

# Advice for Photography Clubs Wishing to Meet Online and Use Remote Judging

Whilst the Coronavirus (Covid19) prevents physical meetings.

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## Introduction

Most photography club activity stopped when the COVID-19 outbreak prevented physical meetings. Whilst there's no substitute for gathering around a print stand sharing a beautiful image, there is much that clubs can do without face to face meetings. Clearly this is only going to work for members who have an internet connection and, ideally, a laptop or computer rather than just a phone, so they can see the images in good quality. The following notes suggest some of the ways you can "keep the club going" until normality is restored. The document covers four topics:

- Internet Connections
- Use of social media to keep in touch, share images and run informal competitions.
- Remote Judging
- Online Meetings and advice on use of Zoom
- Online Exhibitions

## Internet Connections

If you want to share images, video and sound in reasonable quality, everyone taking part will need a reasonably good internet connection. What's reasonably good? You need a download speed of at least 5Mb/s (megabits per second) and an upload of at least 2Mb/s. Many people have broadband which is not fast enough. They may be paying for "10Mb" but that doesn't mean they get 10 megabits in real life. Domestic internet connections are optimised for consumption of media, and you may if you are lucky get downloads (to your home) of the advertised speed but they may be less than half that figure. Worse still, uploads are much slower, perhaps only 1Mb/s, because the service is optimised for you to receive content created by others, not send content to the rest of the world. You can test you broadband speed using Ookla, here <https://www.speedtest.net/> the site is funded by advertising but just click on the "go" in the circle in the middle of the page.

Many factors will determine the speed of connection you actually get, a full explanation is beyond the scope of this document, but some important ones are:

1. How far your house is from the green cabinet or telephone exchange, by the route the cable takes. Not a lot you can do about that but if you are not on "Fibre To The Cabinet" (FTTC) and your internet connection is slow, consider an upgrade if you can afford it.
2. Are you using a wired connection to your router, or WiFi? If you are using WiFi you will only get the advertised speed if you are near the router and nobody else is using your WiFi. As soon as you move away from your router, the performance will drop sharply especially in congested urban areas where all your neighbours also have WiFi. Uses a wired connection (network cable) directly from the computer to the router if possible.
3. Finally, you get what you pay for. If you are on "£10 a month" broadband the speed you actually get will drop at busy times, good quality FTTC broadband with a genuine download speed of about 80Mb/s and upload of 20Mb/s which ALWAYS works at that speed is available in many areas but it will usually cost about £30/month or more.

## What to do if your broadband speed is poor?

1. Consider using your mobile phone instead. Try the Ookla speed test on your phone or tablet, it's best to install the app. Do the test with the WiFi on your phone turned off, so you are testing the mobile signal not your broadband! If your mobile signal gives you a fast internet connection, you can set up a WiFi hotspot on your phone or tablet, and connect your

computer to the phone WiFi instead of your broadband WiFi. Do make sure your phone contract has enough data allowance though, or you may get a very big phone bill!

2. Join club online activities but get somebody else with a better broadband connection to show the images or videos. You will be able to receive in better quality than you can send.
3. Turn off your webcam, for photography club activities people generally want to see the pictures being talked about, not you wearing your pyjamas. Turning off your webcam will leave more bandwidth available for you to speak or share your desktop.

## Social Media

Facebook is the obvious choice for keeping in touch with members and is popular with the slightly older demographic of most clubs. SnapChat, WhatsApp, Instagram etc can also be used, many of the same advantages and disadvantages apply.

### Advantages:

- Many people have Facebook and know how to use it
- You can create a group for your club members, and it can be private so only they can see it.

### Disadvantages

- Facebook and other social media platforms are not concerned with image quality, they reduce the size and quality of images quite significantly
- By posting images on platforms such as Facebook (who also own WhatsApp and Instagram), you grant them the right to use the images. Whilst they acknowledge you retain copyright, their terms and conditions say *“when you share, post or upload content that is covered by intellectual property rights on or in connection with our Products, you grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free and worldwide licence to host, use, distribute, modify, run, copy, publicly perform or display, translate and create derivative works of your content”* Some members may not be comfortable with this. Whilst the chances of your image being used without your permission are remote, it does occasionally happen.

