

# MANAGING MEETINGS

IN SECOND LIFE®

*The Protocol Guide*



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## INTRODUCTION

This guide was developed out of a chance remark in Twitter between @shirleyearley and @virtualewit (also known as Shirley/Rosie and Pauline/Liz – no honestly, we really don't have identity problems!).

The purpose of it was to create something that could be referred to when setting up meetings in *Second Life*.

In many ways setting up a meeting in *Second Life* is pretty similar to organising one in real life. If there are just two or three participants then a phone call, text, email or tweet will probably suffice but if you are planning on something a bit larger scale than it will require a bit more thought and organisation. Somehow the idea of turning up at a venue with 50 colleagues and announcing that you'd like to have a conference there and then doesn't quite work – *Second Life* or real life!

When we started planning this we considered who we were pitching it at and, although there will be some differences in sectors, we decided that it should be as useful to both the education and the business user.

Pick and choose which bits you think apply to you and do let us know what we missed – that can go into the next edition!

And a special thank you to Eirik Merlin (in SL) for the material on setting up voice and audio 😊

*Shirley/Rosie/shirleyearley & Pauline/Liz/virtualewit*



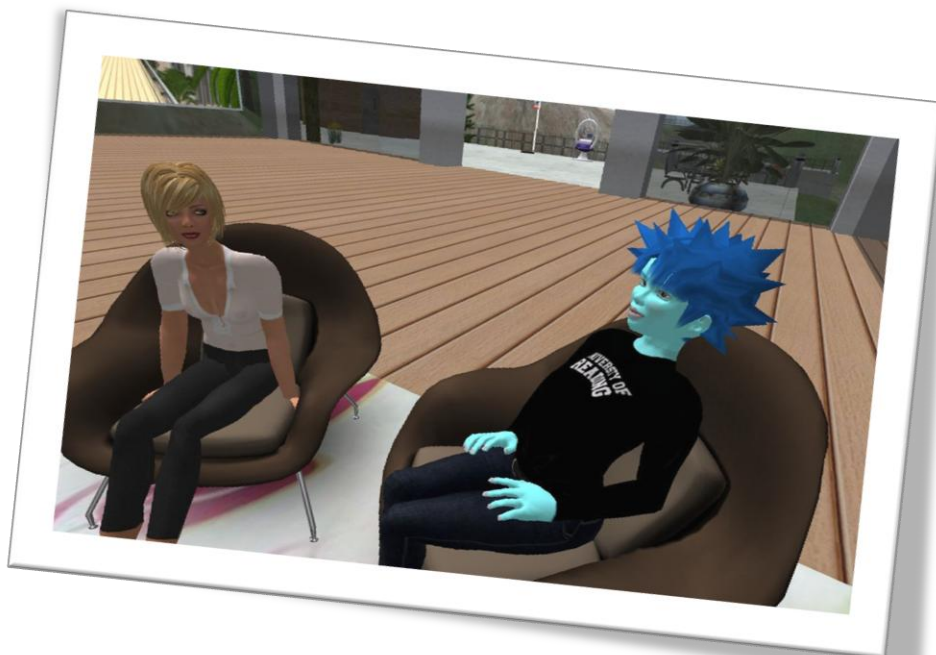
## QUICK CHECKLIST

OK, so you've decided to go down the virtual meeting route – think of all the travelling time you've saved let alone the cost of travel both financially and in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> output. Ah, that makes you feel good.

Now that you've given yourself a pat on the back what do you need to consider?

- What is the purpose of the meeting?
- Who are you inviting?
- How many people are you asking?
- Where do you plan to hold it? Have you got space in-world or do you need to beg, borrow or steal some?
- When do you plan to hold it? Don't forget different time zones!
- What is the dress code? Bikinis? Business suits? Jeans and a t-shirt?
- Is it acceptable to turn up as a cat?
- Do all your delegates have *Second Life* accounts and know how to get around? If not, how are you going to deal with that?
- Have you dealt with the technical aspects of meeting in a virtual space?
- Are you going to record the meeting and if so, how?
- Have you decided on a communication channel – voice, text? Can all delegates support it?
- Do you need any equipment? Showing slides in-world, streaming media etc. Do you have access to the parcel media stream?
- Do you need someone to help you run the meeting, herd lost delegates etc?
- Do you still want to do this?

