

Multimedia Conferencing with Google +

What is Google +

Google + is a social media site that enables easy sharing of information and media; it is a direct competitor to social media environments like Facebook. What is nice about Google + is that it offers users considerable control over what information is shared with others.

An exciting feature is the ability to host live multimedia conference sessions with up to ten people in Google +, which opens up a number of interesting possibilities for teaching and learning. For example, Google+ enables the participation of students from off-campus locations in traditional F2F classroom settings, and faculty can schedule online office hours with their students.

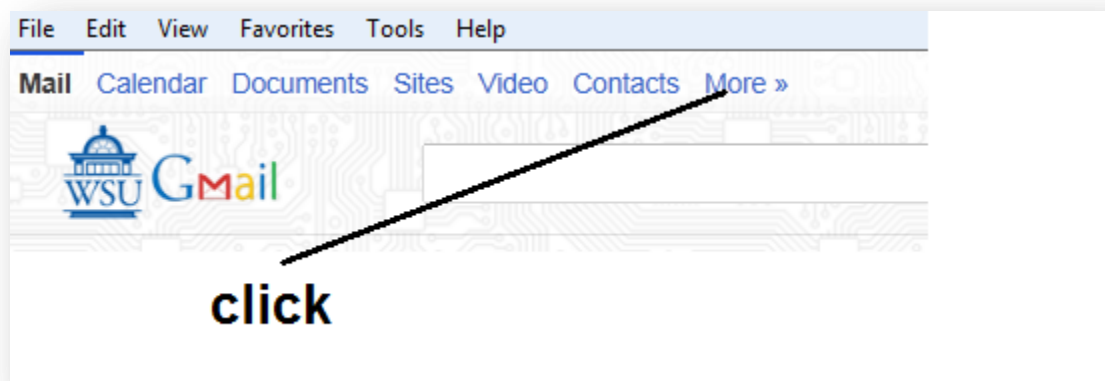
For more information about Google+, visit: <http://plus.google.com>.

Technical Requirements

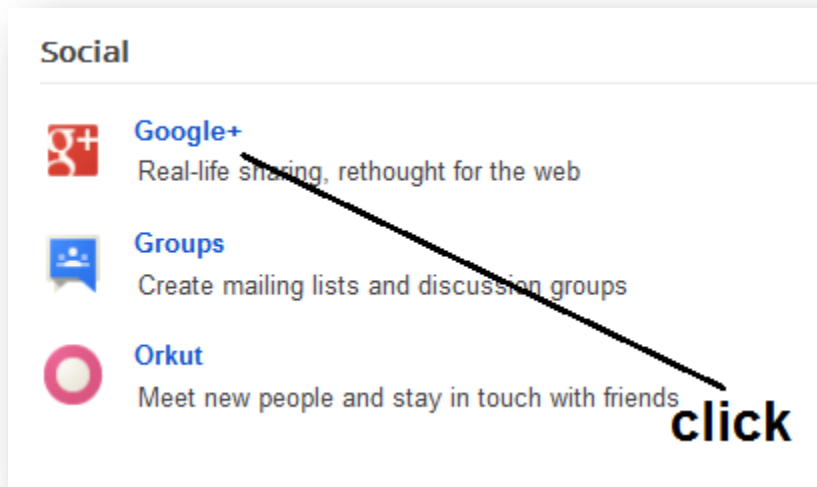
- A free Google Gmail account or a Google Apps educational account (like Worcester State University's).
- A microphone is necessary to participate in a Google + multimedia session. A video camera is optional; Google + supports video, too.