## Photo-specific Media Sites

Sites such as [Flickr](#) are a better bet for image sharing and informal competitions.

### Advantages

- You retain complete control over who can see and download your images and by uploading them you do not grant anyone the right to use them (other than for display on the Flickr site) unless you choose to.
- Image quality is preserved, with professional accounts displaying at up to 6k resolution, way beyond anything used for club DPI competitions.
- You can set up a group for your club members and make it private if you wish, so only members can see the images.
- You can use the discussion function to hold informal competitions.

### Disadvantages

- You need to sign up for an account if you don't have one and whilst free accounts are available, pro accounts which remove the adverts and provide the best experience on Flickr are now expensive at \$50/year. For that you get unlimited storage and given that you can mark uploaded files private so only you can see them, that's actually a very cheap way of

getting backup storage for your photos. Having said that, free accounts work and people are used to services being funded through advertising, so this need not prevent use of sites like Flickr.

- There are a lot of controls a great deal of functionality in Flickr so there is a learning curve if you want to use all the features.

## Remote Judging

There are several advantages to remote judging.

- No driving for the judge, saving them time, money and fatigue. There is also a reduction in the environmental impact of our hobby
- Judges and clubs are not restricted to working within their own locality, any club can use any judge wherever they are based.
- Subject to the limit on the number of people who can join an online meeting, clubs could invite people from outside their area to watch the judging and see their work too.

If you are going to try remote judging you will of course need to get your pictures to the judge. Physical prints could be left on their doorstep at a pre-arranged time, the judge can pick up the box using tissue or kitchen roll then throw it away. The virus will only live for about 24 hours on [cardboard](#) so if the judge leaves the prints for a couple of days before handling them, they should be completely safe. For DPI images at the normal competition resolutions of around 1400 x 1200 pixels, a typical image will be between 0.5 and 1.5 megabytes. More than about half a dozen images will exceed the size which is guaranteed to be delivered by email. Rather than sending the poor judge many emails each with a few files, consider file sharing or transfer. Options for this are explained below.

### File Sharing

If you have a Google (Gmail) account you probably have 15GB of free storage. You can find it by logging into Google on your web browser, clicking on the Google Apps square of dots in the top right corner and clicking on “drive”. You can upload your pictures to a folder on your Google Drive then get a “shareable link” to email to the judge. They can then download all the images to their computer.

Other services you might use for file sharing include [Dropbox](#) which offers free accounts of 2GB storage which are sufficient for club competitions provided you delete the files from the system once you no longer need them. It works like Google Drive, you upload the files then get a link to share the files. There’s no great advantage over Google Drive but if you don’t have a Google account this might be an option for you.

The advantage of file sharing is that you can keep the images available as long as you want, the disadvantage is that you have a fixed amount of storage available and will eventually fill it, and you either have to pay for more, or delete older images.

### File Transfer

To use a file transfer service you upload the files to a web site and type in the email addresses you want to send them to. Each recipient gets an email with a link to allow them to receive the files. Be kind to your judge and zip all the entries into a single file which they can then unzip into a folder on their computer. Modern computers include the ability to zip and unzip files, you don’t need to pay for WinZip to do it.

[WeSendIt](#) allows you to send up to 5GB to up to 15 people, plenty for a club to send files to a judge. [WeTransfer](#) is similar but with a limit of 2GB, still plenty for the average club competition.

The advantage of file transfer is that it is easy to use, the disadvantage is that the files are deleted from the service once they have been received, so if somebody loses them or you want to send them to another person, you have to upload them again.

### Competition Software

There are many different options for running competitions, some require a one-off purchase whilst others are subscription based. For online competitions, [PhotoEntry](#) is popular with those who have tried it. The subscription is £1 per paid-up member of your club per annum.

[MyPhotoClub](#) is a comprehensive web based solution offering competition support and much more; this is reflected in a higher price of A\$10 per member per annum.

