](#)
- OneDrive - [Beginner's tutorial video](#)
- Box - [How To videos](#)
- Office Online - [Get Started at Office.com](#)
- Google Docs - [Help centre](#)
- Google Docs - [In-depth tutorial video](#)
- Google Sheets - [In-depth tutorial video](#)
- Google Slides - [In-depth tutorial video](#)
- WhatsApp - [Techboomers' WhatsApp guide](#)
- Microsoft Teams - [Welcome to Teams](#)
- Trello - [Trello Tutorials](#)
- Slack - [Getting Started on Slack](#)
- Google Calendar - [Tutorial video](#)

Remember, if there's something you can't figure out on any of these tools, try putting your question into YouTube and you will almost always find a short, helpful video demonstrating how to solve your problem. If not, try taking a look at the Help & Support section on the website of the software provider or contact them if you can't find an answer and need assistance.

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