Basic Concepts

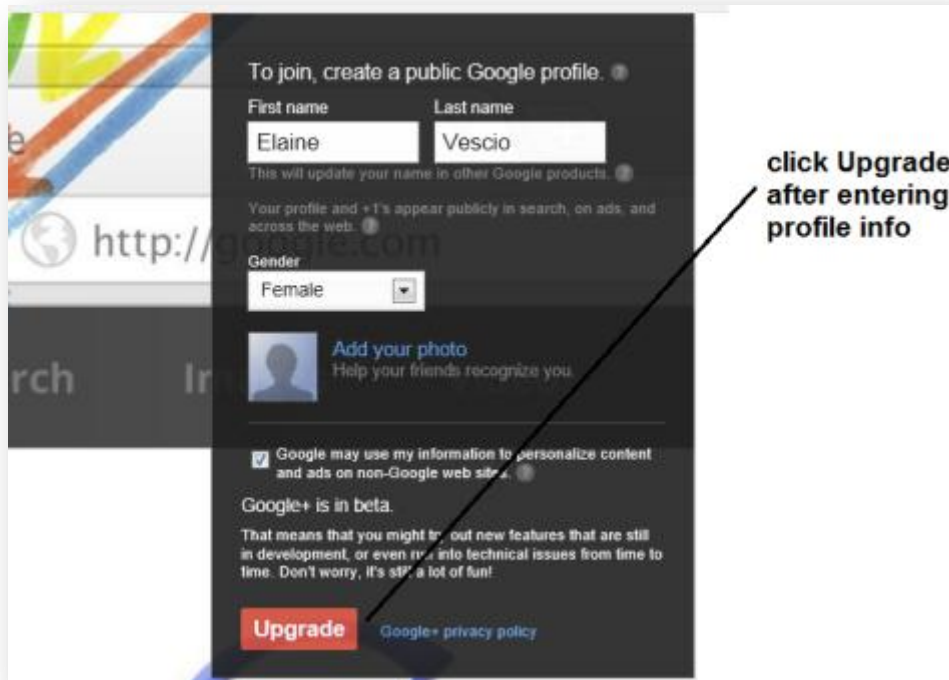
- To access your Google + account, log into your WSU email account. When the your WSU Gmail homepage is displayed, click on the **More** menu item, located top-left of the screen:



- Clicking **More** displays WSU's Gmail application page. Scroll down on this page and select the **Google+** icon, located under the **Social** category.



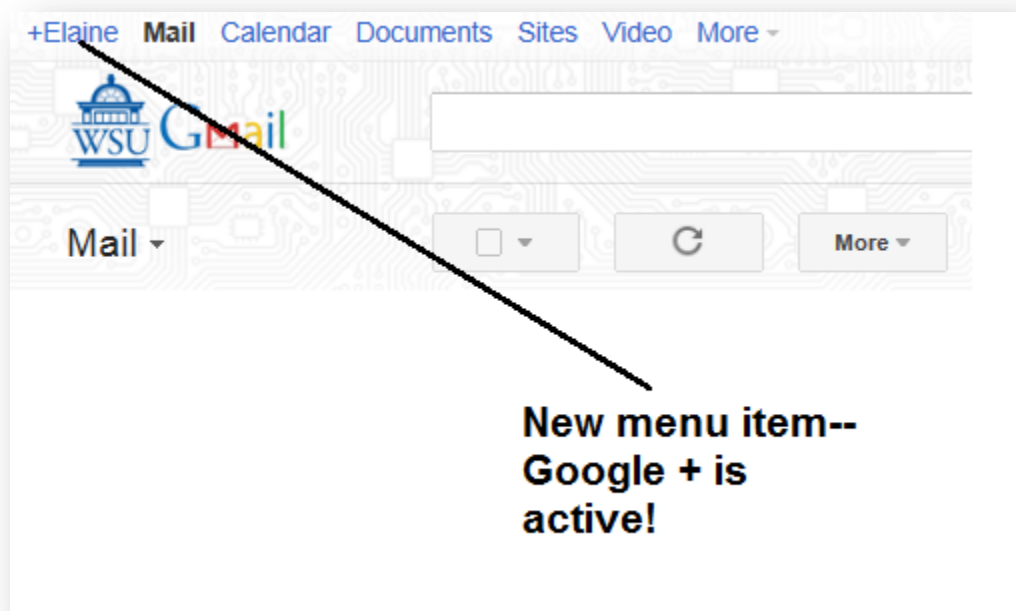
- Join Google + on the upgrade screen.



- After clicking Upgrade, you will be presented with a series of screens that enable you to customize your Google + profile. You don't need to enter any information or select any specific options on these screens, if you'd rather not. Simply keep clicking the Continue button, located at the bottom of the profile screens, until you pass through this initial setup process.

