

Player's Guide to Online Tournaments

Welcome to the PACE guide for **playing** in an online tournament. This guide currently only covers playing in a Discord or Zoom tournament. For guides for staffing, directing or coaching at an online tournament see [here](#).

This guide assumes that you have played at least one in-person quizbowl tournament before. If not, please see [here](#) for quizbowl basics.

General Information

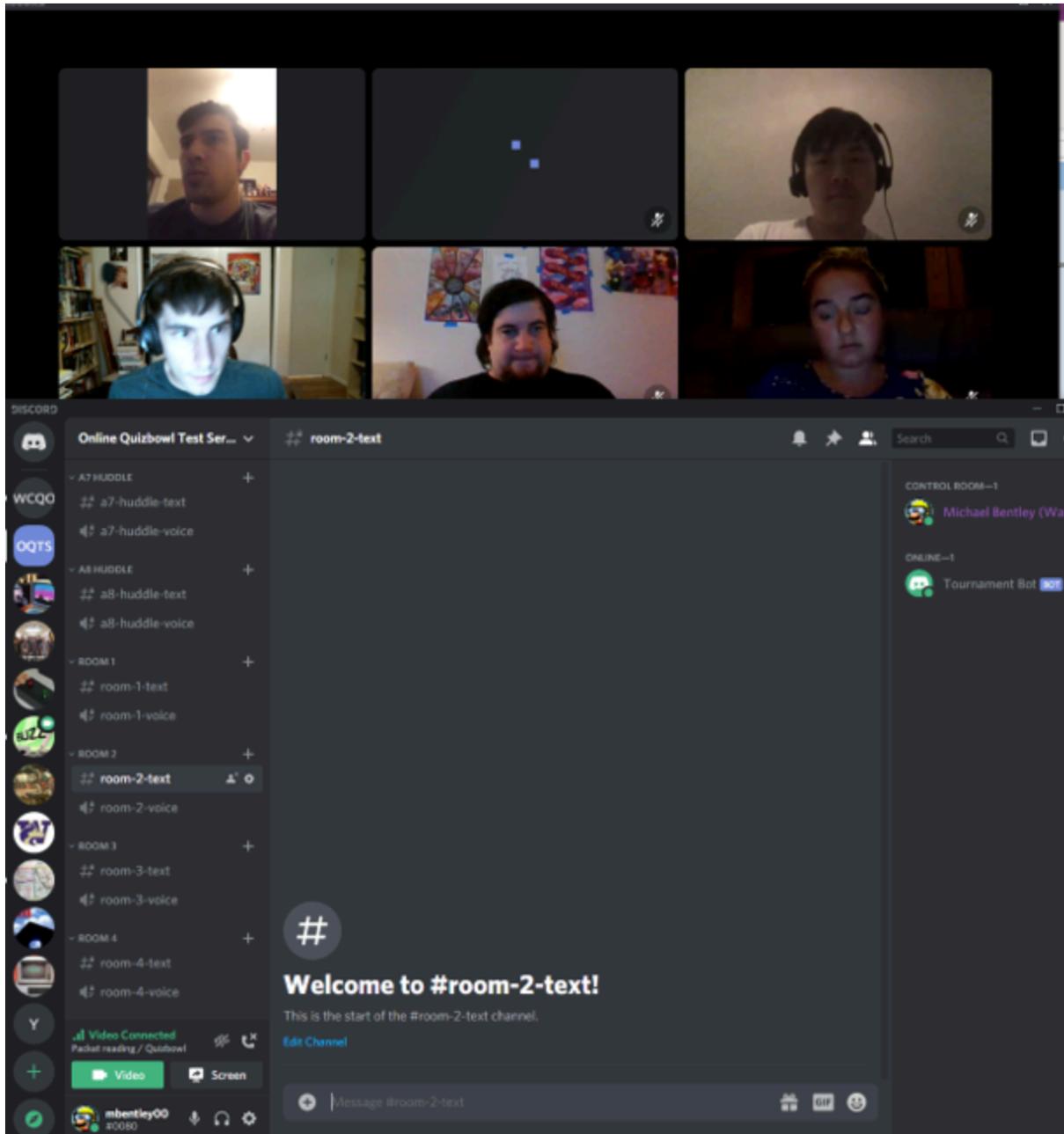
Quick Overview of Discord/Zoom Tournaments

Quizbowl tournaments over Discord or Zoom simulate the in-person quizbowl experience through a combination of audio, video and chat-based buzzing. Anyone with a computer, a headset and passable broadband can play an online tournament. Online tournaments are typically announced on the forums and tournament database at <https://www.hsquizbowl.org>.

Online tournaments will take at least as long as a regular tournament, and probably about 30-40% longer. Everyone attending the tournament should commit to it like an in-person event.

Discord Tournaments

Tournament directors create a Discord server for the tournament, use bots to configure the server for quizbowl, and then invite players, coaches and staff to the server. Each person attending the tournament is generally in a different physical location, although in some cases people may be in the same space.



A quizbowl Discord match in progress

Players and coaches are assigned to team roles. Each round in the tournament, the team will be assigned to a room to play a match against one other team. Everyone will join a video call and the moderator will read questions just like in an in-person match. Players use the text chat in place of physical buzzers to buzz in.

Zoom Tournaments

Zoom tournaments take place on Zoom meetings. The tournament director will typically create one or more large meetings and then assign players/coaches to breakout rooms to play games. Players can use the in-meeting chat in Zoom to buzz in, although many Zoom tournaments utilize a buzzing system such as buzzin.live. Like on Discord, moderators will read the questions aloud to teams and teams will either speak or type their answers.

