Staying Connected in a Digital World

Quick Guide for Seniors

Don't worry if this is new. **Small steps and practice make it easier!** Mistakes are okay and part of learning. With practice, these tech skills will feel more natural and **less intimidating.**

Devices: Smartphones, Tablets & Computers

Before diving in, it helps to know which device is which — and what each one is best for. All three can connect you to people and information; they just work in different ways.

- **Smartphone (Mobile Phone):** A small hand-held phone with a touch screen. Best for quick tasks on the go: making calls, texting, quick emails, maps, taking snapshots, urgent communication. It fits in your pocket, so it's always with you. *Limitations:* smaller screen and keyboard can be harder for long reading or typing.
- **Tablet:** A medium-sized device (e.g. iPad or Android tablet) with a bigger screen. Good for reading e-books, browsing the web, watching videos, or video calls (Zoom). Easier on the eyes than a phone, but less portable (usually needs a bag).
- **Computer (Laptop/Desktop):** A device with a large screen and keyboard. Best for longer tasks like writing emails, managing documents, online shopping or bill paying, or anything that benefits from a big screen. If a task is tricky on your phone's small screen, you can do it more comfortably on a computer.

Device	Best For	Keep in Mind
📱 Smartphone	Calls, texting, quick photos, maps — fits in your pocket	Small screen; harder to type long messages
💻 Tablet (iPad)	Reading, web browsing, video calls (Zoom) — easier on the eyes	Less portable; usually needs a bag
🖥️ Computer	Writing emails, documents, online shopping or bill paying	Not pocket-sized; best at a desk or table

Basic Device Skills (Touchscreen & Settings)

Your phone or tablet responds to touch. Here are the most important gestures and settings to know — start with these and you will feel confident quickly.

Touchscreen Gestures

Your screen responds to light finger touches — no need to press hard. Three gestures will get you through almost everything:

- **Tap:** One quick, light touch — selects items, opens apps, presses buttons.
- **Swipe:** Slide your finger across the screen — scrolls up/down or moves between screens.
- **Pinch to Zoom:** Place two fingers on the screen and spread them apart to zoom in; pinch them together to zoom out.
- Tip: If something isn't responding, try a lighter, faster tap instead of pressing harder.

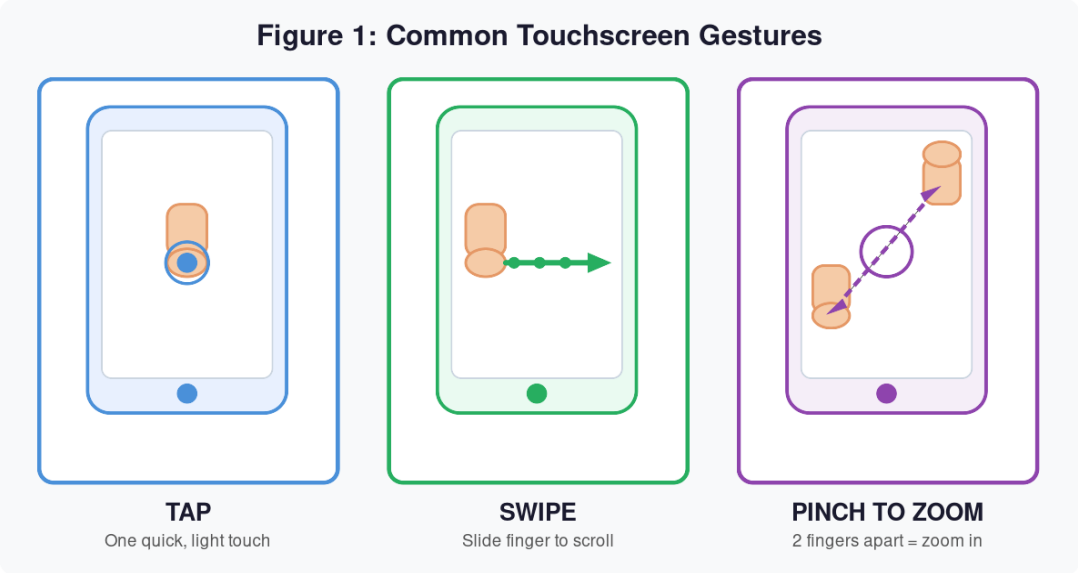

Figure 1: Tap, Swipe, and Pinch-to-Zoom gestures

Screen Brightness

Adjust your screen's brightness for comfortable reading and to save battery life.