Yes, of course you do! Just go through this book, check off the items and have a great meeting!



## PURPOSE

Have you got a clear idea about why you are holding the meeting? The purpose of the meeting can affect where you hold it and the resources that you need.

If the whole point is to have a quick chat and catch up about something then you can be a bit more flexible than if you plan to present information to a large group of people. Although a lot of *Second Life* is open you can't just turn up with a large group of people anywhere that takes your fancy. All of the land in *Second Life* that you see is owned by someone – if you don't have rights to use that land then it is polite to ask! You wouldn't just pitch up in someone else's home/office in real life – the same standards apply in *Second Life*.

If you need to collaborate on something then that might also affect where you meet. If you want to build then you'll need space where you have the rights to do this.

## PEOPLE

It isn't going to be much of a meeting if you haven't got any people involved but neither will it be any good if the people who are involved aren't up to speed with what you are doing so check the points below and see if you've covered everything.

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### SECOND LIFE ACCOUNT

Do they already have a *Second Life* account? If not you'll need to let them know about how to create one. They may also need to know how to download the client software and install it on their computer. You'll also want to check that they have actually managed to login to *Second Life*!

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### INDUCTION

If they are new to *Second Life* they will also need some level of induction depending on what you will be doing with them. This may be as simple as how to move about and communicate or they may need more advanced skills if you are going to be creating objects in world.

You could also check that they understand the basic terminology of *Second Life* – you may want to give them a brief checklist covering things like teleporting (TP) and creating landmarks (LMs).

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### NAMES

If you already know the people you are meeting with in real life then you'll need their avatar names to match up. It is a bit disconcerting when your friendship request is turned down by the meeting organiser because they didn't know who you really were!

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### NUMBERS

If it is your first meeting that you have organised in world then smaller might be easier! If the number of people is quite high then you may also want to consider having one or more helpers who can organise them and help anyone who gets lost. There are other technical issues with numbers which will be addressed in the Place section.

Think about what you will do if things go wrong.

- Make sure that participants know the name of the avatar who is organising, and that they can IM him/her. Likewise make sure the organiser knows the names of participants' avatars and is able to offer than teleports.
- If more than a small number of participants think about getting a helper, who will be able to help participants who are lost or the like, make sure the participants know the name of him, and that he knows all their contact details.
- Do you want to use technology to control who is allowed to speak? There are various scripts available (packaged in different ways) that can allow participants to request permission to "speak".
- If lots of avatars are using chat then it can become really confusing and remember not everyone sees the conversation in quite the same order, and it is wiser people know to say "@Liz I agree"; rather than just "I agree" which may result in agreeing to the unagreeable.



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## DRESS CODE

This may or may not apply to your meeting so use or ignore as appropriate.

In some cases it may not matter how you turn up to a meeting – keep your bikini on or come wearing your cardboard box. However, there are other meetings where it is important to dress your avatar appropriately. If your fellow attendees are all wearing business dress then you might look out of place in a swimsuit. If in doubt check and err on the side of caution.



It is useful to have a range of clothes in your avatar's inventory and include some business dress amongst this. Shirley had someone pitch up to an event with a rotund avatar – apparently just trying to provoke, but what if the meeting was about anorexia? Pauline once had a 30 minute conversation with a parrot from Melbourne. There are some scenarios where having a strange avatar is OK but there are others where it could be deemed inappropriate.

If attire/appearance is important then make sure that you let your fellow attendees know the dress code long enough before the meeting so that they can get themselves appropriately kitted out.

And that leads us neatly into...

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## WARDROBE MALFUNCTION! HELP!

Another thing to be aware of is 'wardrobe malfunction' where you change your clothes and end up with a naked avatar! Oops! There are a couple of ways that you can make changing outfits easy in *Second Life*:

Create folders, clearly labelled, with full outfits. If you have prim hair and a custom skin/shape make sure there are copies of these in the folder. Include all the items that you want to wear. To change into this outfit drag the folder from your inventory onto your avatar and, as if by magic, your avatar will be wearing the new outfit.

You can only wear one top, skirt etc at a time so if you select an item from your inventory, right click it and choose 'wear' it will replace the item you already have on. By doing this you can change your clothes without every getting naked. If only real life was as simple!

