

(WFH)

Working from Home

Pro Tips and Best Practices



Purpose

This document is intended to provide a convenient reference of ideas and practices that can help anyone achieve better results when working from home.

Guiding Principles	2
Being Human	3
Physical Environment	4
Finding Your Groove	5
Communications	6
Knowledge Base	8
Video Conferencing	9
Being Responsive	10

Guiding Principles

You can solve the challenges you'll face WFH in all sorts of different ways. Very rarely will there be one right way. If you keep these guiding principles in mind, they should be able to help you navigate most situations, however unique they might be.



Do things that build trust

You'll need it to accomplish anything you want to do with, for, or through other people. It's hard to build and easy to break, so being careful pays off.



Deliver as one team

Communication, collaboration, and coordination might be harder, but it will still be critical to your success.



Feedback is key

It's the only way you'll know if you're doing it right. And it's the only way your teammates will know, so be generous with your feedback.

Next, we'll provide you with specific ideas organized by topic area that can help you find the suggestions that you're most interested in.



Physical Environment

Take care in setting up the right physical environment for yourself; otherwise, you could lose the battle before it even starts.

Being Human

There are fewer opportunities to learn about your colleagues as people when you WFH. Your teammates might not know anything about you, and that can feel very isolating.

1. Make small talk.

2. Check in on your teammates.

How are they doing? Have they adjusted okay? Do we still feel like the team and the company we'd like to be? Our culture is the behavior we all take, and the values we all act on, so we get to decide what it is.

3. Have 1:1s

with no set agenda. Just see what happens.

4. Make time

to come together for key business moments, and also just for fun. It's not just okay to spend time and budget on this, it's important to spend time and budget on this.

5. Assume good intentions.

Communication is harder when it's not face to face. It's much easier to misinterpret signals and information. Give people the benefit of the doubt until you can talk to them. You'll probably need to steer clear of sarcasm altogether.

6. Out of sight is out of mind.

Or that's the danger, at least. Your teammates won't be able to tell when they do something that helps you or pleases you. You might need to be more deliberate in how you show your appreciation for others.

7. Just-In-Time-Feedback is harder

when you only interact face to face in scheduled meetings. It will be very tempting to simply skip it. But don't. Ignoring or enabling friction to build hurts you, the team, and the mission.

8. Mister Rogers.

This is a fun way to cause random interactions, making up for what you lose in the hallways, in the cafeteria, or at the water cooler. On a regular basis, setup a 15 minute, random grouping of people from across the company that connect to a video chat and see what happens next.

1.

Setup a dedicated professional home office space with an ergonomically correct desk, good cameras and microphones, and, if you have housemates, a door you can close.

2.

Sit with your back to a solid wall -- avoid mirrors, windows, and glass walls.

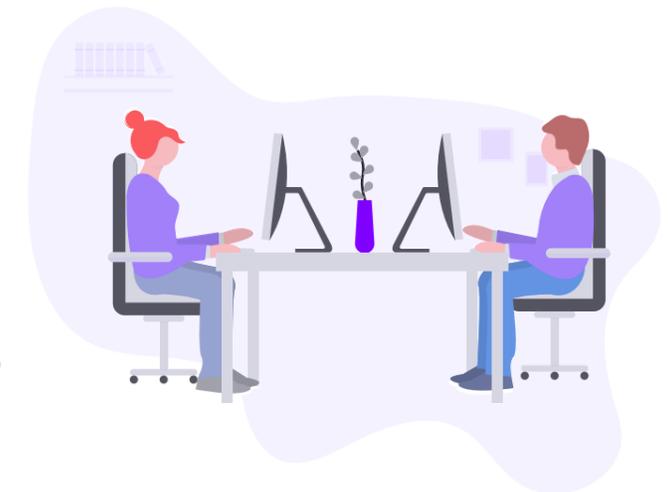
3.

Do an audio/visual test to prove out your A/V quality. Book a Zoom meeting for yourself, and record your audio and video for a minute or two. Play it back.

a. Listen for choppiness, echo, reverb, etc.

b. Look at what is in the field of view. Get a blank, nice looking wall, if you can.

c. Check the lighting. Avoid being top or backlit, as the shadows obscure your face.



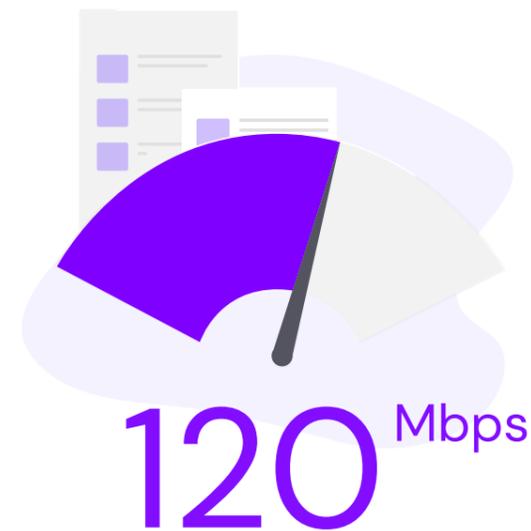
4.

