



Tips for Online Meetings: Facilitators

In Advance

Technical/General Concerns

- Use video when possible.
- Use high-quality equipment, including noise-canceling headsets.
- Have a tech/tools back-up plan in case your tech fails.
- Assign someone to deal with tech challenges.
- Request that participants choose quiet locations.
- For video, request that participants have good lighting.
- Record your meetings for those who can't attend.

Interpersonal/Facilitator Concerns

- Select a facilitator to run the meeting and keep to a timed schedule.
- Prepare an agenda with guidelines re: time allotment.
- Ensure the agenda is accessible to all.
- Establish meeting etiquette.
- Welcome participants to arrive early or stay late for personal time.
- Reserve time for an end-of-meeting “*parking lot*”: when you attend to miscellaneous “parked” questions after the primary agenda has been covered.
- Plan how you will keep track of parking lot items during the meeting.
- Determine how participants can indicate they wish to speak. (With video meetings, this could be to raise one’s hand until acknowledged or to hold up a virtual meeting card [see next item]. With audio-only meetings, participants could use group chat or instant messaging to indicate that they want to jump into the conversation; or they could just interrupt.)
- Building on the previous item, consider using Virtual Meeting Cards to enable nonintrusive communication.
- Determine how you as facilitator will acknowledge a participant’s wish to speak.
- Determine how participants can use ELMO if they want to reign in a wandering discussion.

- Whenever possible, use collaborative tools to help participants visualize the discussion.
- For optimal engagement, don't include information that could be conveyed in writing. (Many recommend having a standard place for posting status updates—such as in Asana, Jira, or Slack.) Instead, reserve meeting time for discussion.
- Keep presentations to a minimum.
- Give participants a 5–10 minute break for every hour of meeting.

As-Needed Considerations

PARTLY DISTRIBUTED TEAMS (SOME COLOCATED, OTHERS REMOTE)

- Use the buddy system.
- If two people start speaking at the same time, and one is on-site and the other remote, favor the remote participant.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- Have an established back channel (such as group chat or instant messaging) to allow for real-time online conversation alongside the meeting—to share additional information and help facilitate comprehension of non-native-language participants.
- Use video as much as possible so participants can read lips.
- Use visuals instead of text when possible.

TIME ZONE ISSUES

- Choose one time zone as the time zone used with any scheduling. (For example, if your team has members in New York, London, and Brussels, with the majority in London, then schedule any cross-team interactions by Greenwich Mean Time.) This standard will avoid confusion and scheduling errors.
- Using a shared calendar is another way to minimize confusion and scheduling errors.
- As much as possible, schedule collaborative activities for any time in which all team members are working regular workday hours.
- Take turns sharing the pain of meeting before or after regular work hours.

Just Before/During the Meeting

Technical/General Concerns

- Test technology, lighting, and connection *before* start time. (Many recommend giving yourself at least five minutes before the meeting starts.)
- Disable tones and announcements.
- Mute yourself when not speaking.

Interpersonal/Facilitator Concerns

- Arrive early to build in personal time; take the opportunity to bond with any others who arrive early.
- Start with an icebreaker to facilitate engagement.
- Convey meeting guidelines at the outset, especially: how to signal a wish to speak—and how you'll acknowledge that wish, the request to keep till the end any extraneous questions or discussion points, and how to implement ELMO if necessary.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak; strive to keep everyone engaged in general.

As Needed Considerations

- Cut short miscellaneous questions, postponing them for the end-of-meeting parking lot.
- Utilize ELMO (Enough. Let's Move On) if a participant starts to dominate the discussion.
- Request feedback from/ask questions of lesser-engaged participants.

Before Adjourning

- Commence parking lot items.
- Announce/reiterate post-meeting action items, specifying who, what, and by when.
- Thank participants for attending and end on a high note.