If you have got a meeting coming up then it might be worth considering getting 'dressed' some time before the meeting so that if something does go wrong you have time to sort it before the meeting!

As well as your clothes check for attachments. Someone once turned up to a meeting carrying a sheep because of a challenge to take Ba-Ba places – and she forgot to detach it when she logged out!



## PLACE

Place matters. Especially if your gathering is on the larger size there will be more things that you need to take into consideration. Check out the points below and make sure you have them covered.

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### NUMBERS

The different types of island (region or sim) can hold different numbers of people. A full region can hold up to 100 avatars; a Homestead up to 20. Openspace regions are not suitable for meetings.

Bear in mind these are maximums – the land owner can reduce the maximum number and in addition if there are a lot of high resolution textures and/or scripts this will reduce the number of avatars you can get in and still be able to function.

When you reach the limits of the sim you will find that the space can get very laggy so better not to try and squeeze in too many.

If you are sharing space on an island with other users remember to take into account that other users may be online so that the max numbers for the island may not be as high as you think. If other users are present it may also be that you can't get all of your attendees into the island in the max number has been reached.

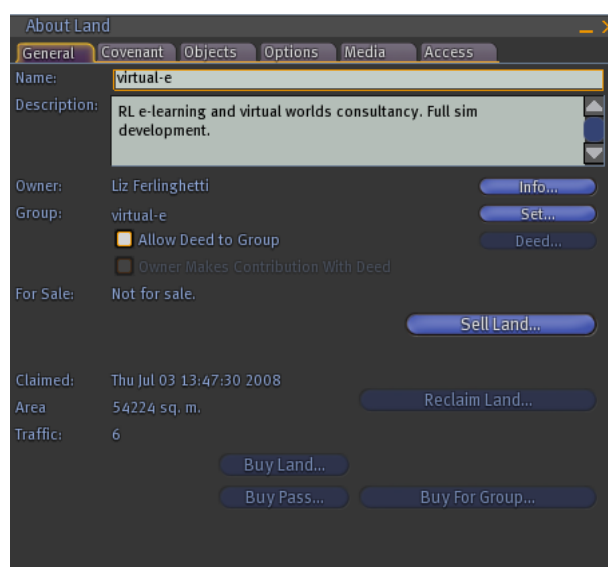
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### SPACE

How much space do you need for your meeting? Do you need private space where you can't be overheard or is a more public place OK?

Do you have your own land that you can use for the meeting or perhaps access to land that belongs to your organisation?

Is the land owner happy with you holding the meeting on their land? Just like in real life you can't generally just turn up and hold a meeting anywhere you like. If you or your organisation doesn't own land then you either need to buy/rent some space or borrow from another landowner. There are plenty of spaces which could be deemed public and the owners would be unlikely to be unhappy if you and one or two others meet up. However, once your group starts to get a bit bigger and/or you need to be able to rez things like a screen then you do need to use space that you have permission to use. If you click the 'About Land' in the World menu you'll get a dialog box which tells you who the owner of the land is. You can then contact them and request permission to use their land.



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### PERMISSIONS

Because the land owner can set a range of permissions it is important to check what these are before you hold your meeting. Some of the permissions that could affect you could include:

- Number of avatars on the land
- Ability to be able to build objects (could stop you rezzing a screen from your inventory)
- Ability to run scripts
- Ability to use voice (could restrict you to using text or choosing an alternative like Skype)
- Access only allowed to group members (even if you are a member are all the other attendees?)
- Ability to use group owned objects on the land

## INVITATIONS

So you've checked out the people and the place and now you're ready to send out the invitations. Guess what? Another few things for you to check!

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### TIME

Time zones – yep, a lot of virtual meetings are going to involve people from different places so be careful of saying 'we'll meet at 3pm' without qualifying 3pm where. Is that 3pm where you are, 3pm *Second Life* time (SLT - same as Pacific time) or 3pm somewhere else? Unless you are specific people will may well assume it is 3pm their time or 3pm SLT.

