Work Faster, Smarter in 2024

Simple async habits to clear your calendar and focus your team

It's time to try something new.

It's hard to break the old habit of saying "let's jump on a call" when you need to ask a favor, explain a problem, or otherwise move complex work forward. But meetings aren't always the best way to collaborate, and they're one of the biggest time wasters (and expenses) for modern teams.

Asynchronous (async) collaboration — where two or more people are working together without being together or an expectation of an immediate response — is the surprising key to ensuring there's space on your calendar for important conversations that do need to happen live.

Here are some signs you need to reclaim your time with better async work habits:

- **Back-to-back (or double booked!) meetings:** If it's tough to find a spot on your calendar for another meeting, you have too many.

- **No focus time:** Are you finding yourself working early mornings or late nights because it's the only time you can work uninterrupted?

- **Lack of preparation:** If you're arriving in meetings unprepared or if the first half of meetings is all context-sharing, it's a sign that pre-work and more space between meetings is needed.

- **Spending the day in reactive mode:** Does responding to meetings and pings regularly derail your plans for the day?

If you're reading this, chances are you feel some or all of those pains. You might have even tried shifting to more async work in the past year — if so, good for you! Whether async collaboration is brand-new or something you've tried before, this guide will help you create new habits that stick — and improve your everyday work life.

Async etiquette

Think back to all the unspoken communication "rules" you've learned over your career — you had to learn the "rules" of email (the dangers of "reply all"!), the rules of conference rooms (no smelly foods), and when to use an @channel notification on Slack. There are similar principles for making async collaboration work better.

Working async is easier when you adopt and socialize similar best practices. This section contains some simple recommendations based on the Loom team's years of experience.

Context

People are coming to your async message at different points in their days, so make sure you're clearly defining the purpose of your communication and timelines for any responses or actions. You (hopefully) wouldn't go into a meeting without a clear structure for the conversation, and your async communication should be just as thought-out.

SAMPLE SCRIPT

"Hey everyone! Looking forward to our meeting Friday. To ensure we stay on time, please have already read this one page doc that has context on the data we're discussing. I will send out a reminder tomorrow to make sure we're all on the same page."

Schedule a monthly calendar audit and defend your deep work time.

Timeboxing (also known as timeblocking) is a powerful tactic to preserve your focus time. Essentially, timeboxing boils down to using your calendar for all work and not just meetings. Your Gmail or Outlook calendar becomes your to-do list. So you are adding projects thoughtfully onto your calendar with a block of time to do it in — otherwise, it isn't prioritized and doesn't get done.

[For a deep dive into timeboxing, check out this Todoist page.]

Timeboxing offers a great mental model to start thinking beyond meetings and about defending your deep focus time. If you've ever tried to get back into a work groove after being interrupted by a meeting, you know that it's not easy. There's even a term for this struggle: meeting recovery syndrome.

Research shows it takes around 23 minutes to refocus after being distracted. All this disruption means less time for deep work — a state of focus, concentration, and productivity.
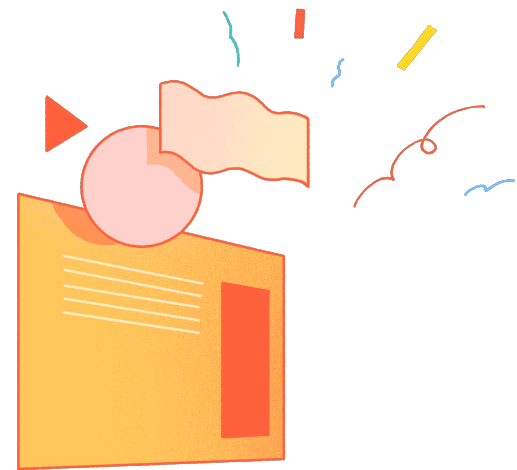
Not sure if you need a calendar overhaul? Start with a quick audit of your past month:

- Did you have enough time during the regular work day for projects?

- How many blocks of less than 1 hour between do you have?

- Have you had to work on projects during off hours (early or late) because there weren't long enough stretches of time?

- Is there a time during the day you're consistently more productive? Before lunch, for example. (If you have time for lunch! If not, also a good sign to try timeboxing.)

Repeat this activity at the start of each month. Put a 15-minute calendar hold down now to do it!

Next, design your calendar around your professional needs and personal preferences. For some people, the most productive time will be first thing in the morning and more mundane tasks should be saved for evenings. Start with rearranging your smaller internal meetings — maybe all your 1:1s are back-to-back on Mondays — then work up to larger recurring meetings.

> "A 40 hour time-blocked work week, I estimate, produces the same amount of output as a 60+ hour work week pursued without structure."
>
> — CAL NEWPORT, AUTHOR OF DEEP WORK

Habit 2 — Shift one weekly 1:1 to an async check-in.

Breaking the cycle of unnecessary status meetings is an easy way to reclaim time on your calendar. Async video (of course we recommend Loom!) is the way to keep a personal connection and conversation going with a colleague without needing a live meeting.

Async video messaging means you're sharing an update, asking for help, providing context, or giving feedback verbally — and you can include a screenshare of visual aids like slides, a doc, or data. When you record yourself or your screen, and add context with your voice, you're sending an async video message. It's a way to replace a status meeting or a wall of text sent over email or DM.

At Loom, we embrace "No meeting Wednesdays" — and a key way that can happen is by replacing unnecessary meetings with async video. Instead of rescheduling that 1:1 for the second time in a row, share an async video update and ask for one in return.

Here's an easy script to follow for a video, but you could also do it with text bullets:

"Hey Janie! Sharing this update to clear up both our calendars, but I welcome any questions in the comments of the video. I'm going to take you through my three priorities for the week, and then I'll share a couple blockers that I could use your help on by Monday..."

