

Which free web apps for collaboration are the most user-friendly?

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The Internet is teeming with Web apps that help people work collaboratively and complete shared tasks online, often over long distances. But which ones are the most user-friendly?

A study recently published in *Ergonomics in Design: The Quarterly of Human Factors Applications* noted the results of an evaluation of 20 popular apps for usability, including Google Drive, Skype, Doodle Poll, Gmail, Windows Hotmail, CoSketch, and DropBox.

The authors, Georgia Tech engineering psychology graduate student Lauren E. Marguileux along with six other grad students and a senior user experience engineer, selected only free apps with the highest Web presence. They assessed the functions of each [app](#), learned how to use them, and evaluated each separately for usability. For instance, Skype was evaluated separately for its videoconferencing function and for its instant messaging function.

The raters measured each app against 10 usability measures, among them visibility and feedback, user control and freedom, error prevention, flexibility and efficiency, and aesthetics.

Some of the apps were rated more usable than others:

- Cisco WebEx for synchronous text communication (but WebEx was in a dead heat with Google Hangouts for audiovisual communication)

- Google Calendar for calendaring
- Doodle for event scheduling
- Zoho Docs for writing and editing

The [usability](#) scores were represented as percentages (see Table 1), and each app's most prominent pros and cons were highlighted. These rankings can help people find the apps best suited to their needs and optimal team productivity.

More information: L. E. Margulieux et al, Online Collaboration Applications Evaluated Based on Ease of Use, *Ergonomics in Design: The Quarterly of Human Factors Applications* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/1064804615611273](#)

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