



Tips for More Effective Online Communication

for Luthiers, Composers, Musicians & Teachers

We've all been using online communication tools – Skype, Zoom and others – for months now during COVID-19. While online meetings have been a lifesaver in many ways, there are definite drawbacks for luthiers, teachers, composers, performing musicians, and others whose work involves reproducing nuanced tone quality. We can't overcome all of the barriers, but we've found a few tips that can make your online meetings more effective.

Joining a meeting – general tips:

- Be sure all other tabs on your browser are closed. Video especially takes a lot of bandwidth. Set up your meeting as close to your router as possible. If your sound is garbled, try turning off the video and use sound only. It may help to log out and log back in.
- Always check your mic and speakers as soon as you log into a meeting. (Click on the arrow next to the mic control and select “test microphone and speakers.”)
- Use headphones whenever possible. This will not only clarify the sound you hear, it will also help others hear you better.
- If any party to your meeting has background noise, ask them to mute themselves (or the host can mute them). This will make more difference than you think!

Hosting a meeting:

- When setting up the invitation to your meeting, always use the “waiting room” option, to avoid security lapses. If a person unknown to you enters the waiting room, ask them to identify themselves in the chat box. Do not admit anyone you don't know or who was not invited to the meeting.
- Select a “co-host” as soon as you initiate the meeting. This will allow you to share the task of monitoring your waiting room. Another advantage is that if your internet goes out, the co-host can continue the meeting in your absence and will re-admit you when you can get back online.
- If you want everyone to see a document or other file on your computer, you can “share a screen.” Open the file and have it ready to go before the meeting starts, so all you have to do is click “share screen” and then double click your document.
- The meeting host and/or co-host can mute someone if there is too much background noise. Be sure to unmute them when they want to speak; they will have to “accept” the unmute (click on the mic icon) as well.
- If your meeting does get “bombed,” either the host or co-host can force the bombing party to leave if you do it quickly (use “security” icon at the bottom of your screen, click on “remove participant”). Otherwise, lock the meeting (again use the security icon), shut it down and start it again.

Much has already been written about the problems with sound reproduction online. Some practical advice:

- Keep your expectations reasonable. Delays in sound transmission are inevitable and part of being online.
- If the quality of sound is important to what you are doing (i.e., demonstrating an instrument), use an external mic, not the one embedded in your laptop or other device.
- If you are using Zoom, in the “advanced settings” option, turn on the button for “original sound.” Most online communication programs are set up for speech, not for music; they enhance short sounds and consonants while reducing or eliminating sustain. “Original sound” will allow your listener to hear a closer approximation of your instrument's sound. It will not change anything that you hear, however.
- For the best sound, pre-record your performance and share it as a video in the meeting, or send it to participants in advance.

We've learned to live with and even appreciate the advantages of online meetings. While they can't replace meeting in-person, online meetings can save a lot of time and car mileage. Until we can see each other face-to-face they're the best substitute we have. We hope these tips help to improve your online experience until then!

