Skype: Talk to Anyone, Anywhere for Free

By Lorrie Jackson

WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?

You will learn how to install and use Skype, a free peer-to-peer Internet-based telephone system.

What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?
Skype works on Windows, Mac, and Linux.

Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?
The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard IIe in particular.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed a set of National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. Standards or Performance Indicators are included for each techtorial to help teachers and administrators improve technology proficiency. For a complete description of the standards indicated, go to NETS for Teachers.

WHAT'S SKYPE?

A chronically ill student joins real-time classroom discussions from her bedroom. A classroom in Idaho interviews a scholar in Egypt. A teacher studying abroad checks in with family and colleagues back home. All those scenarios are possible through telecollaboration. Until recently, however, that meant money and equipment many schools and districts can't afford-- until Skype, that is.

Skype, a free software program that allows anyone to talk to anyone else in the world over the Internet for free, is easy to install and use. Take a look at this quick video for an overview.

Folks around the world are using Skype daily to keep in touch with friends and family with sound that's clearer than a cell phone or even a land line. Add a webcam and you can send video back and forth as

well. Up to 9 users can conference on a call (audio only) at no cost. Just imagine what you and your class could do with such easy and free access to the rest of the world!

TELL ME HOW!

In this techtorial you'll learn how to install Skype.
- make and accept Skype calls.
- Skype Chat.
- use Skype in the K-12 classroom.

You'll also learn a few tricks for trouble-free use, and find out about some fee-based extras.

You need just four things to start Skyping: Internet access, a microphone, headphones or speakers, and permission to install the software on your computer. Most laptops or tablets, as well as some desktop computers, come with internal microphones. If your machine does not have one, check an office supply store or big box retailer to find a mic for under $20. The best choice is to get a headset/mic combination if you plan to talk privately (teacher to teacher for example); or a mic and speakers if you want the whole class to listen in.

Skype will work with a dial-up connection, but broadband (cable or DSL) is best. Most schools' Internet connection are more than sufficient. Do check with your school or district staff, however, if you're unsure if you have permission to install software on your machine.
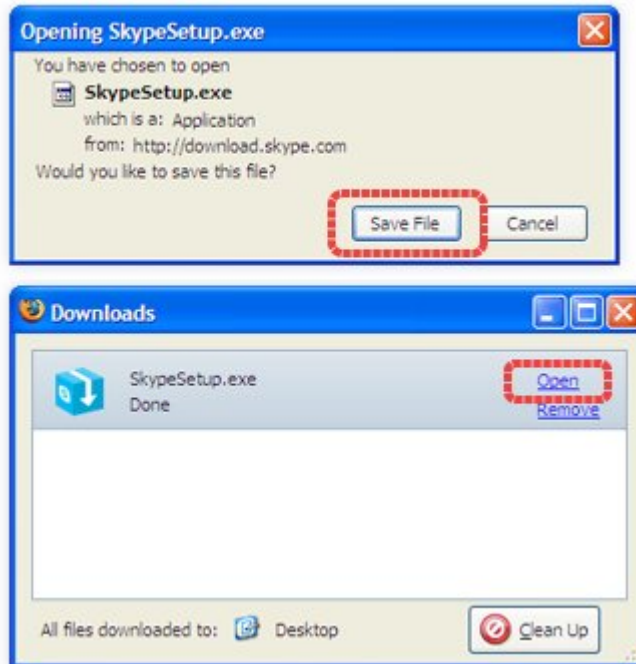
DOWNLOADING SKYPE IS A SNAP

Installing Skype takes only a few minutes:

1. Go to the Skype Download page and click the Download button.
2. Follow directions for downloading Skype onto your machine. Exact directions may vary by operating system.

Windows

① Save the application

Opening SkypeSetup.exe

You have chosen to open

SkypeSetup.exe
which is a: Application
from: http://download.skype.com

Would you like to save this file?

Save File   Cancel

Downloads

SkypeSetup.exe
Done
Open
Remove

All files downloaded to: Desktop   Clean Up

Mac

Downloading Skype

You need a Mac computer with Mac OS X, version 10.3.9 or later.

① Close Skype for Mac, if you have an earlier version running

② Download the latest version of Skype for Mac
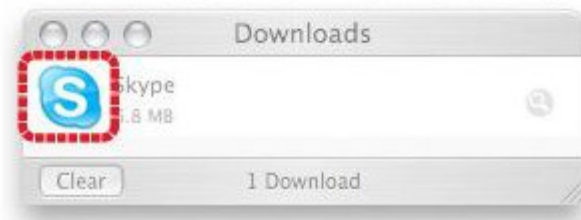
Download

Official release. Version: 2.5.0.85. Release date: January 31, 2007
File name: Skype_2.5.0.85.dmg

③ Open the Skype download

Open your web browser's Downloads window and double-click
on the blue Skype icon.

If a warning dialog opens, simply click Continue.

Downloads

Skype
.8 MB

Clear   1 Download

Linux

Follow the instructions provided. When installation is done, you'll see this window:

1. First, choose a name. More and more educators are using Skype, so create an easily identifiable Skype Name. Most users choose the firstname.lastname format.
2. Next, choose a password.
3. Finally, agree to the Terms of Use. Skype then asks for your e-mail address, which can be used by colleagues to find you in the Skype directory.