[Success](#) is one of a number of online solutions for photography clubs and federations from Datascribe Limited. The software functionality is being expanded rapidly to help clubs deal with the impact of the coronavirus on their activities. It supports online competitions and judging and is free to use.

Free Film Projection Extended ([FFPx](#)) is not free, it's £75 but offers a very comprehensive range of competitions including multiple judges and member voting.

DiCentra is well known to many clubs and works well online provided you follow the guide lines here <https://wilburimaging.com/wifaqs/FAQ%2012%20Zoom.pdf> Some people report DiCentra becoming "unresponsive" to keyboard presses when using zoom but this is almost always caused by the operator having "clicked" on the Zoom window, so the keyboard presses are going to Zoom not DiCentra. It all gets much easier if you can connect a second screen and tell DiCentra the second screen is a projector, then share that screen using Zoom or other platforms.

## Online Meetings

There are many ways clubs can continue to meet online rather than face-to-face. This can really help keep the club spirit alive and give people an enjoyable evening at a time when they can't go out to meet people. Encourage participants to mute their microphone until they actually need to speak! Most platforms include echo cancellation but it can make the audio unclear, if lots of people in a meeting use loudspeakers it can be quite unpleasant so encourage the use of headphones if this is a problem. Unfortunately inexpensive USB and Bluetooth (wireless) headsets for computers are currently in short supply, but any pair of ear buds with an appropriate jack plug on them can be used with most computers.

Most laptops have a microphone, speakers and web cam built in but if you use a tower or desktop PC you will need to add a microphone, headphones and if you want people to see you, a web cam. There will be jack sockets (often at the back of the computer) to allow you to connect headphones and a microphone. Headphones go in the green socket, a microphone in the pink socket and a web cam needs a USB socket. Webcams often include a microphone, which can simplify things. Some headsets also connect by USB whilst others use Bluetooth.

Here are some of the platforms you might use for meetings, there are many others.

### Skype

One of the oldest internet based communication systems.

#### Advantages

- Free and easy to use for small meetings with a maximum of 50 participants
- It's been around a long time so many people already have an account
- Participants can share video with a web cam or share their screen.

#### Disadvantages

- You need to install software on your computer or an app on your phone to get the best experience, although you can use it in a web browser.
- You can't set up a meeting in advance and send people a "one click link" to join the meeting.
- Everybody joining the meeting needs a Skype account.

### Zoom

A meeting system which makes it easy for people to join a meeting.

#### Advantages

- You can use a free account to hold a meeting of up to 100 people for up to 40 minutes. If you want longer, have a 10 minute "comfort break" for people followed by another 40 minute meeting. This will be sufficient for many club needs.
- Only the person setting up the meeting needs a Zoom account. Other people can be invited by email and just have to click on a link in the email to join the meeting.
- The person holding the meeting can allow people to show video from a web cam or share their screen, ideal for judging and demonstrations of processing techniques.
- You don't need any software, just a web browser on your computer, but you will need to install the Zoom app if you want to use your phone or tablet to join a meeting.
- There's a new "Professional Audio" mode which gives better quality sound if you are showing A/V presentations.

## Disadvantages

- Although you can do a lot with a free account, if you want meetings longer than 40 minutes or more than 100 people you need to pay a subscription, these start at £12/month for each person who wants to host a meeting.
- There are a few settings to think about before hosting your first meeting, the person running the meeting needs to think about it beforehand, there are notes below to guide them through the process.

## How to Use Zoom

There has been a lot of publicity about poor security and bad experiences in Zoom but almost all the problems have been caused by people sharing a link to a meeting on the open internet, which means anybody can join the meeting. This will inevitably let the bad guys into your meeting and is true whatever video conference software you use. There were a couple of serious security flaws in Zoom but these have been fixed, so it's secure enough for a camera club meeting provided you take care using it.