Finding Online Tournaments

Online high school quizbowl tournaments are generally announced on the forums at <https://www.hsquizbowl.org> and on the Tournament Database on that same site.

Many NAQT tournaments are also being hosted online in the 2020-2021 school year. As of the writing of this guide, NAQT is still working on their online quizbowl platform. See the [NAQT website](#) for more details.

Pay attention to the tournament's eligibility requirements. While online tournaments make it feasible for teams anywhere in the world to play against each other, PACE generally encourages tournament directors and players to pitch tournaments at existing local circuits.

Equipment You'll Need

Generally, each player and moderator is playing from a **computer** with a **webcam** and a dedicated **headset**. It is technically possible to play an online tournament from a smartphone, but we don't recommend this except as a backup.

Computer: Any computer ought to work for a Discord tournament. All videoconferencing apps (including Discord) use a lot of system resources. It's a good idea to close all background apps. If you have multiple different computers available, try to use the most powerful one.

Headset: Headsets are **required** for moderators. TDs, do not make any exceptions for this policy. Laptop microphones rarely work well for quizbowl. Players can get by without headsets but it's still strongly encouraged.

Wired headsets are better than wireless headsets. These come in both USB and 3.5 mm varieties. If you are using a USB headset, ideally use a more recent one. If you need to purchase a headset, consider spending a little more for a gaming headset which is typically optimized to have lower latency. This [headset](#) that costs around \$40 is one option.



A headset like this with a dedicated microphone is a requirement for moderators and a great idea for players and coaches too

If you have a hardware failure and need to fall back to a laptop microphone, ideally plug in any other headphones. **No one on the call will have a good experience if you are using both a microphone and non-headphone speakers.**

Webcam: If your computer does not have a built-in webcam, you'll want to order one. Webcams were hard to come by in the beginning of the pandemic. They may be more available by the time you read this. You don't necessarily need a fancy one for quizbowl purposes. Something like an [Amazon Basic camera](#) will work and costs about \$35.



Example webcam

For the tournament, the webcam should be pointed at your face. The purpose of the webcam is to (a) make the tournament more personable and (b) discourage cheating. Like any video call, try to sit facing a window so you have good lighting.

9/27/20 Camera Update: Some tournaments are requiring stricter camera policies to discourage cheating. For instance, some tournaments require a camera to be pointed at your hands. Some require a camera positioned above and behind you so the moderator can see both your hands and your screen. In this case, a built-in laptop camera won't work. You'll want to purchase a web cam like above and a USB extension cable long enough to be positioned behind you. You shouldn't need any mounting equipment beyond either tape or something heavy to prop up the camera on.

Internet: An ethernet connection is your best bet for an online tournament. This will have the lowest latency and most consistency. If this is not available, see if you can situate yourself close to your wifi router (if you have one).

Online Tournament Rules

This page contains a list of rules to handle cases specific to online quizbowl tournaments. These rules supplement the [Official PACE Ruleset](#).

Tossup Recognition: In online tournaments, players buzz in on tossup questions by typing “buzz” in the text chat. Saying “buzz” via voice is **not** a valid way to buzz in. But a simultaneous text and voice buzz is a good practice to get the moderator attention, especially in Zoom tournaments. **Players must be recognized by the moderator before giving an answer.** The buzz order the moderator sees is the official order. It may be different than what a player sees on their screen. Players who give an answer without being recognized will be penalized for conferring if they were not truly the first player to buzz on the moderator’s screen.

Alternate Tossup Recognition: Some tournaments may choose to use a separate buzzer app such as [buzzin.live](#) for recognizing buzzes. These apps will serve as the “source of truth” for who buzzed in first. The tournament director should make the buzz-in policy clear before the tournament.

Tossup Timing: Players will have 8 seconds to answer a tossup after buzzing in. The timing for tossups going dead does not change. It remains 5 seconds.

Bonus Timing: Teams will have 8 seconds to confer on bonus parts. Tournaments that use bouncebacks should give teams 5 seconds to answer a bounceback. If the team starts the “our” in the phrase “our answer is” within the 8 seconds they will be given an opportunity to complete their answer, so long as they don’t pause.

Withdrawing: Players may not “withdraw” their buzz, e.g., by typing “wd” upon recognition instead of an answer. Any player who is recognized and attempts to withdraw will be considered to have given an incorrect answer. After an incorrect answer, the buzzers are “cleared” and a player on the other team must buzz again if they still wish to answer.

Moderators Failing to Recognize Buzzes: Moderators will make their best effort to see buzzes and stop reading right away. However, it’s common at online tournaments for there to be some delay before this happens.

The official buzz point is when the moderator stopped reading. Consider a tossup like this:

Manne Siegbahn introduced the notation used in spectroscopy based on this radiation, which includes the k alpha transition. ESCA [Player Buzzes] uses this phenomenon to induce the (*) photoelectric effect. Because this radiation has wavelengths on the same scale as interatomic spacing, crystal lattices serve as effective diffraction gratings [Moderator Recognizes Buzz]

Even if a player “knew” the answer at the buzz point after ESCA, they will not be granted power on this question since the moderator didn’t recognize them until after power.

Players should do their best to yell “someone buzzed” if they see this happening.

Moderators Incorrectly Recognizing Someone: If a moderator has determined that they incorrectly recognized the player who buzzed in and the incorrectly recognized player gave an answer, then the tossup will be thrown out and a replacement read that’s open to both teams.