If you are not use to working across time zones then these really do need to be considered, problems that often occur:

- Meeting times that are during the working day for some are in the middle night for other people;
- Some people like to work at different times, or have recurring commitments;
- Monday evening in Europe is Tuesday morning in Australia;
- The date daylight saving starts is not the same around the world (although consistent in the EU) and the clocks are altered the other way in the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere.
- If you fix a meeting in SLT (the *Second Life* time zone) make sure participants know how to relate it to their own time zones (on the day it refers to!)
- And don't forget the date – at any point in time there will be a lot of people in the world who are operating on a different day to you – either they are already into tomorrow or they haven't yet arrived at today!
- Oh and in Europe 03/02/11 is the same date as 02/03/11 in America, so use the name of the month, otherwise some body may be very early or late.

Logistically issues are much the same as any conference call.

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### LOCATION

Don't just say which region it is being held in – each region is 65,000 m2 so it can take a while to find out where you should be (even worse if the meeting is being held in a skybox up at 2,000 metres up!) Send delegates a landmark and/or a SLurl (*Second Life* URL) and check that the landing area is clear. It is a good idea to check the co-ordinates on a landmark, occasionally SL can take you to the right place but at the wrong height and you'll end up under the floor – this can be a bit disconcerting to new users.

Also make sure you or an assistant is ready to teleport over any people who haven't managed to get there by other means.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If dress code is important then remember to confirm this on the invitation so that attendees are pre-warned.

If you are going to be going to record the meeting then you must let people know and ensure they are happy with this before you go ahead. Also let them know if you will be supplying a transcript/minutes after the meeting.

## SOME TECHIE STUFF!

A few more technical aspects you might need to consider or, in some cases, get someone else to deal with.

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### ACCESS PERMISSIONS

If the land that you are using is restricted to group access then do you need to get people added to the group? Do you have the rights to do that or do you need to get someone else to do it for you? These things can take time and need to be dealt with in plenty of time before the meeting.

Double check the SL location is able to support the number of people that you have invited, plus any extras they may bring with them

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### SL DOWNTIME

Check planned down time against planned meeting time. You can find information about the current state of the Grid at <http://status.secondlifegrid.net/> This page will tell you if there are current problems and you can also see from the calendar when there are planned outages. You can also get updates by following @SLGridStatus on Twitter

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### SETTING UP MEDIA

Are you going to show slides? Streaming media? Video? Have you got access to the parcel media stream? Can you work it? Can you work it while trying to run the meeting? If not you may need some help!

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### VOICE

Think about what technologies you are going to use and establish that all participants can access them, e.g.:

- Voice
- Streaming media
- Make sure that they know a headset is a good thing to have – especially in a shared office

What will you do if it doesn't work for all participants? Voice does not work at Shirley's university; if she wants to speak she has to be at home.

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### MAKING YOURSELF HEARD

There are of course plenty of occasions when the only common mode of communication you have with other SL residents is text chat, either open or private. You may encounter significant resistance from some participants in an in-world meeting to the use of audio communication techniques and this can be for a number of reasons, none of which would be obvious in a real-world scenario.

For example, some residents may find that using an audio communication method negatively impacts personal boundaries between their real world and *Second Life* personas - that it runs counter to immersiveness in the virtual environment, by seeming to merge an aspect of RL with SL. Some individuals may have avatars which do not match their RL genders and thus their RL voices may be incongruous, or require the use of voice-changing devices which they may or may not have access to, or feel are appropriate.

Thus you should remain sensitive to the needs of other participants as to whether or not audio methods are appropriate. Circulate a group message or notecard to participants beforehand to establish if audio is a suitable medium.

This being said, for a lot of applications, you need audio.

Whatever audio system you use, be prepared beforehand. Make sure you have a working headset and most of all, make sure that your loudspeakers are muted. Internet audio techniques suffer from significant latency and sound takes time to emerge at the other end. Thus there is the potential for serious and disruptive echoes if feedback occurs: a headset is mandatory.

The obvious mode, since it has become available, is SL Voice. However, there are some significant problems associated with this technology. It can be unreliable - sometimes severely so. There are several setting options, some of which can affect audibility, such as distance of other speakers from the listener. There are also security issues that may be compromised by SL Voice.

A better technique, then, may be to use an external VOIP technology, and here Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)) is the obvious choice as it is free and widespread. Be sure to establish that participants have Skype beforehand or help them in obtaining and installing it if not. Be sure to establish the Skype Names of participants in advance.

