



Smart Usage of Slack

Introduction

This document offers practical guidelines for smart usage of Slack and other apps that may prompt compulsive behavior. Careful implementation of these guidelines should bring a significant boost in productivity and a corresponding reduction in stress.

Although we describe what we believe is the optimal approach for most Spooners, we recognize that everyone has different needs and preferences that may require adjustments to the guidelines we present. Ultimately, it's every Spooner's responsibility to use sound judgment in applying them in practice.

Regardless of the exact approach chosen, it's important for each Spooner to seriously consider—and, if needed, promptly address—the issues discussed in this document.

Guidelines

Use calls—not Slack—for urgent communications

Slack isn't an immediate-response channel. This means **a Spooner shouldn't expect instant Slack replies or feel obliged to provide them**, as consistently replying within minutes harms focus and productivity. For this reason, quick replies are only appropriate if a Spooner is already within one of their planned usage windows (more on this in the dedicated section below).

Calls are inherently synchronous, which makes them ideal for handling urgent matters. Additionally, using them as the default channel for time-sensitive communication reduces the pressure to compulsively check Slack.

To make this system work, a Spooner should configure their devices so that urgent calls can always be heard. On iOS, this is achieved by enabling the *Allow Repeated Calls* option, which allows callers to bypass Silent Mode by making two calls within 3 minutes.

We have a dedicated approach for managing technical incidents.



Schedule usage windows in advance—and respect them

A Spooner should block specific times in their calendar for checking Slack, and avoid using the app outside those windows. Treating Slack as *off* by default and *on* only at scheduled times should help curb the impulse to check it constantly. Moreover, processing incoming messages in batches is far more efficient than reading them piecemeal. We recommend following a similar approach for all other relevant apps, including Gmail.

Turn off notifications

Notifications are designed to interrupt, and every interruption comes at the cost of focus, productivity, and mental health. Therefore, **a Spooner should keep notifications off across all of their apps when working.**

Quit apps that aren't in use

The briefest check of Slack—or any other app eliciting compulsive behavior—to confirm the absence of anything urgent is still an interruption that carries a significant productivity and stress cost. Having to launch the app afresh every time adds a bit of friction, which helps break the mindless cycle of checking and re-checking. As such, **a Spooner should quit all apps they don't currently need.**

Hide all app icons

Merely seeing app icons—especially those associated with habitual or compulsive use—creates cognitive pull and unnecessary temptation. **By removing app icons from sight, a Spooner can reduce distractions** and ensure that opening an app is a deliberate choice rather than a reflex.

Triage incoming messages deliberately

Normally, a Spooner won't know how important or urgent a message is until they read it. As attention is limited, **messages should be triaged deliberately, rather than consumed in the order they arrive.**

A practical and effective heuristic is to read incoming Slack messages in the following order:

1. **Direct messages.** These generally imply higher priority or personal responsibility.



2. **Messages in which the Spooner is tagged.** These typically imply a clear request for input.
3. **All remaining messages.** These are usually informational and can be addressed later if needed.

Avoid marking messages as *unread*

Marking messages as *unread* is inefficient and should be avoided. When a Spooner reads a message, they should immediately act on it if the resulting task takes 15 minutes or less, or if it clearly deserves top priority. If neither condition is met, the message should be converted into a task and added to the Spooner's task list (potentially including the *Saved for later* list on Slack).

Delete apps from cellphones

Sustainable focus comes from reducing temptation, not just resisting it. **By keeping Slack and other relevant apps off their phone, a Spooner can remove the possibility of reflexive checking.**

If a Spooner needs such an app on their phone, we recommend at least removing its icon from the home screen and deactivating all notifications.

Keep cellphones out of sight and reach (but not earshot)

A Spooner should place their phone somewhere within earshot that requires standing up and taking a few steps to retrieve it. This small amount of physical friction is often enough to prevent reflexive checking without impairing availability.