This also applies to situations where the moderator ambiguously recognizes someone. For instance, consider the case where Team A has a player named Mike A. and Team B has a player named Mike B. On a tossup, Mike A buzzes in slightly before Mike B. The moderator only recognizes “Mike.” Mike B then gives an answer. In this case, the tossup will be thrown out. However, if a player not named Mike gives an answer, that will be considered conferring and ruled incorrect.

Giving Answers on Tossups: Players can either say the answer (after unmuting) or type in their answer. When typing out an answer, players must give the full answer. Typing a shorthand like “hf” when the answer is “Huck Finn” is not acceptable.

Spelling: Exact spelling for typed answers is not required. Any plausible spelling that follows the existing rules around vowels and syllables will be accepted.

Giving Answers on Bonuses: For bonuses, teams can either type their answer using ALL CAPS or by saying the phrase “Our Answer Is [Answer]”. Other answers (such as lower case text or other spoken answers without “our answer is”) will be considered conferring and not a directed answer.

Warning: Some potential answers, like NATO, are naturally typed in all caps. Players should take extra care when conferring that they don’t accidentally type these answers in all caps.

Like in an in-person event, what the moderator accepts is not subject to protest.

Equipment Failure and Technical Difficulties: It’s the responsibility of players to immediately let a moderator know if they cannot hear the question. When this happens, moderators should pause and attempt to resolve the issue. Tossups and bonuses that go through the entire cycle without the moderator being alerted of a technical issue will not be replaced. It’s up to the moderator to decide whether to repeat any/all parts of a question a player had difficulty hearing while that question is still being read.

Moderators and tournament directors have the discretion to give up trying to solve a technical issue for player(s) who are having repeated issues. See this [troubleshooting guide](#) for tips on fixing issues.

Day of Tournament

Confirm the time of the tournament. Make sure you’ve set your alarm to be there in time for the opening meeting. If your teammates aren’t there when you join, message them.

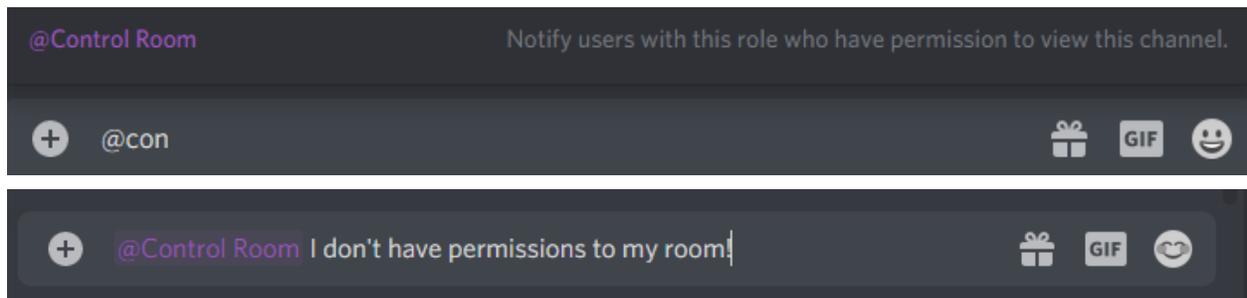
Online tournaments often have shorter lunch breaks than in-person events. Tournaments that have teams playing across time zones can also have breaks at different hours than usual. Plan your meals ahead so that you can eat quickly and have enough snacks during the day.

Also remember that online tournaments almost always take longer than in-person tournaments. Plan your day accordingly. Don't expect to have a lot of time

Getting Help at Online Tournaments

Players, coaches and moderators: The tournament director should provide directions in the #announcements channel on the Discord server about who to contact if something goes wrong. Generally, you'll want to do an @mention of that person in the #general chat to get their attention because they may be in another channel.

In extreme cases, you may want to @mention an entire role in the #general if you need help. For instance, an @mention of the @Control Room role.



You should also consult [here](#) for how to troubleshoot common Discord online tournament issues.

Discord Tournaments

Discord Basics for Online Tournaments

Discord is a chat and audio/video conferencing app widely used for hosting online quizbowl tournaments.

Download Discord from [here](#). Discord is free for all users. It has a paid option called Nitro, but we've found that this doesn't offer any advantages for quizbowl tournaments.

Note: You must be at least 13 years old to create a Discord account.

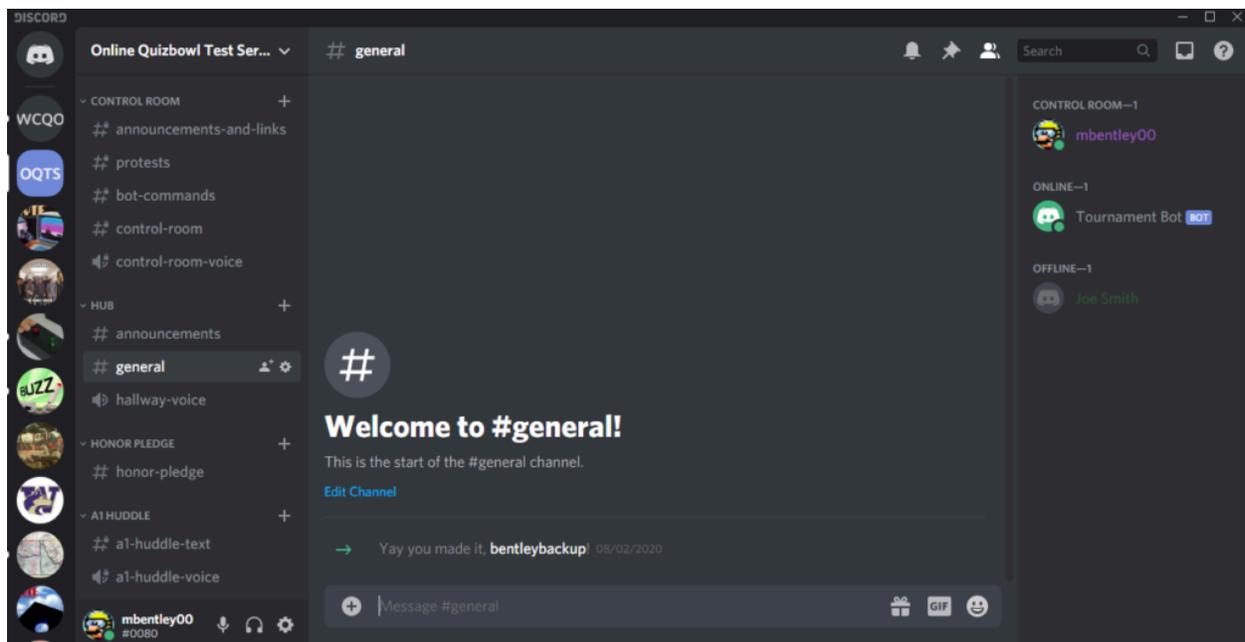
Always use the downloaded desktop app. **Do not use the version of Discord that runs in your browser.** This version has inferior audio and generally leads to more issues.

