Skype for Silver Surfers

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What is Skype?

Skype is one of many programs available for your computer which allow you to talk to people such as family or friends, over the Internet. If you have a webcam they can see you as well (and vice versa). This is usually free which makes it cheaper than any call using a normal phone. This technology is called Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP pronounced v-oi-p) which is a term you may hear from time to time.

What do I need?

A computer, broadband, microphone, speakers, (optional webcam).

Any drawbacks?

You are tied to your computer (or laptop) while you make the call, but you can get various wireless phones and headsets to make this far less of a problem.

Skype can sometimes give connection problems, or if you have a slow Internet connection you can get break up in the speech to the point that conversation becomes almost impossible. Good video and voice calls require a good Internet connection at both ends.

How to download and install Skype

Use Internet Explorer to go to the website www.skype.com

Click the "Download" link (top left). Click the green "Download now" button (middle of screen).

At this point, Internet Explorer may "helpfully" block the download, to overcome this block you need to click the yellow/white bar at the top of the screen (just above the top blue Skype logo and the search box).

You may then get various security warnings from Internet Explorer, click "Run" (or Alt-R) on any you get.

Eventually you should see the Skype Welcome screen shown below.

Optional - if you don't want Skype to be running on your computer all the time then click the "Options" button and un-tick the option "Start Skype when the computer starts". This means that you run Skype when you choose to run it and is the option I would recommend if you tend to pre arrange your Skype calls like I do or if you have a slow computer.

Click the "I agree – install" button (or Alt-I) to start the installation.

Skype will now install itself, this should take about 2 minutes but depends on your Internet connection speed. When installation has finished you should see the window shown below.

Fill in your full name first and then click in the "Create Skype Name" box to see the one it automatically generates for you. You can change this if you want.

Fill in the password boxes (make sure you type the same password in each one, minimum 6 characters). You will get 2 green ticks when successful.

Fill in your email address in both boxes.

Click the "I agree – create account" button.

Skype will now check to see if the Skype name chosen is available, if not you need to alter it slightly or chose another one. You will then see the window shown below.

You must fill in the "City" box, the rest are optional.

Leave the "Sign me in…" box ticked only if you are using your own computer or laptop.

Click the "OK" button (bottom right) to sign in and start Skype.

Testing Skype

The first thing to do is check your sound (and webcam) works, to do this click the middle of the three pictures (the picture of headphone and mic). Click each of the test items on the next screen and follow the instructions. If everything is working OK you can carry on and make a test Skype call.

Using Skype

To make sure people the other end can hear you properly before you call them, Skype offer a service called "Echo/Sound Test Service" which is in your contact list by default. If you make a call to this service and listen to what it says, it will allow you to be sure that you can hear people properly and that they can hear you.

Make a call to the Echo service by clicking it in the contacts list on the left and then clicking the green "Call" button on the right
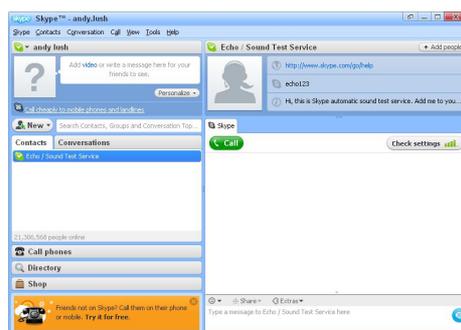
To find somebody you know on Skype, click on the "Contacts" menu, then click "Search for Skype Users…" (Press and hold Alt, press C, press S, release Alt – easier to do than explain ☺). Just type a name or email address in the box and click the "Find" button. You can then add them to your contacts list. Be aware that John Smith in Austrailia may not be **your** John Smith!

Skype to Skype calls and video calls are free, so you can call anybody you find in this list for free. To call or video call somebody, click on them in your contacts list and then click the green "Call" or "Video Call" button.

You can also call normal phones (landline or mobile) via Skype at rates that are usually lower than a normal phone call (this is especially true of international calls). Your first call to a normal phone is free so you can try out this service and see how well it works. Click the "Call phones" button (bottom left).