Tip: You also might want to add your Skype Name to your e-mail signature line to alert friends and colleagues that you're on Skype.
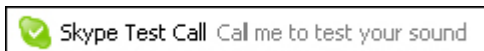
That's it. You're now ready to sign in and start your first Skype call.

SKYPING FOR THE FIRST TIME

- Open Skype: **PC: Start>All Programs, Mac: Applications Folder>Skype**
- A window with the following tabs will open:

- Look under contacts and you should see Skype Test Call.

That is an automated testing service that helps you make sure your microphone and speakers (internal or external) or headset are working.

- Click Skype Test Call once. You'll see a green phone icon (to call out) and a white balloon in a blue circle (to instant message/chat). Make sure your microphone is plugged in, and then press the green phone button.
- A recording will prompt you to say a word or two. Your message then will be played back to you. If you hear your voice played back, everything is working.

MAKE THE CALL

Notice the word "Search" under the Contacts tab. To call someone, first you need to find them in Skype. Click Search, and then type the first or last name or e-mail address of the person you want to call.

After you find that person's profile, you can click to add it to your Contacts page or simply press the green phone icon to make the call. Calling is simple once you've found your contact in the Directory or added the person to your contact list.
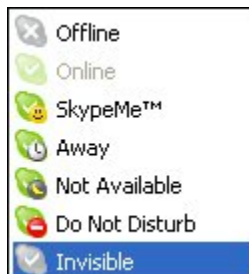
When you press the green phone, you'll hear a dial tone. If the call recipient is online and able to take your call, he or she will greet you.

Speak at normal volume; you'll be surprised at the clarity of the sound. When done, click the red hang-up button.

CAN'T GO TO THE PHONE?

Just as you turn off your cell phone while teaching, you'll want to let others know when you can and can't take Skype calls. To do that:

- Double-click the Skype icon in your Start bar or Dock. You'll see these choices:

- Select the most appropriate option. (Warning: the SkypeMe icon tells anyone on Skype that you want to talk regardless of whether you know them or not. That probably isn't a good choice even when students have gone home.)

Tip: If a friend calls and you don't have your mic ready or are in public area where you don't want to talk, click the Chat button to instant message instead.

That's it! Now that you know the basics of Skyping, let's take a look at using Skype in your classroom.

SKYPING IN K-12

What can you do with Skype? The sky's the limit.

- Hold a poetry reading at which an actual poet in another state reads to your class -- or vice versa.
- Brainstorm teaching ideas with an out-of-town mentor.
- Include an ill student in daily classroom discussions.

- Conduct a conference call for a club or other small group of students.
- Add new life to the same old pen pal project by adding audio and video.
- Conduct virtual classes (distance learning) in an informal setting.
- Help English as an Additional Language (EAL) students practice conversation skills and learn about your community through a weekly call-in session.

To reduce the chance of problems, start small and be sure to practice several times at home and at school without students present. Even just Skyping to a class down the hall or across town to a friend's classroom is fun at first and will build your confidence level. Also, the first time students are exposed to any tech tool, their excitement often turns to silliness, so be sure to practice before initiating a serious project with Skype.

Skype allows you to send large files to friends or colleagues, an important feature when so many schools limit the size of e-mail attachments. Use Skype to exchange photos, drawings, documents, and more.

As with any telecollaboration, keep in mind that time zones and school calendars differ greatly. Setting up guidelines for discussions also is a good idea. Content that is appropriate for a class at one school might not be considered appropriate in another culture. Honest and polite discussions between teachers beforehand can help prevent problems.

Be sure to check the additional resources located at the end of this techtorial for more ideas on teaching with Skype.

TIPS AND TRICKS

By now, you know that Skype lets you use a computer to talk free via the Internet. But did you know that -- for a fee -- you also can call from your computer to any cell phone or land line in the world -- *and* from any phone to your computer? SkypeIn and SkypeOut are fee-based extras, but they might be the more affordable alternatives

when a caller or call recipient are at a remote location, or when Internet access is not available. (Voicemail is included.)

Skype also allows you to click the Live tab to see and/or join public conversations at any time. A number of security and safety issues prevent that from being a good classroom choice, but after school you might find a lively discussion by and for teachers.

Advanced users can add the Skype RSS feed to their aggregator to stay current on the latest from Skype. You also can add a "Call me" button on your Web site.

Skype users share ideas for using Skype in the site's Forums section. Take a look there or post your own message to find answers to your Skype questions.

Finally, you'll probably notice that most users have either their photo or an avatar (a personalized cartoon-like figure) in their contact profile. Take a minute to customize your avatar (Skype calls it a WeeMee) or to upload your photo so friends and colleagues have a face to put with the name.

TELL ME MORE!

Where can I find more information?
You can find more information at the sites below:
- Skype in the Classroom
- How I Taught Skype to My Classes
- Promoting Synchrous Interaction in an eLearning Environment.

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