- **How:** Open Quick Settings (swipe down from the top of your screen, or up from the bottom) and look for the brightness slider (a sun ☼ icon). Slide it up to brighten or down to dim.
- Indoors, about 50% brightness is often fine. Outdoors you may need it higher.

Volume & Silent Mode

Use the side volume buttons to control sound. Press them during a call to adjust call volume; press when not in a call to adjust the ringtone volume.

- **iPhone:** There is a small physical silent switch on the left side of your iPhone. Flip it to silence all sounds instantly.

- 🤖 **Android:** Use the volume buttons or swipe down to open Quick Settings and tap 'Do Not Disturb' for a quiet mode.
- Tip: Don't forget to turn the ringer back on after quiet settings — it's easy to miss calls when the phone is still silenced.

Screen Rotation

Your phone or tablet can display content upright (portrait) or sideways (landscape). If your screen rotates unexpectedly when you tilt your device, use Orientation Lock to keep it in place.

- 🍎 **iPhone:** Swipe down from the top-right corner to open Control Center. Tap the lock icon (🔒 with a circular arrow) to turn Orientation Lock on or off.
- 🤖 **Android:** Swipe down from the top of the screen to open Quick Settings. Tap 'Auto-rotate' or 'Portrait' to toggle rotation lock.

Flashlight

Smartphones double as a flashlight using the camera flash. To turn it on or off, open Quick Settings and tap the flashlight icon (📣).

- Tip: Remember to turn it off when done — the flashlight drains your battery if left on.

Charging Your Device

Keep your device charged so it's ready when you need it. Plug it in regularly — especially before long activities like video calls, which use more battery.

- Find the charging port (the small slot on the bottom or side of your device) and insert the charger cable firmly.
- It is safe to leave most modern devices plugged in overnight.

Staying in Touch: Calls, Contacts & Texts

Your phone's most powerful feature is staying connected with the people who matter to you. These three skills — calls, contacts, and texts — cover the basics.

Phone Calls

To make a call, open the Phone app (phone icon) and dial the number or choose a saved contact, then tap the call (☎) button.

- **To answer:** Tap Answer or slide the phone icon when it rings.

- **To silence without hanging up:** Press a volume or power button — this silences the ring without ending the call.
- **Speakerphone:** Tap the speaker icon during a call to hear the caller out loud, so you don't have to hold the phone to your ear.
- **To hang up:** Tap End Call (the red button).

Contacts

Save important names and numbers in your Contacts so you don't have to remember or retype them each time.

- Open the Contacts app and look for a '+' or 'Add Contact' button.
- Enter the person's name and phone number, then save.
- Tip: Keep key contacts updated — family, friends, doctor, neighbors — so they're easy to find in a hurry.

Text Messages (SMS)

Texting lets you send quick written messages (like 'I'm on my way' or 'Happy Birthday!') and even photos — without making a phone call.

- **To send a text:** Open the Messages app (chat bubble icon). Tap the compose/new message button, type the person's name or number, write your message, then press the send arrow (▶).
- **To send a photo:** Tap the camera or attach icon (📎) in the message screen, choose a photo, then send.
- Note: Sending photos requires a data or Wi-Fi connection.

Email Basics

Email is like digital mail — great for longer or formal messages, sharing documents, and receiving important information from doctors or services.

Reading & Replying to Email

Open your email app (like Gmail or Apple Mail) to see your Inbox — a list of messages you've received.

- **To read:** Tap any email to open it. You'll see the sender, subject line, and message body.
- **To reply:** Tap the reply arrow or 'Reply' button inside the email, type your response, and tap Send.