▶ **Watch a short tutorial on giving feedback with Loom.**

"Time is money, and it should be spent on helping our merchants succeed and not on unnecessary meetings."

— SHOPIFY CFO JEFF HOFFMEISTER

Walk through feedback in a video to reduce confusion.

Have you ever opened up a doc to review a colleague's feedback and been immediately overwhelmed? Looking at a sea of comments on a design or track changes on a document is a great way to feel like your work wasn't good.

It's hard to read or understand tone and nuance in comments on a doc. It's hard to know what's a "must change" and what's just another idea someone's offering. And, it's easy as a reviewer to forget to leave positive comments.
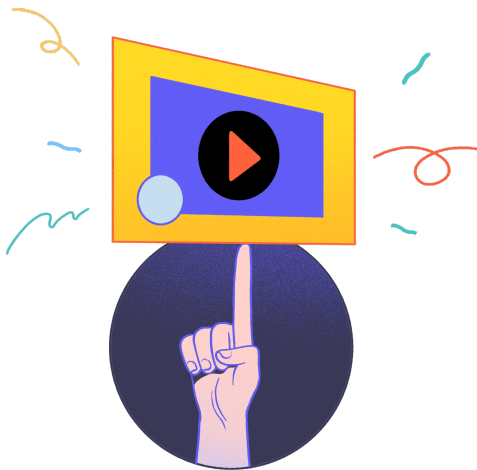
That's why sharing a video voiceover of feedback on a project or design is wildly helpful. You'll see immediate gains in focus time because Loom estimates back-and-forth messages and clarifications can take up to 5 hours of focus each week, in certain roles. But it's also a really human way to share feedback without unintentional negativity.

Next time you mark up a doc or design with feedback, start a screenshare recording with Loom and start with some high level thoughts on the overall project – do you think it's just needing final polish? Say so. Are some of your comments for consideration rather than requirements? Call it out clearly.

▶ **Watch a short tutorial on giving feedback with Loom.**

"I use Loom most often in a one-off capacity, say, running through a Google Doc, and I don't want to add 75 different comments. So I will use that as a way to give my verbal feedback and next actions to save a ton of time — or at least a ton of my time."

— TIM FERRISS, EPISODE 694 OF THE TIM FERRISS PODCAST

Habit 5   **Shift to async brainstorms.**

We all know that a great brainstorm can create positive energy and fresh ideas to a problem. Bringing together different points of view is the best way to create a really powerful solution, idea, or new product. And including cross-functional partners in a brainstorm at the top of a project can also build a sense of ownership and connection across teams.

But most people don't come up with their best ideas in live meetings. And you'll end up with a lot of uncomfortable silence and pressure.

Instead, use async tools to give people the freedom to share ideas on their own time, with the structure of a digital whiteboard (or even blank doc) and Loom kickoff explaining the problem statement.

> "A special thanks to all the heroes who think twice before sending a 60-minute meeting invite, a 30-minute prep call, a 60-minute 'alignment' call or 'just a quick sync'.... and instead send a Loom. The world is a better place because of you."
>
> —THEODORA PETRA NEGREA, CUSTOMER SUCCESS AT MURAL

Habit 4   Share out regular kudos and team highlight reels.

This isn't technically going to free up time, but an important part of working async is making sure you're also intentionally making moments for connection. Do your colleagues and leaders know the amazing work you (and/or your team) are doing? Did you just wrap up a project that had really strong results and could inspire others as a success? Do you just want to shout out some effective collaboration or creativity or above-and-beyond from a colleague?

Blocking off time each month for kudos will make it a regular part of your work behaviors, and it will ensure no connection is lost on your team as you start to shift more into async communication and away from small talk meetings.

At Loom, department leads share out monthly recaps of highlights and blockers so that everyone at the company knows progress towards goals and priorities for their colleagues. It's a great way to bring transparency while also celebrating hard work and accomplishments.

Are you client or customer-facing? Record or email over a personalized thank you or status update. You don't need to get on someone's calendar to build a strong business relationship — in fact, you might find yourself deeply appreciated for not requesting a meeting.

▶ **Watch a short tutorial on how to say congrats with Loom.**

Your video can be less than five minutes; just set up the challenge, target audience, and point people to any background resources you've compiled. As long as you explain the problem clearly and bring the hype, people will be excited to share ideas.

Include in your video:

- The problem you want to solve

- Where ideas should go – a doc or digital whiteboard, for example

- Deadlines

- What you'll be doing with the ideas and next steps

Brainstorms don't need to be all about external problems – you can also follow these guidelines for project retros and feedback sessions.

▶ **Watch a tutorial video on async brainstorming.**

> **"Leaders who want to gain an innovation advantage in the future of work need to avoid sticking to pre-pandemic innovation methods."**
>
> **HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW**

It only takes a few small steps to create a better workday and a better year!

If you only bring a couple async tips into your 2024 work year, these will help get you more focus time:

1 Audit your calendar and intentionally create structured space for deep work.

2 Be clear about expectations (timing, scope, where feedback goes) when kicking off async projects.

3 Tap video messages for communication that needs to have nuance, celebrates wins, or could be subject to misinterpretation in written form.

4 Shift readout meetings, brainstorms, and one-way presentations to async. These are low-hanging fruit to knock off your calendar.

5 Build moments of connection into your async work; bring your personality into video messages and regularly share positive kudos — async is not just for updates and assignments.

Ready to start taking things async?

Loom is video messaging for work.

[💬 **Book Time with Loom**]

Our team would love to help you build
a measurable async collaboration program.