Be as autonomous as possible

People tend to overestimate how critical it is for their messages to receive an immediate response. In most cases, this urgency stems from poor planning, misplaced assumptions, a lack of resourcefulness, or insufficient individual effort.

It's never a sound strategy for a Spooner to assume that others share their priorities or timelines. For this reason, **a Spooner should design workflows that don't require others to interrupt their own work to provide immediate input.** While this approach may initially involve inefficiencies, the long-term benefits far outweigh the costs.



Use meetings when lots of quick exchanges are needed

When progress depends on many fast back-and-forth exchanges that would be inefficient over Slack, a Spooner should prefer a meeting instead. Typical examples include the early onboarding of a new Spooner or the initial phases of building a new system, when numerous questions and comments surface in quick succession.

It's important to remember that meetings carry their own risks: They can easily become inefficient if overused or poorly managed. For this reason, a Spooner should use meetings deliberately and sparingly.

Be selective with channels

Knowledge is power, but more information doesn't automatically translate into more knowledge. Excessive channel membership merely increases distraction and cognitive load. **A Spooner should leave channels unless they are genuinely relevant to their work or responsibilities.**

Favor channels over group direct messages

Unlike channels, group direct messages lack titles, making them harder to find and slower to re-contextualize when revisited after some time. In addition, adding new members to an existing conversation is either functionally impossible or, when supported by the tool, risks exposing them to past exchanges that may be irrelevant or confidential. For these reasons, **a Spooner should always prefer creating or using a channel rather than sending a direct message to multiple people.**

Use threads

Threads keep channel usage efficient, so a Spooner should always use them in both channels and direct messages.

In some cases, this approach could lead to important updates being missed. The following habits help keep that risk small:

- **Manually following the thread.** When a Spooner doesn't intend to write in the thread yet they'd like to read any updates, it's a good idea to use the *Get notified about new replies* feature.



- **Keeping threads on topic.** This involves starting a new thread, rather than changing the topic within an existing one.
- **Also sending important messages to the channel.** If a message is particularly important, the Spooner posting it can use the *Also send to channel* feature to ensure maximum visibility.

Tag people when appropriate

Tagging affects the order in which a Spooner reads messages and should be used sparingly and deliberately. For this reason, **a Spooner should only be tagged if it's important they notice a message they might otherwise miss, or if there's clear value in them reading—and acting on—a message sooner rather than later.**

In particular, tagging shouldn't be used to compensate for unclear writing or poor prioritization. Additionally, when tagging a Spooner, sufficient context should be provided so the reason for the tag is immediately clear.

Write fewer messages—but make them high quality

A Spooner should aim to deliver everything needed in a single, well-structured message. High-quality messages reduce back-and-forth, improve decision-making, and minimize disruptive notifications. The following elements characterize a high-quality message:

- **Appropriate context.** The message provides the right amount of information to understand and act on it.
- **Unambiguous outcome or required actions.** The message includes an answer, a question, or a call to action.
- **Explicit timing.** When appropriate, the message sets a clear deadline for the expected action.

Select the right tool for the communication

Slack is the ideal place for short messages that won't need to be iterated on collaboratively or referenced repeatedly over time. The rest of the written content belongs in Google Docs, Evernote, or Notion.



Conclusion

Slack can be a negative force just as easily as a positive one. We've been using it as our main channel of communication since the earliest days of Bending Spoons, and we don't expect that to change in the future. However, due to its addictive nature, it takes considerable discipline to make optimal use of it. Similar considerations apply to other apps with the potential to encourage compulsive behavior.

It's hard to overstate the degree to which following the guidelines outlined in this document can enhance Spooner productivity and help keep unnecessary stress at bay. Nobody is perfect, and we all fall short of the ideal standard in some way or another. What matters is being mindful of the problem, making continuous efforts to improve, and doing our part to help Bending Spoons maintain healthy and effective communication habits.