There are some techniques you can use to improve audio quality on Skype calls. Many of the most useful tips are documented here:

[http://www.bigbruin.com/2007/skypetip\\_1](http://www.bigbruin.com/2007/skypetip_1)

Another tip is to delete the "shared.xml" file in the Skype folder:

(from <http://www.ghacks.net/2008/08/02/improve-skype-sound-quality/>)

"If you are experiencing a bad sound quality in the voice over IP software skype you might want to try the following. This can be a quite complex problem but one thing that can really do the trick is to delete the file shared.xml which contains host cache information which is basically a list of Skype super-nodes and host pairs that are needed to run Skype properly.

"It can happen that the information stored in the shared.xml file is not optimal for the connection which can have a direct impact on sound quality of the conversation. Imaging being routed over half the world to call a friend who is living two blocks away from your location.

"Deleting the file shared.xml forces Skype to rebuild that list during the next startup. You need to close Skype first and then head over to the Documents and Settings \Username \Application Data \Skype folder in which the shared.xml file can be found.

"Just delete that file and restart Skype. Skype will automatically create a new file with that name in the very same directory. That's still no guarantee that the Skype sound quality will be any better but it

offers a good chance if other reasons like blocked ports, p2p background processes and the like are not reducing the quality."

Another common cause of aggravation with Skype is that people have it open on 2 machines and that can cause really strange problems.

In addition, you may find that the member added last to the call experiences poorer audio quality. Why this should be is not entirely clear, but one way round it appears to be to call the entire group at the same time. If you have the latest version of Skype (Windows at least), there is an easy way of doing this. Start the call by adding people as they become available and you will see the call members displayed in the window with their current call status. Above it is a green tab which lists all the names involved. Once you have everyone in the call, click the red button bottom left of the pane to end the call and then immediately /right-/click on the green tab. Choose the first option in the pop-up menu, "Call Group". This will call everyone back simultaneously.

Try to minimise the number of other applications running at the same time. The big CPU and bandwidth hog is, of course, the Viewer itself and you can reduce the data it has to download by reducing your view distance in Preferences, for example. Quit unnecessary applications where possible so that you have Skype, the Viewer and as few other apps running simultaneously as possible.

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## AUDIO AND VIDEO PRESENTATIONS

If you need presentation audio to be heard by a large number of people, the most effective solution is to use a streaming audio server.

You can set the parcel music URL to the address of the server and anyone can hear the content simply by pressing Play in the Viewer while they are on the parcel. You can also supply the URL (in a slightly different form) to people who are not able to visit the location in-world so they can listen in a conventional internet audio player such as Winamp or iTunes.

On the face of it, presenting a pre-prepared video is easy. Just put up a media player screen on the parcel in-world and set the video URL to point at the material on a web server somewhere. Visitors to the parcel can click Play on the movie section of the Viewer and watch the video.

This is quite true, but the problem is that the viewing of the material by different visitors is not synchronised: each gets their own feed, which starts when they click Play. The only way to arrange a synchronised feed is to use a video streaming server in the same way as would be done for audio. The most common server for this application is Apple's QuickTime Streaming Server (QSS), described here:

<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/streamingserver/>

Contact one of the many streaming server providers to rent audio and video servers. These can be rented by the week or month or even for a specific event.

## AND FINALLY - CHECK, CHECK AND CHECK AGAIN

It is useful to have an alternative avatar so that you can log in and check that everything works as you expect. Can you access the land, interact with anything required? It is almost impossible to check using the avatar which set everything up as they will automatically have the right permissions so get yourself an alt and make them go and check it all.

If it is going to be a big meeting (so lots of people will see if it doesn't work properly!) then it is a good idea to get one or more of your colleagues to go through everything and see if it makes sense to them and check that they can access what they need to. Often someone else will see the things you might have missed.

If it is really important, like the launch of a corporate site – consider getting a similar number of your contacts to turn up for a rehearsal, so you avoid mistakes like having a fireworks display where the participants can't see them.

## AND ENJOY IT!

In the process of setting up a virtual meeting, particularly for the first time, it is important to remember that this is new technology and we are all still learning. Don't be too hard on yourself if things go wrong; just keep a note for the next time. Like anything else, it won't get better unless you practice!