Discord updates frequently. It's a good idea to boot it before the tournament so you're not stuck waiting for an update.

You'll have one Discord account. However, you'll often be joined to multiple Discord servers (one for each tournament, plus non-tournament servers like the Quizbowl discussion Discord). On each server, you can set a different display name. For tournaments you'll want to set this to your real name and affiliation (i.e. school).

The tournament director will create a server and then send a link to the server to players, coaches and staff via email or some other form of communication.

Discord divides up servers into channels. Channels can be either text or voice + video. A tournament server usually has a combination of text channels for general announcements, staff discussion, and game rooms. Plus a separate set of voice + video channels for game rooms.



Example Discord Quizbowl Server

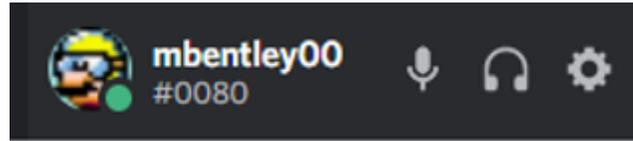
Once you've got Discord installed, you'll want to set up your audio settings to be ready for online quizbowl. Click [here](#) for a guide on how to do that.

Discord Audio Settings

When: After installing the Discord desktop app and (if necessary) purchasing your audio/video equipment.

Once you've installed the Discord desktop app and have your headset plugged in, you'll want to configure the audio settings so they work best for quizbowl.

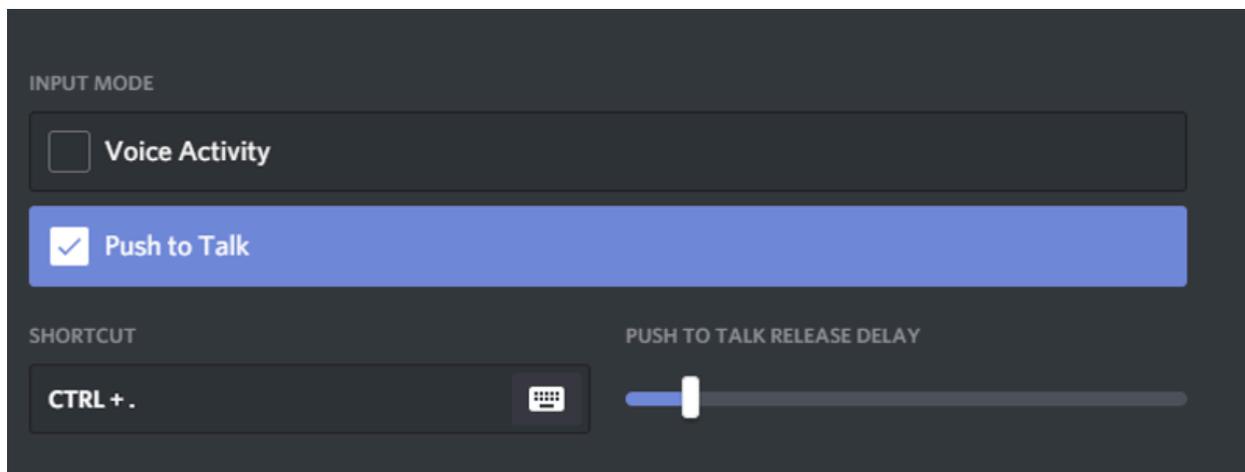
Click on the “User Settings” gear button that should be at the bottom left of your screen:



Click on the gear button next to your username to open the settings

Go to App Settings -> Voice and Video

I personally prefer using Push to Talk. This lets me control when my audio is coming through by pressing a hotkey (in my case, Control + dot). Important: Make sure that the Push to Talk Release Delay to around 200 MS so that it doesn't cut you off at the end of talking.