Again, you don't have to select any people that you might want to follow, and you don't have to enter in any personal information—even if Google + suggests that you might be lonely ;)

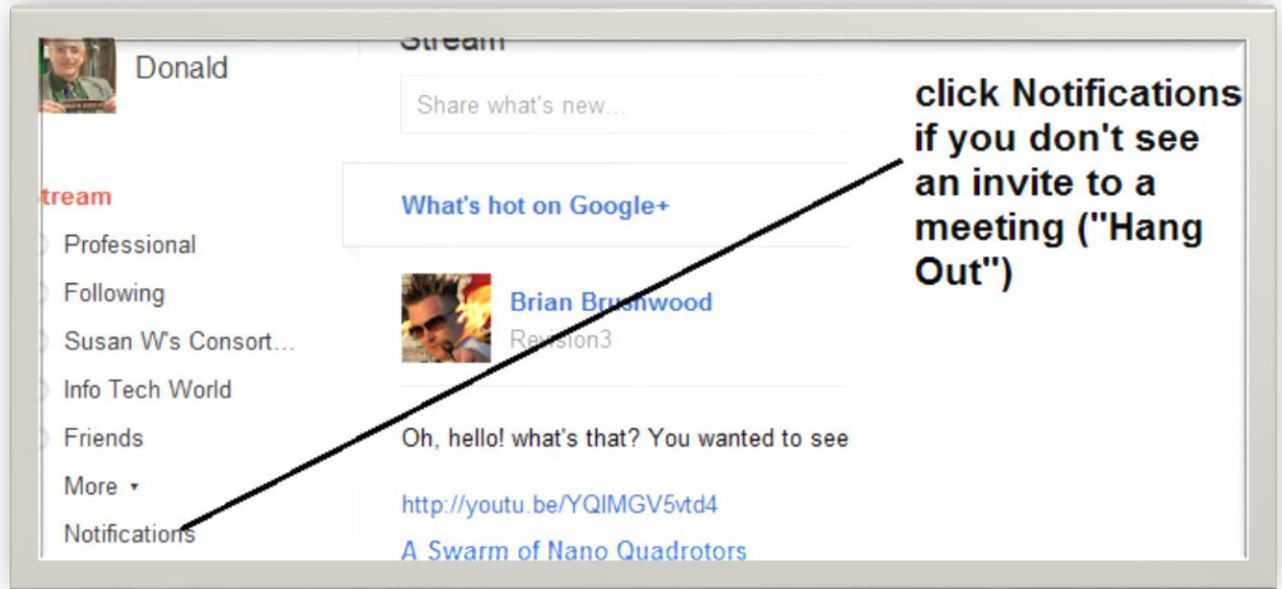
- Once you have completed Google +'s initial setup process, close your web browser, and then reopen it and log back into your WSU Gmail account. After login, you'll note that addition of a new menu item, located top-left of your Gmail homepage. This menu item is comprised of a "+" sign added to your first name:



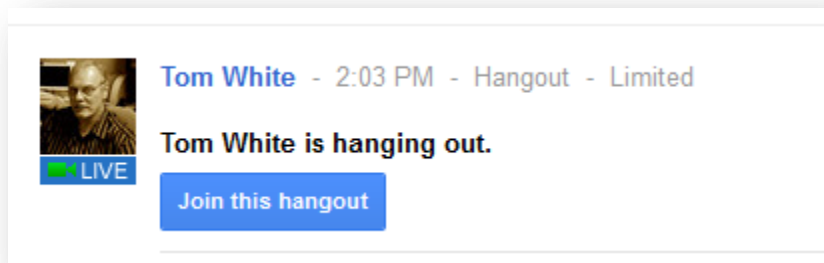
- To access your Google + account, click the **+yourname** menu item on your WSU Gmail homepage.

To Participate in a Google + Multimedia Session

- Login to your Google + account (see above)
- The host of the Google + multimedia session will send you an invitation to “hang out.” This invitation will appear on your Google+ homepage; if you don’t see an invitation, also try clicking on the Notifications option, located in the left menu bar on your Google + homepage.

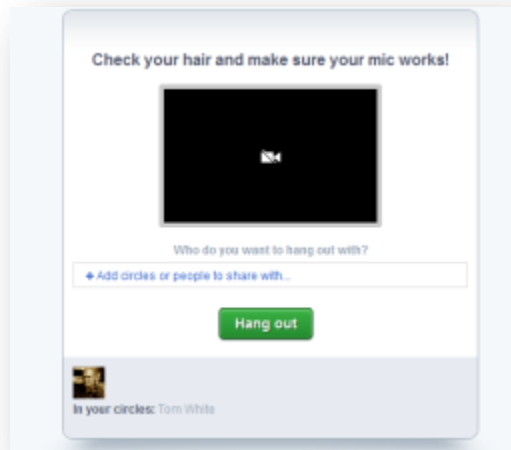


- Clicking the **Join this hangout** button enables you to join the multimedia session.