Make sure you have a great internet connection. You'll need it to ensure professional audio and video quality. There's the speed you pay for, and there's also the speed you get based on your system configuration. Here's how to do a health check.

a. Test your internet speed at fast.com. You need to care about your download speed, latency, and upload speed.

b. If you don't like your download/upload speeds, you can talk to your ISP.

c. If you don't like your latency, you need to tune up your router configuration. You should get a delay under 40ms on average to be able to have a good call quality. If there are peaks of more than 100ms, you have a bad connection and will probably have a very bad video call.



Finding Your Groove

You may notice it's harder to keep your focus on work since once you lose the immersion of an office environment that's been entirely designed for that purpose.

Work from home, but still go to work. It takes a little mental discipline to transition between mindsets.

1. Make sure the things you see in your office space are all work related to avoid distractions, temptations, and procrastinating.
2. Avoid working from locations where you can be interrupted or interrupt others.
3. Make it easy for others in your household to see if you are OK to interrupt, versus "Do Not Disturb". An option might be to use a cardboard letter on your desktop that you can flip between "Busy/Available".
4. Try putting your shoes on. It'll make it feel like you've left your house and you'll be more focused.
5. Make your bed every morning. This is your first accomplishment of the day and can help get you in the right place mentally for the rest of your day.
6. Put on work-appropriate clothes.
7. Have a morning ritual (and an evening one). Replace what you used to do on your commute with new, regular activities that help you transition between mindsets.
8. If noises distract you, invest in some noise-cancelling headphones.
9. Walk around during calls. The movement often improves focus.
10. Avoid going "back to your desk" after you "leave work" for the day. Keeping sharp distinctions between mindsets helps make each clearer and more effective.
11. Get out of the house after you're done working. Go for a bit of a walk and get some fresh air, get some exercise. This can create a transition ritual for you, and keep WFH a sustainable thing you can repeat indefinitely.



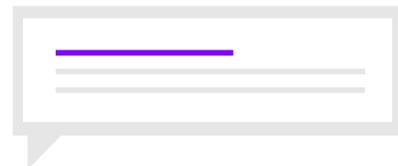
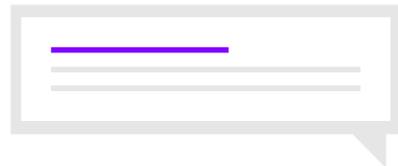
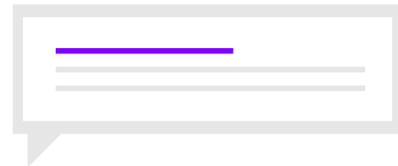
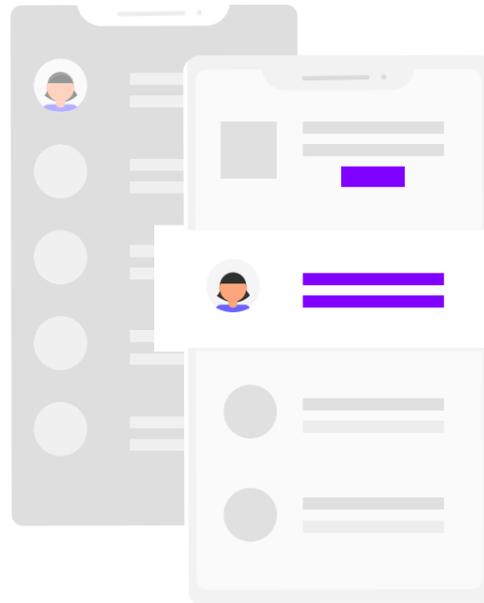
Communications

As I'm sure you've experienced, communication can make absolutely everything we do harder, or easier.

1. Communicating frequently and clearly builds trust.
2. Provide a bit more context than you normally would. You're sending your communication out into the world to be understood, and you might not actually have the opportunity anymore to see if they understood it.
3. Read what you write, and revise it at least once before sending it.
4. Typography and formatting matters. Help your readers by using fonts, emphasis, and whitespace to improve readability.
5. Create and respect Team Agreements.
6. Be specific about the feedback you want. It shows vulnerability, which builds trust. It helps others quickly understand what you want from them, which builds trust. And you will be much more likely to get something more meaningful and valuable to you. Consider the difference between the following examples:
 - a. "Would like your feedback."
 - b. "I'm not sure about x, and how maintainable it will be over time. What do you think about its maintainability?"
7. **Everyone's voice is important.**
 - a. Don't be shy just because you're on the phone. Make sure you are asking the questions you have, sharing your voice and input. Help others help you.
 - b. Truly listen and provide space for others to share their voice. Make it hard or even impossible for them to be overlooked or forgotten.

8.

Show a bias towards **communicating in higher bandwidth ways** that humanize relationships. Video call beats email or chat for all but the simplest communications.

