

Skype Skills to Master

Before you can conduct an effective videoconference using Skype (www.skype.com), you'll need to know how to master several basic Skype skills. Work with a partner and a computer with Skype installed to explore each of the following skills.

Opening Skype

On many computers, Skype will open automatically once the computer is turned on. If this is true for your computer, you will find an orange icon in the computer's system tray—the collection of icons found in the bottom right-hand corner of your computer.

If Skype doesn't open automatically on the computer you are using, you can launch it from the **Skype folder** found under **Programs** in your computer's Start menu—or the **Applications** menu in the **Finder** window on a Mac. (You'll need a Skype username and password, though.)

Checking Audio Settings

To be sure that your microphone and speaker volumes are loud enough for a successful Skype conversation, select **Options** found under the **Tools** menu at the top of your Skype window. Then, select **Audio Settings** from the menu on the left-hand side of the **Options** window that appears.

Check to see that the **Automatically Adjust Microphone Settings** and **Automatically Adjust Speaker Settings** options are selected.

Testing Your Webcam

It is also important that you test your webcam before making a Skype call. Doing so will ensure that your webcam is working and that your digital guests will be able to see you.

To check your webcam, select **Options** found under the **Tools** menu at the top of your Skype window. Then, select **Video Settings** from the menu on the left-hand side of the **Options** window that appears. Your webcam should automatically start. Check the image that appears for quality. Does anything in the background—pictures, windows, chalkboards—make it difficult to see you? If so, consider moving to a new location.

Also, check to see that **Only From People in My Contact List** is selected from the **Automatically Receive Video From** menu and that **People in My Contact List** is selected from the **Show That I Have Video** menu.

Making a Skype Call

Begin by finding the person that you are trying to call under the **Contacts** tab found on the left-hand side of your Skype window. (You will know that they are online and ready for your call if the icon next to their screen name is green.) After selecting the contact that you are trying to call, select the **Video Call** button found at the top of the contact window that appears on the right-hand side of your computer screen.

Your computer will automatically dial your contact. When they answer, you will see their video appear in the center of your screen. Your video will appear in a small box in the bottom left-hand

corner of your screen. Be sure to pay attention to your video so that you can adjust your camera during the course of the conversation if needed.

Planning for Disaster

While Skype is a great service that will work without a hitch most of the time, disasters—losing audio or video, having the Internet crash—are always possible when working online with a free tool. Having a plan for disasters will make these unexpected moments less stressful.

The first step to take when planning for disaster is deciding at the beginning of a videoconference who will take action when something goes wrong as well as what that action will be. Perhaps you will work to call your digital guest back. Perhaps he or she will call you back.

You can also communicate through instant messages. To send an instant message, type your thoughts in the **Instant Message** box found at the bottom of your contact window and then click the blue **Send Message** button.