- Clicking the **Join this hangout** button also will generate a new browser page or tab. In the center of the screen you will see a preview of the image that you'll broadcast to the session (if you have a video camera). You also will see at the bottom-center of this screen a microphone sound scale that indicates how sensitive your microphone settings are. If you do not have a camera attached to your computer, you will see an icon in the center of the preview image.

In the example below, the user is about to join a hangout via audio only—there is no camera attached to the computer.

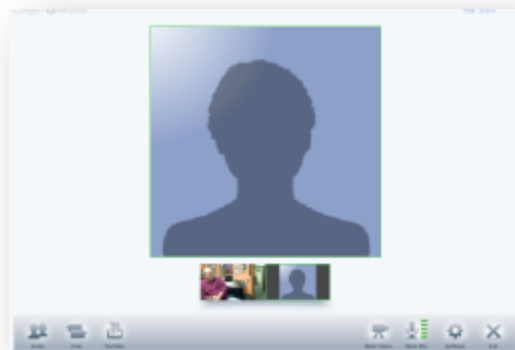


Click **Hang out** to join the session.

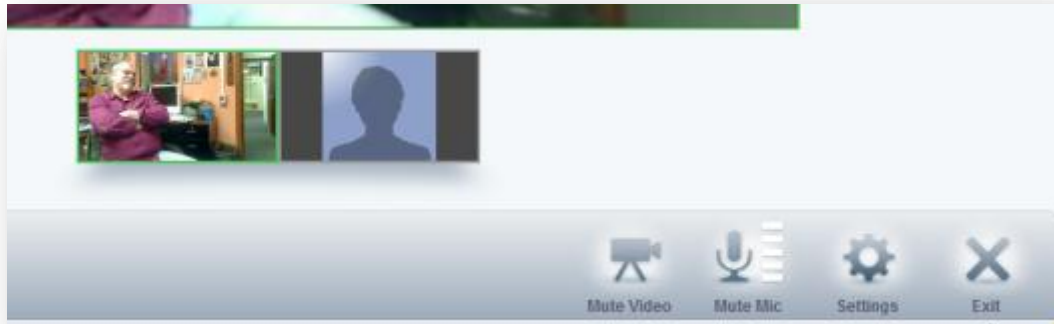
- Once you've joined a session, you will see the host's video as the primary display in the hang out screen. Beneath the primary display, you will see thumbnail representations of the other participants who have joined the session:



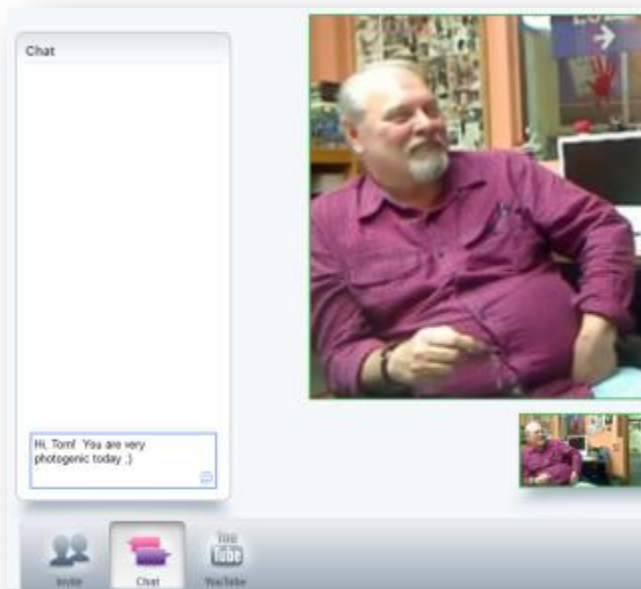
Clicking on any of the thumbnails will change the primary display. Note that a static image will be displayed if a user does not have a video camera attached to the computer.



- At any time, users can mute their audio; users also can “mute” their video by clicking on the appropriate icon at the bottom of the hangout screen.