- **To open an attachment:** If an email has a photo or PDF attached, tap it to view it.

Sending Attachments

You can attach photos or documents (called attachments) when writing a new email.

- When composing an email, look for a paperclip icon or 'Insert Photo' option.
- Or: open a photo in your Photos app, tap Share (📎), and choose your email app to start a new message with that photo already attached.

Joining Video Calls (Zoom & Google Meet)

Video calls let you see and hear people remotely — perfect for family chats, virtual events, or telehealth appointments. Someone will send you a meeting link by email or text.

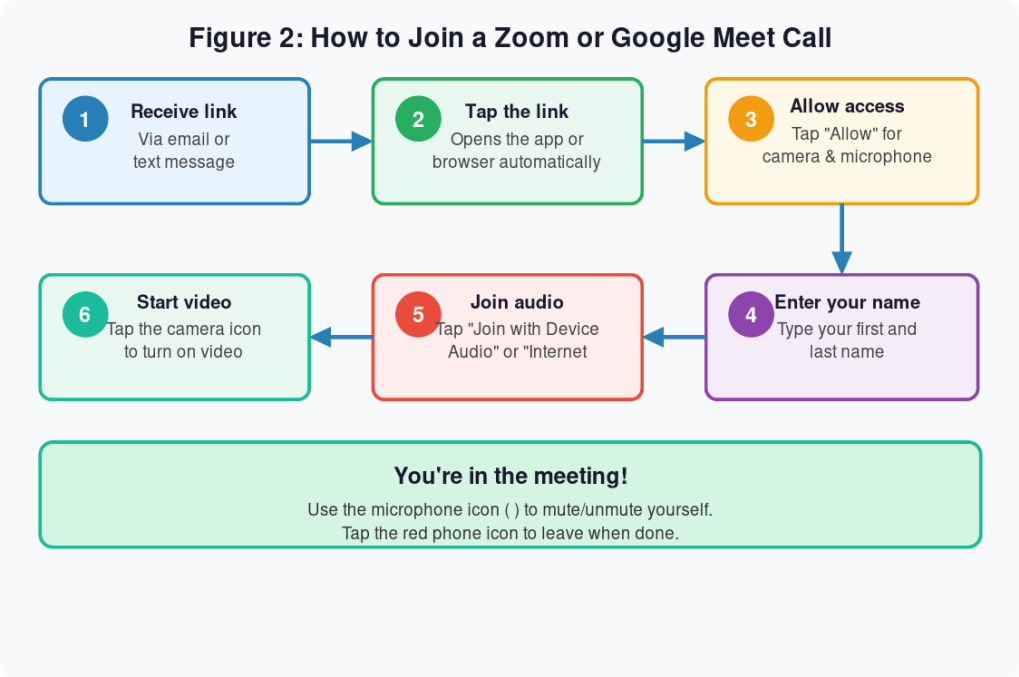

Figure 2: Step-by-step guide to joining a Zoom or Google Meet call

Joining a Meeting

Tap the meeting link when it's time to join. Follow these steps:

1. **Tap the link** in your email or text message.
2. If asked to install the Zoom or Meet app, tap **Install** or **Download**.
3. Allow camera and microphone access — tap **Allow** when the phone asks.
4. Enter your **name** when prompted.

5. Tap **'Join with Device Audio'** or **'Internet Audio'** so you can hear and speak.
6. Tap **'Start Video'** to turn on your camera (optional but nice).

In-Meeting Controls

Use these icons during a call:

Button / Icon	What It Does
Microphone	Tap to mute or unmute yourself. A slash through the icon means you are muted — others cannot hear you. Unmute before you speak.
Camera	Tap to turn your video on or off. A slash means your camera is off. It is fine to leave it off if you prefer.
Red Phone / Leave	Tap the red button (or 'Leave') to exit the call when you are finished.

