

Playing our murder mystery games online

Our murder mystery games are normally played face-to-face, with everyone in the same space. That hasn't been possible during the coronavirus lockdown, and we have been learning how to play our murder mystery games online.

The three key differences are: setting up your video chat, making announcements, and handling the game mechanics.

Video chat

Whichever video chat system you choose (Zoom, MS Teams, Discord, etc) it needs three key features:

- It needs to cope with the number of players and GMs all in one room together (mainly for the briefing and debriefing). Some systems may have a maximum size of 10.
- You also need smaller rooms (or channels) alongside, for people to talk in small groups.
- It needs to allow people to be present for about three hours. (Most do, but the free version of Zoom only allows group calls for 40 minutes max.)

Video chat tips:

- Arrange a test beforehand to make sure it works with everyone simultaneously.
- If your video chat system allows it, get everyone to change their screen name to their character name.
- Set up an “out of character” room for everyone to congregate in before the game and where you will deliver the briefing and debriefing.

Announcements

One difficulty of online play is that it's hard to make announcements during the game as players can be in lots of different spaces.

Some ideas:

- Some systems allow you to send updates and messages to all the players. This is probably simplest.
- If you've got a small game and you're using something like Google Hangouts, it's easy to drop into each room/channel and paste the announcement into the chat window.

Rules briefing: Don't forget to do a full rules briefing at the start, including how things like abilities and items and locations will work online. Even though you may have explained in advance how these things will work, you can guarantee that someone won't have read that or will have forgotten what you told them.

Game mechanics

Our games include special abilities, items that move from character to character, and (occasionally) specific game locations. We've designed the games to be played face-to-face, and these aspects of our games need some thinking about when playing online.

Abilities: We recommend that players print out their abilities, Secret and Clue. That way they can hold them up to their webcam when they need to either use an ability or reveal their Secret/Clue.

Items and money: Tracking money and items as they move between players can be complicated—we recommend a dedicated co-host whose only job is to track those, by keeping and updating a list of who currently has what.

We have also used Google Drive/OneDrive folders with items and money as image files, but that isn't as foolproof as simply having a dedicated co-host.

Other resources

[Our blog:](#) Our blog includes stories from our customers about their online parties using various different games of ours (posted under the tag “[lockdown stories](#)”)

[Our tips for running an online game:](#) Our more detailed tips for running our games online.

[Hints and tips:](#) Our hints and tips page includes numerous tips for hosting our games.

[Facebook:](#) We post any new stories or tips on our Facebook page.