Increasing the push to talk release delay helps prevent Discord from cutting off your statements. Pay attention to the shortcut key you chose. In this case, it's Control + dot which I need to hold to talk

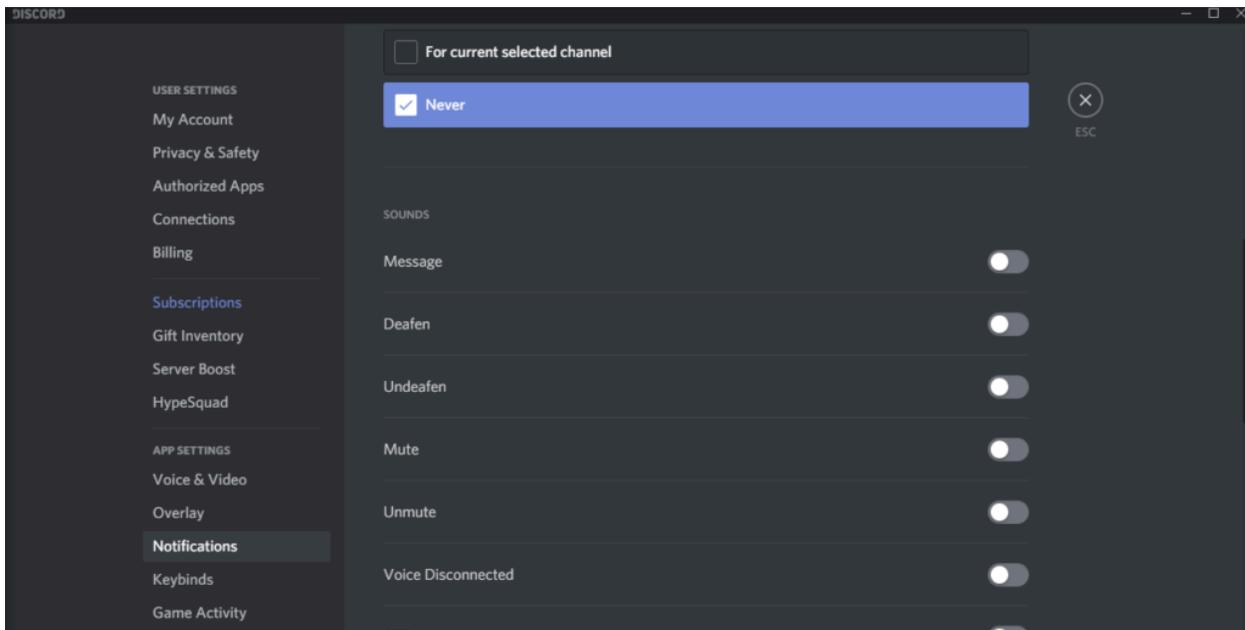
Many people find it easier to use the Voice Activity option. If you do this as a moderator, turn off the “automatically determine input sensitivity” and move the slider all the way to the left:



For moderators, when using “Voice Activity” make sure to set your input sensitivity low. For players, if you set this to a low value make sure you’re vigilant about muting when not speaking

Once you have this configured, use this dialog to test your mic and video to ensure that you’re coming through clearly.

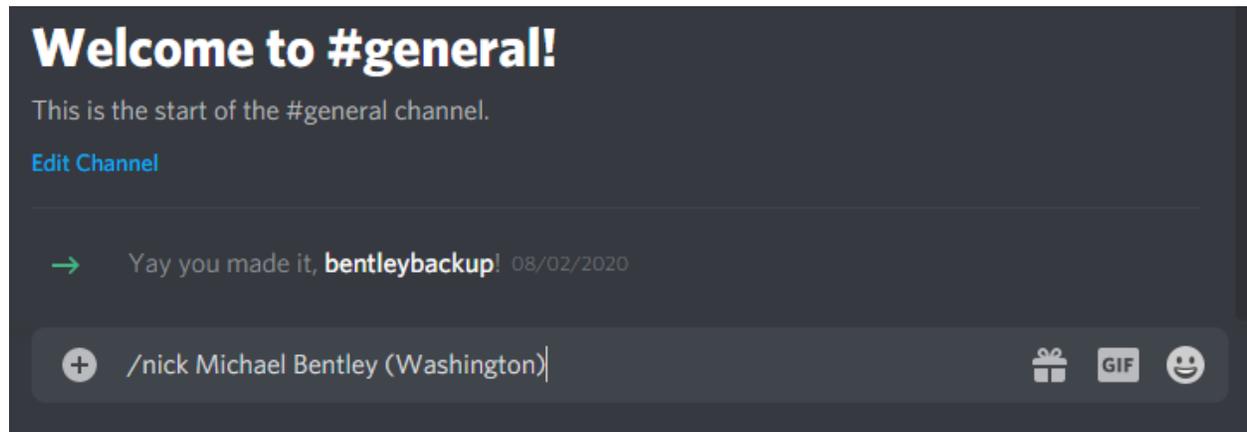
You may also want to change notification sounds, as these can be distracting when you’re playing or moderating a match. You can find these in the “notifications” section below “Voice & Video” and then scrolling down:



Discord notification sound settings

Joining a Discord Server

You, or your coach, should receive a Discord invite from the tournament director a few days before the tournament. Join this link as soon as possible so that the TD can assign you the proper role for the tournament. Once you join the server, rename yourself to your real name + school by typing a command like `/nick Michael Bentley (Washington)`. (Coaches: also add “coach” to the end of your username.) Read the code of conduct / honor pledge and agree to it.



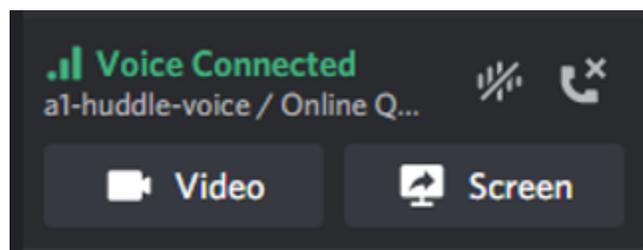
If it's been a while and you still aren't listed as being part of a team role, @mention the tournament director to get you assigned. It's especially important to do this if you join late (but please be on time!).