Video Call Etiquette

- Mute yourself when not speaking — it reduces background noise for everyone.
- Speak clearly and take turns — there can be a slight delay on video calls.
- If you have trouble hearing, turn up your volume or plug in headphones.
- It's okay to join audio-only if you're not comfortable with video.

Safety Essentials (Scams & Privacy)

Staying safe online is just as important as staying connected. Scammers often target seniors by phone, email, and text. Knowing the warning signs can protect you and your family.

Beware of Scams

Be cautious with calls, emails, or texts from people you don't know.

- **Red flags:** strangers asking for money, gift cards, passwords, or personal info (like Social Security or banking info).
- Government agencies (Social Security, IRS, Medicare) will **never** ask for payment or personal info by phone or email out of the blue.
- If someone pressures you or claims a relative is in trouble and needs money — **stop — it's likely a scam.**
- Don't click suspicious links in emails or texts. When in doubt, hang up and check with a trusted family member.

⚠ SCAM WARNING — Stop If You See Any of These
✕ Someone you don't know asks for money, gift cards, or wire transfers
✕ Someone asks for your password, Social Security number, or bank account info
✕ A call or email claims to be from the IRS, Social Security, or Medicare asking for payment
✕ Someone pressures you to act fast or says a loved one is in trouble and needs money now
✕ You receive a suspicious link in a text or email from an unknown sender
When in doubt — hang up or ignore it. It is always okay to check with a trusted family member first.

Blocking Unwanted Calls

You can block nuisance callers and reduce spam calls with just a few taps.

- **iPhone:** Open the Phone app, tap Recents, find the number, tap the (i) icon, and select 'Block this Caller'.
- **Android:** Open the Phone app, tap the number in Recents, tap the three-dot menu or 'Block/Report Spam'.
- You can also register on the national **Do Not Call list** at donotcall.gov to reduce telemarketing calls.
- Best practice: If you don't recognize a number, don't answer. If it's important, they'll leave a voicemail.

"Find My Phone" (Peace-of-Mind Feature)

Modern smartphones can be located if lost using built-in tracking features. If you misplace your phone, you or a family member can make it ring loudly — even if it's on silent — or see its location on a map.

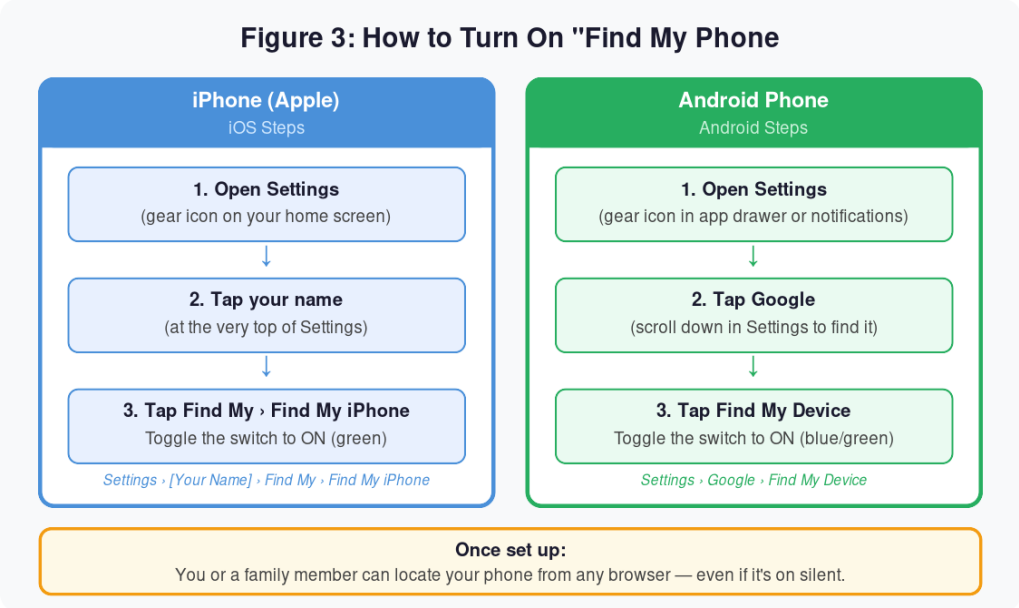

Figure 3: How to enable Find My Phone on iPhone and Android

Setting It Up

- **iPhone:** Go to Settings > [Your Name] > Find My > Find My iPhone — toggle to ON (green).
- **Android:** Go to Settings > Google > Find My Device — toggle to ON.
- These features are usually turned on automatically when you first sign in to your Apple or Google account. It's worth checking to be sure.