1. When setting up the meeting, make sure it has a password and that the "waiting room" is enabled. These are now the default settings, don't change them.
2. Let Zoom create a new link for each meeting, don't re-use them and never use your "personal link".
3. It makes it easy for people to join if you use a link to the meeting which includes the password, but only send the link to your club members, by email or in a private Facebook group, not on the open internet. Tell your members NOT to share the link with anyone else.
4. If your meeting is for a competition, set it up so people's microphones are muted when they join or there will be a lot of background noise.
5. Send the images to the judge in advance, in your usual "projector" quality using one of the file transfer or sharing services described above. They can then view and judge the images in advance of the meeting, in the usual quality, not the lower quality they may see using video conferencing.
6. When you start the meeting, people wanting to join will be kept in a virtual waiting room until the organiser admits them. This can allow the organisers to welcome the judge and check everything is working before letting everyone else join. Tell your members to use their proper name, not a joke name, so you can see who you are admitting to the meeting.
7. Once everyone you are expecting has joined the meeting, consider locking it. That way others can't join part way through.
8. You can set Zoom to only allow verified users to join. These are people who have signed in to Zoom with the email address you sent the meeting invitation to. But this removes one of the big advantages of Zoom, that the participants don't all need to sign in to Zoom...
9. Think in advance about the roles in the meeting. You may have one person showing the pictures using competition software, another judging and perhaps somebody making the introductions and giving a vote of thanks etc. The person running the Zoom meeting should NOT be one of these people. It is best if the Zoom meeting organiser can concentrate on letting people in (or not) from the waiting room, muting people if they are talking whilst the judge is speaking, contacting people having trouble hearing what's being said and so on. This leaves the people showing the images and doing the judging free to concentrate on those tasks.
10. If you have trouble with sound, there is a little "up arrow" ^ next to the mute / unmute button in the bottom left of the screen. This allows you to tell Zoom which input on your

computer to use for the microphone and which output to send the audio to. There is also a simple “test speakers and microphone” option. Video is less often a problem because most people only have one web camera connected to their computer so you don’t have to tell Zoom which one to use!

11. Use Zoom full screen (control in the top right corner). There are two main views, “Gallery View” which shows many people on screen at once; depending on the size of your screen and number of people in the meeting, you may not see all of them without scrolling. “Speaker View” shows you the person speaking in a large window and other people in a strip of smaller images.
12. When sharing your screen to show images or competition software, check in advance which settings work. You can either share one application (such as DiCentra, Lightroom etc) or your screen. Some applications work very nicely if you share them, others such as DiCentra do not and you have to share your whole screen then launch the competition. Make sure you don’t have anything personal open on your desktop first!
13. If any of the key people involved have not previously used Zoom, have a rehearsal in advance. Make sure everyone is sitting where they will sit for the meeting, and using the equipment they will use. This will allow you to check their broadband is up to it and their audio is working. Some software such as DiCentra is particular about the screen resolution and image size, if you use a computer with a very high resolution screen to show images at a much lower “projector friendly” resolution, they may be rather small on participants’ screens when shared. This can be easily remedied but it’s best to find out before the meeting starts.
14. You can type messages to everyone or a specific person in the meeting, which can be handy for communicating without interrupting the speaker.
15. You can vote in Zoom, but only from a list of 10 items. If you want to hold a vote for “best image” and there are many images, you will need to find another way of doing it.

## Online Exhibitions

There are various options for holding online exhibitions, the author has experience with the following two

### [UK Club Photography Gallery from Datascribe](#)

This is being rapidly developed and has been used by the Photographic Association of Great Britain. Whilst it is being developed it is available for UK clubs to use free of charge.

<https://ukcpg.co.uk/main.php>

### [Virtual Galleries from Kunstmatrix](#)

This is a more sophisticated solution but at a price, a regular subscription is €25 / month for 250 artworks.

<https://www.kunstmatrix.com/en>

Good luck and enjoy your online meetings!

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Version 2, added PhotoEntry.

Version 3 added details of other competition software and benefits of remote judging.

Version 4 Substantial update with additional advice on internet connections and use of Zoom.

Version 5 updated with new features in Zoom and a new section about online exhibitions.

[www.brun.co.uk](http://www.brun.co.uk)