

Tips for Virtual + Hybrid Meetings

At LifeLabs Learning, we've studied hundreds of meeting hours to identify what makes great meetings different. Here are our favorite pro-tips to set up your virtual meeting for success:

BEFORE THE MEETING	
Set up early	Join the meeting five minutes early to test video, audio, and any other tech. Bonus: joining early increases visibility and water-cooler-chat possibilities!
Circulate the agenda as a reference	Agendas matter even more in remote meetings. Circulate them in advance. Why? If a tech glitch happens and participants drop and dial back in, it is easy to see where you are and pick back up on structure.
Assign multiple speakers	Engage attendees by assigning them talking points. Having at least one talking point on everyone's agenda gives them a purpose for being at the meeting beyond hearing what everyone else is saying. It also confirms that they are part of the team and are spending their time in a valuable way.
Use time zone hacks	Use a website like worldtimebuddy.com to easily find meeting times that work well for all participants. Bonus: ask for input from participants on their preferred times to meet.
Add a meeting description	In the meeting invite, be crystal clear about how people will be connecting. In the 'Meeting description' field, include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of the meeting, the date, the time + time zone, and the duration • HOW TO JOIN: followed by the meeting information like the meeting link, dial-in number, and any access codes or websites • Contact information for those who have trouble connecting
Nominate a helper	If multiple hubs are dialing into a hybrid meeting (part in-person and part virtual), nominate a helper for each site. The helper can handle tech glitches and signal if people want to talk.
Keep it short and varied	Be brain friendly. Virtual meetings are harder on our bodies because we move and blink less, leading to more fatigue. If your meeting is longer than 60 minutes, add variety! For example: rotate facilitators, launch polls, use chat, and take quick breaks.
Have a hotspot as back up	When dialing in from home, have a mobile hotspot ready in case your internet drops. (Click here for detailed instructions.)
Encourage video (one person, one screen)	Face-time keeps people focused and cuts down on multitasking. If one person is remote, be sure everyone has their laptops open, one person per screen. If some people are in a room together, mute all but one audio source. Bonus: use an external mic like a Jabra.

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DURING THE MEETING	
Start with round robins	Do a round robin that gets everyone to say at least one thing at the very beginning (e.g., a round of self-intros or 30 second updates). Why? Get all voices in the room / break each person's silence. Get everyone used to talking right away.
Agree to chat norms	Using group and private chat during virtual meetings can be engaging or distracting. Agree to a shared group norm for all or parts of the meeting. For example, for important discussions, you might ask the group to go "chatless." On the other hand, chat is a great tool for quick pulse checks, voting, and large group participation.
Cut the apologies (normalize step-overs)	Don't be too apologetic or deferential when people start speaking over each other. It's like driving up to a four-way stop with other cars who get there at the same time. Everyone's gesturing and mouthing to one another, "You go," "No, you go," "No, it's fine, you go!" Then, everyone goes at the same time. In remote and hybrid meetings, it is inevitable that two or three people chime in at the same time. At that point, one person should just take the lead instead of being overly apologetic. Just talk, then return to other people.
Direct questions to specific people vs. to the room in general	Why? Saying "anybody have ideas?" will create silence because normal nonverbal rules aren't there, so people won't risk cutting one another off. Instead, call on people and normalize that saying "pass" is fine.
Use the digital "raise hand" feature	Most virtual meeting platforms offer a digital hand raising function that makes it easy to determine who should speak next. Encourage meeting members to use this tool.
In hybrid meetings, invite remote members to speak first	In a hybrid meeting, yield the floor to remote meeting members first. This shows their voices count and makes sure their opinions aren't forgotten.
Do more process checks than normal	When people meet remotely, especially if there's no video involved, you're missing out on the ability to read facial expressions and body language. That's why it can be useful to solicit feedback on how people are thinking throughout the meeting. Every ten minutes, do a check-in where you ask attendees if all is clear / if they have anything to add / if it's okay to transition to the next point.
Nominate a 'watcher'	In hybrid meetings, the 'watcher' looks to see if a remote participant wants to say something, then says "I think x wanted to add something."
Use the mute function	As the meeting leader, mute any distracting sounds and encourage people to unmute themselves whenever they're ready to talk.