If your roster has recently changed, alert the tournament director about that.

Note that some tournaments may have multiple Discord servers. Pay attention to announcement mails from the TD and join all applicable servers if this is the case.

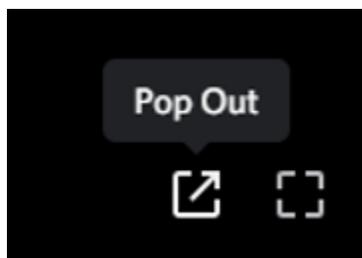
Playing Online Matches

Moderators will add you to a game room for each match. You should see exactly one text and voice channel for a room. Join the voice channel by clicking on it. Once you join, you should see something like this in your Discord client:



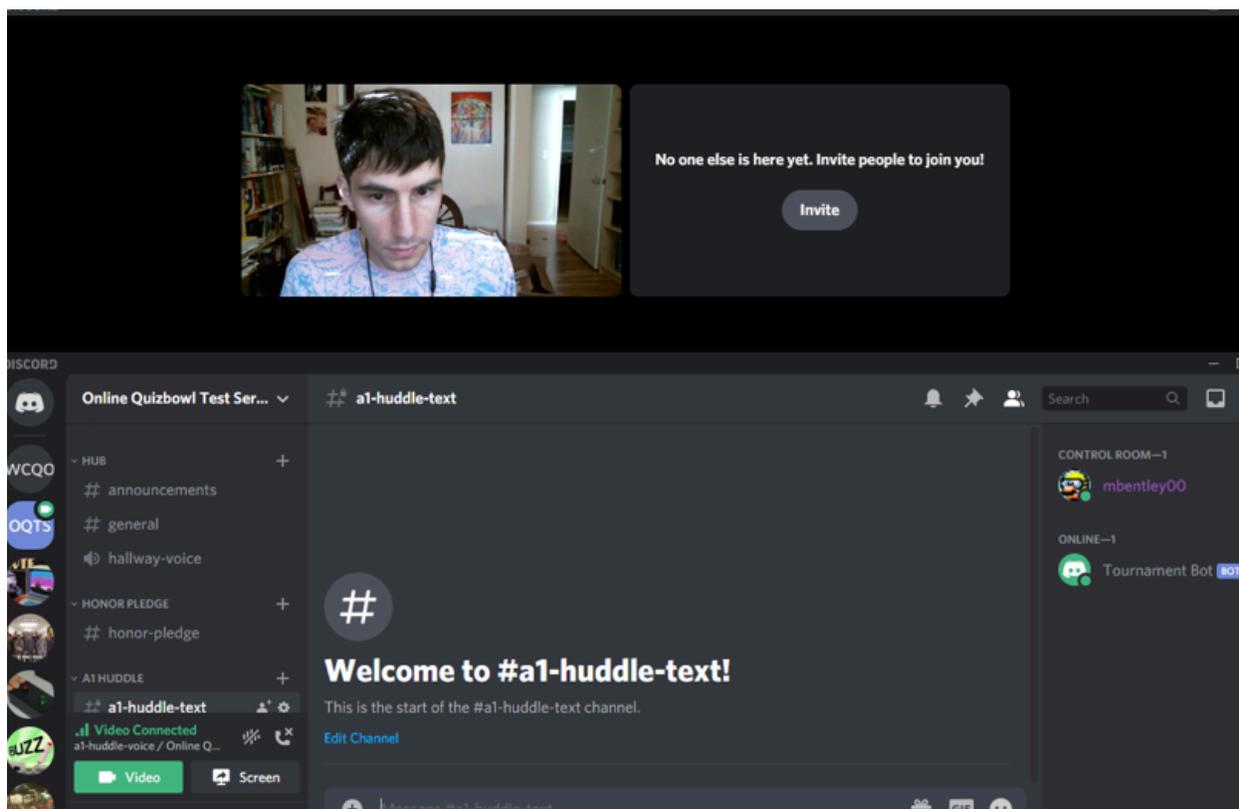
Click on the Video button to join the video call. Note: you do not and should not share your screen for a quizbowl tournament

Click on the Video button to enable video. You'll then want to find the pop out button that looks like this so you can the video open in a separate window than the text chat:



Use the Pop Out button once you've started a video chat to be able to see both the video and chat at the same time

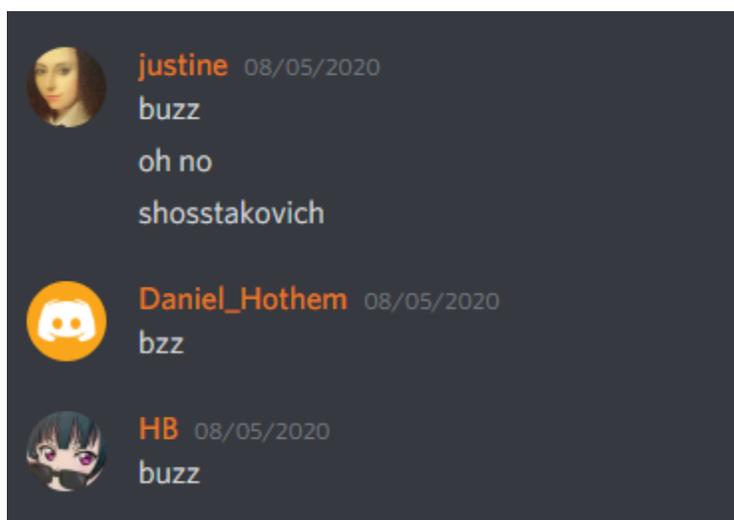
You'll end up with windows that look something like this:



Two Discord windows open: one for video, one for chat (where you'll buzz in)

Once the game is about to begin, make sure to mute yourself. **Never have your microphone on while questions are being read.** Even if you're using a headset, having your microphone unmuted can result in noise from your environment overriding the moderator.