How to Use It

- **iPhone:** Visit icloud.com/find on any browser and sign in with your Apple ID.
- **Android:** Visit android.com/find on any browser and sign in with your Google account.
- From there, you can make the phone ring, lock it remotely, or see its location on a map.
- Tip: Keep your account passwords written down in a safe place so you can access these services if needed.
- Easiest fix if you misplaced it at home: have someone call it and listen for the ring or vibration!

Practice at Home: Checklist

Use this checklist to practice your new skills. Check them off as you go — a little practice each day builds real confidence.

- **Adjust Brightness:** Find your screen brightness setting — make the screen brighter, then dimmer.
- **Orientation Lock:** Lock and unlock the screen rotation. Try turning the phone sideways with lock on vs. off.
- **Flashlight:** Turn on your phone's flashlight, then turn it off. Remember how to find it quickly.
- **Volume & Silent Mode:** Use your volume buttons to turn sound up, then down. Mute the phone (silent or vibrate mode), then unmute it.
- **Phone Call:** Call a friend or family member. Try using speakerphone during the call.
- **Contacts:** Add a new contact (or have someone help you) for a family member or friend.
- **Text Message:** Send a text to someone you know — even just 'Hello, I'm learning texting!' If you can, try attaching a photo.
- **Email:** Open an email you've received and reply with a short message. Or compose a new email to say hello.
- **Video Call:** If possible, join a video call with a friend. Practice tapping mute/unmute and camera on/off.

Tip: 'Practice a little each day' — for example, text a family member daily or adjust your brightness in different lighting. With time, these digital skills will become second nature and empower you to stay connected!

Quick Reference: Words to Know

These are common technology words you will see and hear during the session. Each definition is written in plain language — no experience required.

Term	What It Means
SMS	Short for 'Short Message Service' — the technical name for a text message. When someone says 'send me an SMS,' they just mean send a text.
Orientation Lock	A setting that prevents your screen from rotating when you tilt your phone. Turn it on to keep the screen upright; turn it off to let the screen flip sideways automatically.
Speakerphone	A feature that plays the caller's voice through your phone's loudspeaker instead of the small earpiece — so you can hear without holding the phone to your ear.
Voicemail	A recorded message left by a caller when you do not answer the phone — similar to an old-fashioned answering machine. You can listen to voicemails from your Phone app.
Mute	Turning off your microphone so others cannot hear you. In a video call, a muted mic shows a slash (/) through the microphone icon.
Attachment	A file — such as a photo, document, or PDF — that is added to an email or text message and sent along with it. Tap an attachment to open and view it.
Do Not Call List	A free government registry (donotcall.gov) where you can register your phone number to reduce unwanted telemarketing and sales calls.
Inbox	The main folder in your email app where received messages arrive. It is the first screen you see when you open an email app like Gmail or Apple Mail.
Browser	An app used to look up information on the Internet. Common examples are Safari (iPhone), Chrome (Android or computer), and Edge (Windows computer).
Telehealth	A video or phone appointment with a doctor or health provider — no driving required. You connect through a video call or a special link the provider sends you.
Spam	Unwanted messages — usually from strangers or companies — sent to many people at once. Spam can arrive by email, text, or phone call. It is safe to delete or ignore spam.

Ringtone	The sound your phone plays when someone is calling you. You can change your ringtone in your phone's Settings under Sounds.
Quick Settings	A shortcut panel on your phone — usually reached by swiping down from the top of the screen — that gives fast access to Wi-Fi, brightness, flashlight, silent mode, and more.