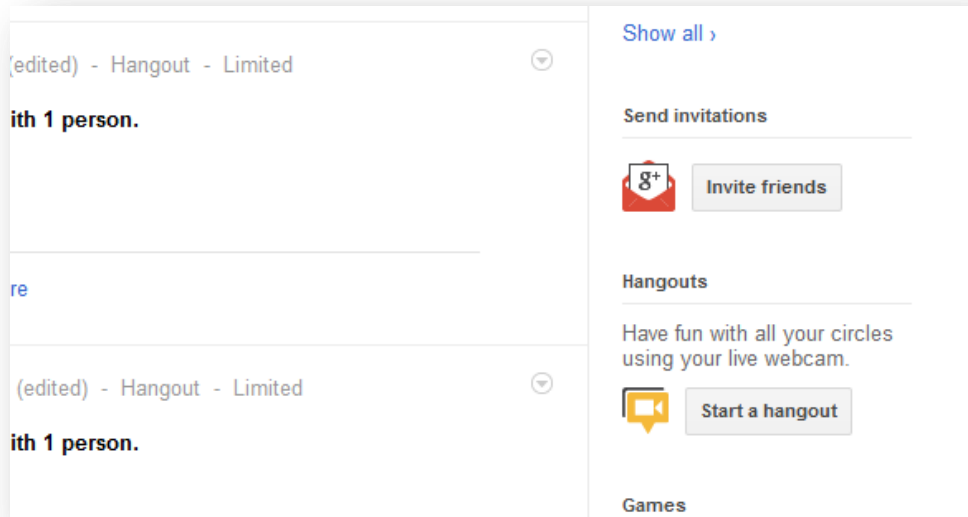
- Participants also can incorporate text chat into the multimedia session by clicking the Chat icon, located at the bottom of the hangout screen. Clicking the **Chat** button will display a vertical chat dialog window on the side of the Hangout screen.



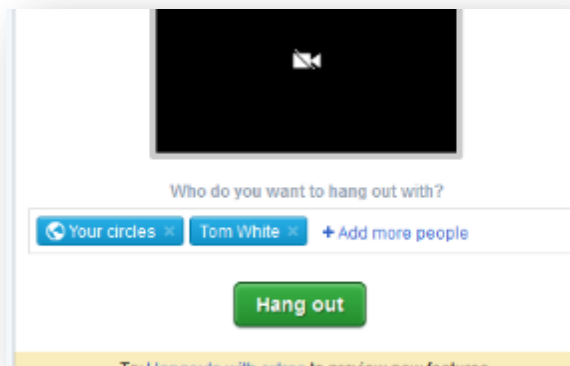
- At any time, users can leave the hangout by clicking the **Exit** button, located on the bottom of the screen.

To Host a Google + Multimedia Session

- Login to your Google + account (see above)
- Click **Start a hangout**, located on the right of your Google + homepage.

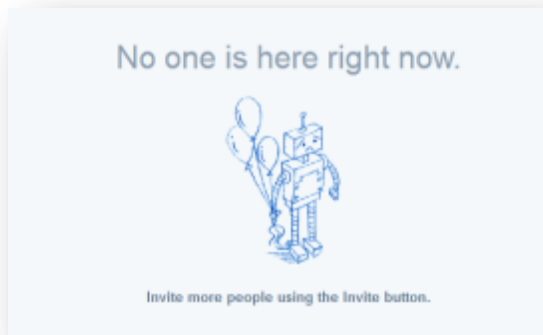


- Click on **+Add more people**, located immediately above the Hang out button. Enter the Gmail address in the displayed field. Do this for each participant that you'd like to invite.



When done, click the **Hang out** button.

- When your **Hangout** screen is first displayed, you will see a notification that no one is present.



- As each invitee accepts your invitation, their icon or video stream will be displayed.



Final Comments

There are many additional features that you can use in Google+'s multimedia sessions.

- If I were going tool to accommodate students located off-campus, I would create a **Hangout** and invite the students to participate.
- If I were going to host virtual office hours, I'd tell my students when I'd be available, and then open my Google + page during this time, accepting invitations to join individual **Hangouts** as they arrive.
- For easier participant management, I would create a "**Circle**," which is Google +'s term for a group. In this Circle, I would enter the names of my students and save them, so I won't have to do this again going forward. The topic of Circles is covered in a separate guide.