

Are My Computer and Internet Connection Adequate for Using Skype? (Technical Specifications)

“Skype” is a free software program that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet. To install it you will need to go to <http://www.skype.com/> and click on the link to “Get Skype.” Download the version appropriate for your type of computer (Windows, Mac, iPad, etc.) and follow the directions for installation.

Windows PC

The recommended system requirements for using Skype on a Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7/8/10 computer are at least a 1 GHz CPU and a minimum of 512 MB of RAM. (If you have purchased your computer new within the last year, it is very likely it already meets these specifications.)

How do you find out your processor speed and the amount of memory on a Windows computer?

- * Locate the icon for MY COMPUTER on your desktop or in the START menu.
- * Right-click your mouse over MY COMPUTER. This opens the shortcut menu.
- * Select PROPERTIES at the bottom of the menu. This opens the SYSTEM PROPERTIES window.
- * The GENERAL tab will probably already be selected.
- * Look for the word "Computer:" and read the lines under it. You should see two sets of numbers.
 - The first numbers following the CPU (Central Processing Unit) are the speed of this processor. To be able to use Skype, this number should be 1.0 GHz (GigaHertz) or higher.
 - The second number is the amount of RAM (or Random Access Memory) on your computer. This number should be no less than 512 MB (Megabytes) and on newer computers maybe 1.0 GB (Gigabytes) or higher.
- * If the numbers shown are less than these specifications, you will have difficulties with a Skype call on your computer.
- * Click either OK or Cancel to close the SYSTEM PROPERTIES window.

How fast your computer is running and how much memory it has is only part of the picture. Now we have to talk about the speed your computer connects to the Internet. A dial-up modem connection will NOT WORK for Skype. Your computer will be constantly “dropping the line” causing you to drop out of the call and then it will reconnect itself automatically. This destroys the quality of the call for everyone else participating.

You must have a DSL or Cable-type modem to be fast enough to keep up with Skype.

Note: Skype tech support says it is also better for you to connect to the Internet via a cable because a Broadband connection provides more band width than a Wireless connection. If you must use a wireless connection make sure you are as close to the router as possible to get the strongest signal.

The following test will tell you how fast you are downloading information from the Internet and how fast you are uploading it.

How can you tell how fast your Internet connection is?

- * Connect to this Web site (<http://www.speakeasy.net/speedtest/>).
- * Click on the name of the server closest to you to start the Speed Test.
- * Watch the screen as two tests are run.
 - The first number is the download speed or the speed that you receive data from the Internet. I have a very fast connection using a Bresnan Cable Modem so my number is usually between 5.0 to 8.4 Mbps (Megabits per second).
 - The second number is the one of greatest concern. This is the upload speed that you are sending data back to the Internet. Skype tech support recommends that this number should be at least 380 kbps or higher for video calls and at least 256 kbps for audio calls like our conference calls. My download number is usually between 385 kbps and 1.5 Mbps.

What other equipment do you need?

To use Skype you will also need to have a microphone and either headphones or speakers attached to your computer. I have found that most Windows PC computers' internal speakers are usually not loud enough to be satisfactory for these calls and I prefer to use headphones or to attach external speakers to my computer.

After you have installed the Skype software, they have provisions for making a test call. If you can hear yourself during the test call, then you have Skype set up correctly.

A Webcam is often used for Skype calls. Although you cannot participate in video conference calls unless someone on the call has subscribed to and paid for the Skype Premium service, you can use a WebCam for your microphone on audio conference calls. This may be another piece of equipment to buy or it may be built into your laptop or iPad. I use a Logitech® QuickCam® Pro 9000, but there are many good brands on the market. If in doubt, look for brands certified for use with Skype. Naturally, the more you pay for a camera, the better quality image you will transmit.

Macintosh Computers

Information courtesy of Susan Zevenbergen

(<http://www.myharpdelight.com/skype-harp-lessons.html>)

According to the Skype site, the minimum system requirements for Skype 2.0 for Mac are a Mac OS X v10.3.9 Panther or newer, G4 800 MHz and above, any G5 or any Intel processor, 512MB RAM, 40 MB free disk space on your hard drive and a microphone. I use Skype on my eMac with less free disk space than that, however. You can check your computer's capacity by going to About this Mac on the Apple Menu and clicking on the "More Info" button.

I have found that my internal mic & speakers actually work better than the headset mic I bought, so if you have a Mac I suggest trying what's built in first. Also, if you have a MacBook or newer

desktop Mac (like an iMac), you already have a built-in camera that will work beautifully. If not, I recommend the Ecamm Network iMage USB Webcam for Mac and Windows v 2.0.

iPads

Skype provides a free App through the iTunes App Store for making and receiving Skype calls on an iPad. With the built-in Webcam and microphone this version of Skype actually works quite well if you have a good Internet connection.

You cannot host a Group Conference Call from an iPad as of 09/06/2015.