Slack

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Since its founding, Allovue has used Slack as its primary communication tool. In this time we've grown to dozens of employees working across many teams. Slack, more than our physical location in Baltimore, serves as Allovue's primary office space. In order to ensure Slack continues to work for Allovue as we grow and to better acclimate new employees to how we communicate at Allovue, we've produced these guidelines for Slack.

TL;DR: Slack Basics
- Update your profile and photo
- Set your presence and status to signal your availability
- Join company-wide public channels like #general and #appreciations
- Join other relevant channels and manage your DND and notification settings for desktop and mobile
- Use @channel or @here sparingly
- Limit use of group DMs - consider alternative DM, private channel, or live-meetings
- Be considerate of teammates when using @user
- Only "break through" DND during *true* emergencies (which we expect will be few)
- We don't expect you to be online/available 24/7
- When people use italics to type, it's generally directional and doesn't require action. You'll notice this in channels like #bmore-office when someone shares "*wfh*" in the morning.

Set Your Availability

Allovue has employees in four time zones and offers a flexible work environment so team members have a variety of working hours. Additionally, we all have times we need to focus, whether on specific work, a meeting with coworkers, or working with school districts.

The flexibility we allow for people to work at nearly *any* time does not mean that you need to

be available and responsive *all* the time. Slack is a great tool for asynchronous communication that allows for team flexibility across time and space. The downside of this is that it can sometimes feel like the “office” is open 24/7. You are not expected to be always-on; everyone deserves time each day to unplug and “go home” - even if you work in your bedroom. We trust that you will make yourself available for communication and questions during hours that make sense for your work and your team.

There will be few - if any - true emergencies in our day-to-day work that cannot wait a few hours or a day. In the case that there is a major, urgent problem that needs your immediate attention, your manager will call you.

Status v. Presence

Slack has the ability to set your **status**. The easiest way to do this is to type (in any channel): /status. Whatever you type after status will be set as your status, like an away message on AIM back in the day. If you start your status with an emoji, it will show up in the sidebar. If you add the Google Calendar App, you can set it to automatically update your status in Slack when you are in meetings to show that you are in meetings.

In addition to statuses, you can also set your **presence**. If you type /away in any channel, the circle next to your name will toggle from filled in green ("I am present and available") to an open circle ("I am not present on Slack or available"). Presence is normally determined by whether or not you have Slack open and active. However, if you type /away, you can remain away for a period of time or indefinitely until you return using /away again.

By setting your availability and presence, you are communicating to coworkers how likely you are able to respond to them at a given time. It helps members of the team decide whether and when they should message you directly.

Statuses are a great way to signal if you’re working from home or the office, if you’re sick or on vacation, if you’re in a meeting, or if you’re available for conversation.

Profile

Allovue has added some custom profile fields to aide in getting to know one another and learning communication preferences. Please take a few minutes to edit your profile to update these fields and to add a photo.

Do Not Disturb and Notifications

Feel free to use Do Not Disturb to reduce your notifications as much as necessary to keep your incoming Slack messages reasonable. Do Not Disturb turns off notifications on Slack between certain hours. You can "mute" channels so that there is no indication when new messages are present in those channels. It is absolutely unnecessary to be notified of every message in #et_cetera, for example. Leaving on extensive notifications is the number one way to find Slack an overwhelming distraction.

@channel v. @here

There are some special terms on Slack to notify people: **@channel** notifies everyone in a channel. **@here** will notify anyone who is in the channel who is also present. Both of these should be used *rarely*, with @here nearly always preferable to @channel. Think of @channel as using the Emergency Broadcast system that sometimes buzzes everyone's phone with that loud, awful noise. Think of @here as shouting in a room for attention. Both are sometimes needed, but be wary because of the impact of using these.

@user

When you use @(username) or even type the first name of someone in Slack, by default, it will create a notification for that user. Some of us have adopted the use of modified names to ensure there are no notifications when we don't want to trigger one-- for example, in order to not notify Jake we might type J0rk or J4ke or Jak3. Using @ will not notify a user who has set Do Not Disturb (DND) on, but Slack will give you the option to send a notification that "breaks" through Do Not Disturb when you @ message a user with DND on. This should only be used in true emergencies, of which there should be few.

Channels

Channels are a way to organize conversations around the same topic with multiple members of the team. Channels can be public, meaning any member of Allovue's Slack can view/join/search

or private, meaning only members of the channel can see/search for what's written in that channel or invite others to join a channel.

In general, communication should go in public channels, then private channels, then direct messages, and finally, group direct messages.

Public channels have the advantage of being accessible to members of the team. They produce a record of conversations so that we can retrace why we make certain decisions. It allows folks who are not available during a conversation to take part asynchronously or get up to speed. Although Slack is *a bad place to document decisions*, we all can fall into that pattern. Public channels make that less of a problem and make discussions more accessible. That said, if a decision is made in Slack that impacts more than those actively involved the discussion, an email should be sent to ensure all parties are informed.

Private channels are a good way to have conversations in groups that are not relevant or appropriate for a larger audience. They can create internal spaces for teams or functional groups to talk about work in progress that would be impeded by broader input or distracted by other participants.

Limit Group DMs

Channels are broadly preferred because individuals can control their notifications from channels. Without turning off notifications completely, users are directly notified for each method in an individual or group direct message. There are reasons to DM one person, but the cases for group direct messages are much weaker. Not only is it difficult to control notifications from group DMs, they are also hard to search for, and can quickly spiral into every possible combination of people in the company. Only use these when a conversation is urgent, the grouping is ephemeral, and no existing channel, public or private, contains that audience.

Before DMing or group DMing, consider:

1. Can more than one person answer this question?
2. Is there a broader audience that will want to read the rationale for any decisions made as a part of a conversation?

   a. If so, is it appropriate for a group conversation, or is this conversation best had one-on-one first?
3. Does this conversation need to be synchronous or can someone respond at a later time?
4. Can you use a private channel for this conversation that can be archived when it is no longer needed?
5. Is this conversation urgent now, or can it be had during an existing meeting? If not during an existing meeting, is it more appropriate to have a quick meeting rather than a chat conversation?

Common Channels

Allovue has several public channels common to all employees. Below are their description and use:

#general

This should be used exclusively for company-wide announcements specific to Allovue.

#et_cetera

This is Allovue's primary off-topic channel. Conversations here not about work. This is a fun space to talk to colleagues or share fun links that you find.

#appreciations

Mention someone in this channel and talk about something positive they've done when you want to acknowledge your colleagues. Share when folks go out of their way to help one another or a customer, great feedback we receive as a team, or anything that you want to make sure doesn't go unnoticed and unrecognized.

#family

Allovue has an inclusive definition of family— share your children, parents, siblings, pets, best friends, spouses, partners or whoever or whatever is special in your life. We love cute and funny pictures and stories.

#ednews

A place to share news stories about education. New research, news stories about school districts or school politics, etc all belong here.