Once the game starts, your focus will mainly be on the text channel for your room (i.e. #room-4-text). The moderator will read out the questions (via voice). To buzz in, you will type “buzz” in the chat (alternatively, some moderators may request that you buzz by @mentioning their name so they get a more prominent notification). **After buzzing, wait for the moderator to officially recognize you.** Buzzer order is determined by what the moderator sees on their screen. This may very well be different than what you see on your screen (generally, your buzzes will appear faster to yourself than other people see them).



Example screenshot of buzzes

After buzzing in, you can either say your answer (make sure to unmute) or type it in. Tournament directors will let you know the timing for answering tossups and bonuses. Generally, you’ll have a little more time than at an in-person tournament.

If the other team gets the tossup incorrect and you want to buzz in again, type “buzz” a second time. The moderators will not count any buzzes after the first buzz unless you buzz in again. (It’s generally good quizbowl strategy to wait until the end of the question if the other team gets the tossup incorrect.)



An example of two players buzzing on the same question. If “hydrogen bond” was incorrect, the moderator would not recognize Daniel’s buzz unless he buzzed in again

For bonuses, do not interrupt the moderator while they’re reading. This is much more distracting and hard to understand than at an in-person tournament. We suggest that you use the text chat to confer while the moderator is reading and then audio afterwards.

To avoid ambiguity on giving an answer, teams should say either “Our answer is [the answer]” or type their answer in ALL CAPS.

If you have a protest, let the moderator know during the match. The TD may then contact you about resolving it.

Focus on the match while the game is going on. Do not have other apps open or use your phone, just like you wouldn’t do those things in an in-person match.

Don’t fill up the room chat with extraneous messages. Don’t post in gifs or other images in the room chats because they can be distracting to other players.

After each round, it can be helpful to the TD to report in the #general chat that you’ve finished. Once your next room is ready, you’ll be automatically assigned to that room. Join the voice/video chat and start the process again.

Sometimes tournaments will have a discussion channel. Do not discuss content from any match currently in progress in these channels.

Troubleshooting Discord Technical Issues

This section documents some common things that go wrong with Discord tournaments and how to fix them.

If you’ve gone through this guide and still have a technical issue, PACE Online Quizbowl tech support can help. See [here](#) for details.

The moderator is speaking but can’t be heard

First, make sure the moderator is in the correct voice channel.

Next, check if the moderator is lighting up as green in their listing in the voice channel. If not, this means that Discord doesn’t think they’re talking. The most common reason for this is that the moderator is either muted or has push-to-talk enabled and isn’t hitting the push-to-talk keyboard shortcut. Check Discord’s audio settings.

Another thing to check is if the moderator is using the web version of Discord (i.e. they’re using Discord via their web browser). If so, have them download the desktop app and try there.

Some moderators may be using a microphone with a volume or hardware mute button on it. Check to make sure the volume is turned up on the device and that it's not muted.

Tournaments can continue without the player being heard (so long as they can hear the moderator). It's not ideal, but players can communicate solely via text.

Player is on slow internet connection and video is lagging

It's important for players to keep their video feed on to prevent cheating. However, if they're having bandwidth issues they can try disabling the video of other people in the call. You can do this by right clicking on someone's video in the Discord video window.

A player can't see the rounds they need to join

Staffers, make sure that you've assigned this person the correct Discord role. Right click on their name in the chat and assign them to either Staff or the appropriate team role.

Room role.

server's settings. Make
the Player/Coach role, do
e.

Room role. Specify a prefix
t... End? The bot will
ed r

- Control Room
- Staff
- Spectator
- A1
- A2
- A3
- A4
- A5
- A6
- A7
- A8
- Player/Coach

Profile

Mention

Mute

Deafen

Change Nickname

Roles [>](#)

Sometimes this can also happen if the team hasn't been added to the room where they're playing their next match. Staffers, use the Discord tournament bot to run a command like this (by typing it into the #bot-commands chat channel and hitting enter):

```
.a @A2 #room-1
```

“Checking ICE” or “No Route” error when joining a video chat

This usually indicates that the player can't join a video chat for some reason. The player should restart Discord and try again. And/or use another internet connection if possible. If this problem persists, it can sometimes be resolved by changing the match to be audio only (everyone will have to leave the video chat first).

Chat messages are delayed

Chat messages sometimes take a long time to be delivered on busy Discord servers. This can be a big problem for getting buzzing timing correct.

The most immediate remedy is for players to yell “buzz” when this is happening if they're trying to buzz in.

This problem often goes away on its own. If it persists, tournament directors may want to create a new temporary server for handling chat messages.

