Slack (Team Messaging) Etiquette Guide

> 📓 This guide serves to help new and experienced users alike make the best use of Slack with the aim of making it a productive tool rather than a productivity drain.

Principles.

Let's start with the basics, a few things that Slack **is** and few things that is not.

- Slack is a communication tool, not a collaboration tool. This means messages will get lost over time especially on the free plan (10K limit total). Don't treat as a place to store permanent information, documents work best for that.

- Slack is not email, it is closer to instant messaging. Generally speaking, a conversation is happening so don't keep people waiting during an active conversation. That said there are exceptions to this (eg announcements)

- Slack is asynchronous (like email) not synchronous (a video or phone call). This means you should not expect an instant reply to your message. If something is really urgent (and please question whether is really is urgent) jump on a call with that person or group.

- Slack is a form of 2D communication medium, not a 3D medium (link). Know when to break out into a video or phone call in terms of the context of the conversation that is happening.

Notifications.

The first practical step to stay productive in Slack is to get a handle on the notifications that are coming in and communicate expectations with your other teammates.

The first step is to turn on Do Not Disturb, this turns off notifications for a specified time period. Have it turn on at the end of the day and off at the beginning of the day. Use it to get on with some Deep Work during the day. Additionally set yourself as away if you want to keep Slack open while doing said Deep Work.

Next communicate what you are up to with your status, this will set the appropriate expectations to your team. Use it to communicate your office hours or if you are at lunch. Make use of the fact statuses can expire (eg you are on a call or at lunch)

Channels, Direct Messages & Groups.

Slack has three communication contexts, public channels, private groups and direct messages.

Direct messages and private groups will be the most familiar to you as these contexts exist on other platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. You would be tempted to drift to these contexts, however they will create silos of information and knowledge.

The final context is channels. Channels are public by default and generally cover a topic, department or project (or anything you want really).

> 💡 When sending a message default to a channel over a private group or direct message. This breaks down silos of knowledge and reduces the amount of distracting notifications flying around.

Below are some quick DO's and DON'TS of Slack channels.

- DO take the time to browse existing channels and join the ones you feel will be useful or fun to be part of.

- DO create fun channels as well as work related ones but DON'T mix the content between these channels.

- DON'T create a channel without seeing if one already exists, DO ask if you cannot find a channel.

- If the channel doesn't exist DO create it!

> 💡 DO prefix your channel name if you can as this helps others with finding channels

- DO clean up after yourself. Channels do not need to exist forever so archive a channel if it is no longer relevant.

- DO mute a channel if you want to be part of it but it is very spammy for whatever reason. This allows you to catch up at your own pace.

- Each team will have a unique set of channels that is unique to your team, but I encourage off topic channels to exist such as #random, #pets, #babies, #coffee-break or #tea-break. These will be channels will bring a deeper connection to the team than purely talking about work.

Messages.

When it comes to the messages themselves it can be easy to craft messages that get what you need but annoy and distract the rest of your team. Here are some quick tips to ensure you don't end as office gossip.

First up don't send a short message of just Hi, Hey or Hello. At this point you would have distracted your teammate for nothing as they now have to wait for you to type the rest of your message. DO send a longer formatted message that is easy to read that actually starts the conversation.

💡 Press **'shift + return'** to create a link break to have multiple paragraphs Use formatting (lists, bold, emojis) to make the message easy to scan and read

Related to the above, is not to follow up with several short messages if a teammate is unresponsive. A reminder that Slack is asynchronous, trust they will response when they see the message.

Use @mentions mindfully. Slack will notify someone when they get mentioned. Be clear in your message about what you want them to action or respond to. Make it a clear question or action item.

Reserve @channel for important & urgent announcements that require everyone to know about a message. A better alternative might be @here which notifies only people who are currently online.

DO use threads whenever you can. They prevent conversations overlapping a channel becoming an absolute mess. You can then message back out to the channel once the conversation has resolved with a decision if relevant.

DO use emoji reactions as short follow up messages, this again reduces notification overload but can also be a powerful communication medium if developed into a glossary.

- ✅ could mean a 'request has been completed or approved'
- 👀 is I am looking into it'
- 👌is 'OK! or I understand'
- 👋is 'Hello! or I can help with that'

Finally DO praise in public and do it often! We have a negativity bias and this happens even more over a text based communications medium. However when the need to criticise arises do that privately, there is no need to set an example and it will simply make you look like the school bully. Again depending on the severity of the situation, this might be a time to schedule a call instead.

Following all of these suggestions won't necessarily mean you get your work done, but will hopefully mean you are communicating effectively, efficient and empathically with your team and as result being more productive as a team.

Let me know if you have any suggestions, improvements or other ideas. Get in touch at input@softwarecrafts.uk.

Change log.

- v0.1 - 2020-03-26 - Initial Version.

Sources.

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