

Before You Hit Send: Your Meeting-or-Message Decision Guide

A quick guide for when to meet, what to write instead of meeting, and how to decline gracefully.

The 60-Second Meeting Test

Ask these in order. The first “no” means: don’t call the meeting.

- 1 Does this need live, real-time back-and-forth — not just a status check? No → send a message
- 2 Do you need buy-in or a decision from more than one person, right now? No → send a message
- 3 Would waiting for written replies meaningfully delay something urgent? No → try async first

If you answered “yes” all three times — it’s a real meeting. Keep reading for how to size it right.

Meeting Type Quick Reference

Type	Purpose	Length	Who's in the room
Status update	Share progress and spot roadblocks early	15–30 min	Core team + cross-functional partners
Decision	Evaluate options and reach a final choice	30–60 min	Only the decision-makers
Brainstorm	Rapidly generate creative ideas and solutions	45–90 min	Project team + a facilitator
1:1	Coaching, feedback, and relationship-building	30–50 min	Manager + direct report, only

Examples of What to Write Instead of Sending a Meeting Invite

For a status update: “Here’s where things stand on [project]: [1-2 line summary]. No action needed unless you have questions — reply here if so.”

For feedback on a document: “Could you add comments directly in [doc link] by [specific date/time]? That gives me time to incorporate changes before [deadline].”

For a decision that isn’t urgent: “Here are the options: [A/B/C]. I’d lean toward [X] because [reason] — reply with any objections by [date], otherwise I’ll move forward.”

How to Decline a Meeting (Politely)

You aren’t sure you’re needed: “I don’t think I’m essential for this one, but I’m happy to review the notes afterward if anything needs my input. Feel free to reach out if you need me sooner.”

The topic could be handled over chat/email: “Could we try this as a written thread first? If we hit a wall (blocker), I’m glad to hop on a call.”

Your calendar is completely packed: “I can’t make this time work without dropping something else — could we handle my part over email, or is there a recording or notes I could review instead?”

You’re double-booked with a higher priority: “I have a scheduling conflict that I can’t move, but I want to make sure I don’t hold things up. Can you send over the agenda? I can email you my updates before the meeting starts.”

The meeting lacks a clear agenda: “I want to make sure I’m fully prepared for this. Do we have an agenda or a specific goal yet? I just want to make sure I’m the best person to add value to the conversation, or if I should loop someone else in.”

The Golden Rules (If You MUST Meet)

If a live conversation is truly required, stick to these three etiquette rules to respect everyone’s time:

No Agenda, No Attendance: Never send a blank invite. Always include 2–3 bullet points explaining the goal of the meeting.

Shrink the Clock: Default your invites to 20 or 45 minutes instead of the standard 30 or 60.

Only Invite the Crucial People: If someone is only needed for the first 5 minutes, let them leave early. If they just need to know the outcome, send them the notes instead.