Zoom Tournaments

Zoom Basics

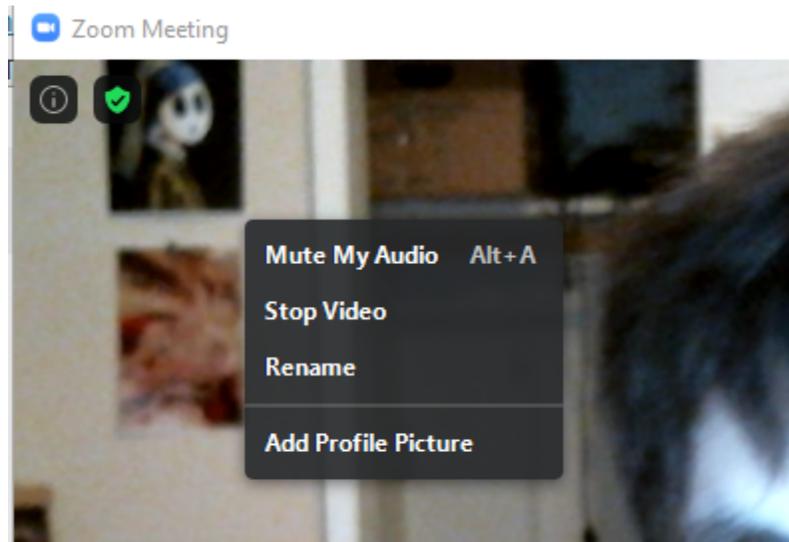
Quizbowl tournaments played over Zoom are similar to classes and other virtual meetings held on Zoom. Players, coaches and tournament staff join a Zoom meeting set up by the tournament director. They'll be assigned to breakout rooms where the matches take place. After each match, they're moved back into the main meeting room to wait for assignment to the next match.

In a Zoom tournament, everyone connects via audio and video. Moderators read questions just like in-person quizbowl matches. Players will use the chat feature in Zoom to type “buzz” to buzz in. They can collaborate via voice or text on bonuses.

Because Zoom's chat notifications aren't very noticeable, some Zoom tournaments have players say “buzz” at the same time as they type “buzz” (the text being the official buzz). Other Zoom tournaments use a separate online buzzer system such as buzzin.live for buzzing.

Playing a Zoom Match

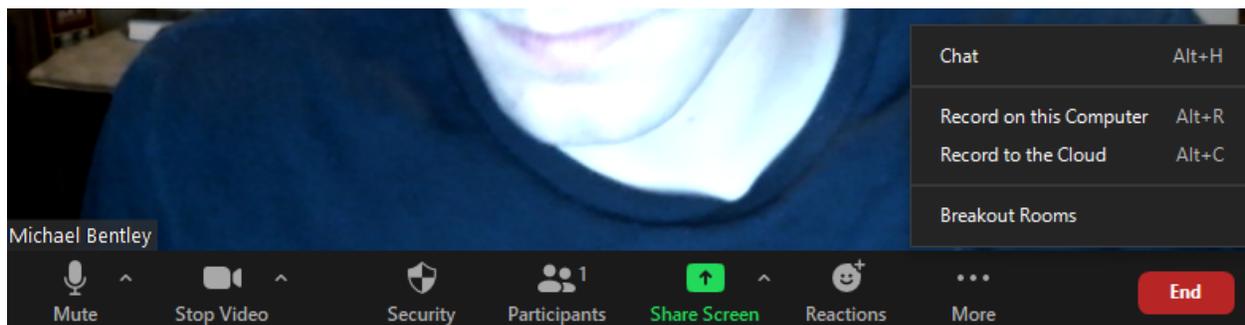
Zoom tournaments generally consist of one or more meetings. You'll receive a link from the tournament director for the meeting. After joining the meeting, make sure you've set your name according to what the tournament director wants.



To rename yourself, right click on your video stream and click "Rename." You should have a name that's like "[A1] Mike Bentley" where [A1] is your team code from the bracket. It's important that you follow the standardized naming template so tournament directors can quickly find your whole team.

Before each round begins, the tournament director will assign you to a breakout room to play your match against one other team.

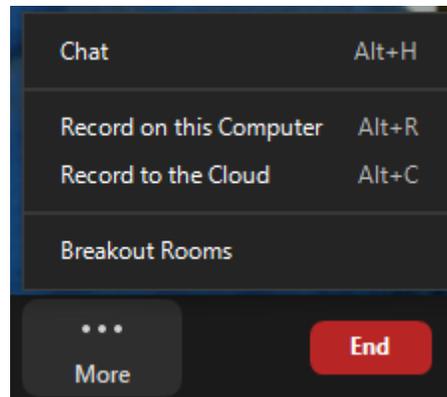
Sometimes you will be automatically assigned to a breakout room. In other cases, you should see a notification saying that a breakout room is available. When this happens, you'll need to manually join the breakout room by looking in the bottom menu of your Zoom window. It may be hidden in the "... " section.



Breakout Rooms in this case are in the "... " menu

After joining a room, confirm that you can hear the moderator and that they can hear you. In general, you'll want to have your camera on and your microphone muted. You can unmute when giving answers.

Most Zoom tournaments will use the meeting chat to handle buzzes. Make sure you have the chat window open. You can find this in the same bottom menu on the Zoom screen. On Windows, pressing Alt + H will also load the chat.



Chat menu from the bottom of the Zoom window

Important: Make sure that you are typing your chat messages to Everyone. If you don't change any options, this will be the default.



Make sure your chats are going to "Everyone" and not to a specific individual.

Once the game begins, you'll type "buzz" (and ideally also yell "buzz") to buzz in on tossups. You must wait until the moderator recognizes you after typing buzz to give an answer. The buzz order you see on your screen is not necessarily the official order from the moderator's screen.

You'll say your tossup answers via voice and also use voice to collaborate with teammates on bonuses. For bonuses, you'll want to say "our answer is" to confirm that you've directed an answer to the moderator. See the [online rules section](#) for more info.

Some tournaments may use a separate buzz-in system rather than the meeting chat to track buzzes. Consult with your tournament director for details.