**9.**

Recognize and skillfully use the different communication tools you already have. Research has shown that nonverbal cues or body language along with facial expressions, tone of voice and body stance account for almost 55% of all the communication that takes place. As per the research, only 7% of the message's comprehension by the receiver is based on the actual words of the sender, 38% is on the basis of para language (the volume, tone and pace of speech) while 55% is on the basis of nonverbal cues (body language).

a. Face-to-face

(videoconference with cameras on, if not in-person)

i. Highest bandwidth**ii.** Anything sensitive**iii.** Crucial conversations**b. Verbal**

Anything that requires a dialog, or detailed discussion

c. Written**i.** Group chat for quick, simple, fleeting exchanges**ii.** Emails for more formal communication that can be referenced**iii.** Documents when the content is large or must persist over time**d. Body language**

Your movements, eye contact and gestures, the way you sit and stand all help in conveying a message to the person with whom you are communicating.

e. Para language

A significant component of nonverbal communication is the way something is said, instead of what is said actually. This consists of style of speaking, tone, emotion, stress, pitch, intonation and voice quality. It helps in the communication of interest, approval or the absence of it.



Knowledge Base

Expect and plan for more documentation. Less in-person, easy, anytime communication means you will almost certainly need more documentation, and more asynchronous ways to share and radiate information.

1.

Have a knowledge base (KB) or wiki or some other portal for the team to put and share important knowledge and files. It serves the team and potentially stakeholders as an information radiator and single source of truth.

2.

Disorganized documentation is virtually the same as not having documentation. It has to be easy to find and reference. Think about your knowledge base structure, access, and taxonomy.

3.

If someone asks you for information that you know is already in the KB, don't repeat what is already written. Instead, respond with the link to that information to help build the self-service muscle.

4.

If someone has questions after reading your KB, immediately update it with your response, so others will not need to ask you the same question.

5.

Be obsessively consistent about keeping the KB up to date. Wherever you hear or discuss something that is important enough to tell others, add it to the KB immediately. Your work is not finished until you update the KB. You can add this as acceptance criteria in user stories very easily.

6.

Don't write a thesis. You don't have time for that, and others don't have time to read it. Instead, keep it short. Very Short. Use bullet points. Write the shortest update and cover all the important facts, accurate to the best of your knowledge. Imagine the other person is reading on a smartphone.

Video Conferencing

1.

Schedule every meeting as a video call. Doesn't have to be a "special" meeting.

2.

Always have video on. It enables multiple other communication forms to occur besides the video, enhancing the effectiveness of the communication.

3.

Use group chat backchannel and nonverbal communication to speed up video calls.

a. When a meeting attendee loses video or audio, use a backchannel to debug the problem while the meeting flow continues.

4.

The facilitator must actively ensure that everyone who raises their hand has a chance to speak in turn.

5.

If everyone in the group starts signaling to speak louder by putting their hand to their ear, just start speaking more loudly. No need to stop the flow of the meeting to talk about it.

6.

Zoom Pro Tips

a. Explore all your options at <https://zoom.us/profile/setting>

b. You have the option to setup a personal meeting room so your meeting ID never changes, and you and others can memorize it and use the same one repeatedly. Just be careful with highly confidential meetings, then.

Use Personal Meeting ID (PMI) when scheduling a meeting

You can visit [Personal Meeting Room](#) to change your Personal Meeting settings.



Use Personal Meeting ID (PMI) when starting an instant meeting



c. Turn video on by default.

Host video

Start meetings with host video on



Participants video

Start meetings with participant video on. Participants can change this during the meeting.



d. Presenting to a big audience?

Mute participants upon entry

Automatically mute all participants when they join the meeting. The host controls whether participants can unmute themselves. [🔗](#)



e. Did you know you can poll?

Polling

Add 'Polls' to the meeting controls. This allows the host to survey the attendees.



f. Annotate and whiteboard in real-time

Annotation

Allow participants to use annotation tools to add information to shared screens. [🔗](#)

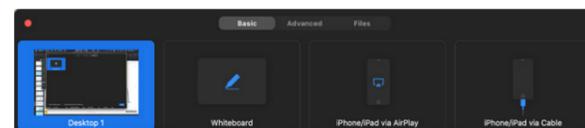


Whiteboard

Allow participants to share whiteboard during a meeting. [🔗](#)



g. Share your screen, or a device's screen



h. Collect nonverbal feedback.

Nonverbal feedback

Participants in a meeting can provide nonverbal feedback and express opinions by clicking on icons in the Participants panel. [🔗](#)



i. Recordings

i. Assume it is illegal to record someone without their knowing. Always announce it before you record.

ii. Recordings persist on the cloud for 30 days, and then are automatically deleted.

Being Responsive

When you reach out to communicate to someone and they are not responsive, it can feel more discouraging than when you know they are in the office working next to you. And, vice versa. The last thing you want is for people to give up on trying to reach out to you for help.

1.

Publicize your working hours. Avoid making people think about timezones. You can bake this into the tools you're already using.

a. Team agreements

b. Calendar working hours

2.

Let your calendar radiate when you are available or not. Don't block time if you're actually available to meet. And if your calendar shows you are available, it's reasonable for people to expect you to be responsive.

3.

Respond to all feedback to demonstrate you appreciate it and that it has been received. Healthy, functioning feedback loops build trust.

3.

Don't give in to the temptation to multitask. If you are not paying attention, it leads to all sorts of failed communication and broken trust.

