

Better Meetings Checklist

End meeting mayhem – stay focused, respectful, and outcome-driven with these tips.

Before Calling a Meeting

- **Define a clear objective:** What outcome are you aiming for?
- **Check for alternatives:** Could a quick chat, shared doc, or email suffice instead?
- **Align with priorities:** If the topic isn't timely or strategic, postpone or cancel.
- **Delegate when appropriate:** Empower team members to lead and report back.

When Setting Meeting Logistics

- **Consider unconventional durations:** Try 15, 25, 45, or 55 minutes to promote focus and create breathing room.
- **State the purpose up front:** Add the objective to the meeting invite. Let people know if the meeting is for input, consensus, or final decisions.
- **Link, don't paste:** Store and share a link to the agenda for easy updates.
- **Curate the guest list:** Mark attendees as required or optional—respect people's time.
- **Block time for follow up:** Build space to act on post-meeting tasks.

For Recurring Meetings

- **Audit regularly:** Is it still useful? Trim the frequency or cancel if not.
- **Keep it relevant:** Reconfirm the purpose each time you meet.

Before Accepting a Meeting

- **Clarify the purpose:** Unsure why you're invited? Ask the organizer.
- **Check your role:** If optional and overloaded, delegate or decline.
- **Respect transitions:** Let the organizer know if you need to leave early for another commitment.

When Chairing a Meeting

- **Know your audience:** Anticipate who might dominate, who might hold back, and plan how to balance voices.
- **Start and end on time:** Punctuality builds trust and shows respect.
- **Stay focused:** Reinforce the objective at the start; steer conversations to stay aligned.
- **Use timeboxing:** Assign time limits to agenda items and stick to them. It keeps energy high and prevents rabbit holes.
- **Draw out quieter voices:** Invite input from those who haven't spoken—sometimes the best ideas come from the least vocal.
- **Handle derailers diplomatically:** Acknowledge off-topic points and suggest parking them for later follow-up.
- **Summarize often:** Recap key points and decisions as you go to keep everyone aligned.
- **Communicate decisions and next steps:** include who's doing what by when
- **Send a crisp recap:** Include decisions, action items, owners, and deadlines.
- **Follow up on follow-through:** Check in on action items before the next meeting to build accountability.

Want to go deeper?

Take the **Meetings Management course** on Harvard ManageMentor.

Email learning@ihis.org for access.