

Top tips for starting and finishing meetings on time

Your meetings will often start late and run over time, but it doesn't have to be this way. It's time to take your meetings more seriously! Whether you're the meeting organiser or the attendee, commit to starting and finishing your meetings on time.

Expect attendees to be punctual and the meeting to finish on schedule. Intolerance for tardiness will set a behavioural standard for the group and participants will likely conform if expectations are well-defined and consistently enforced.

If you're the Meeting Organiser/Chair:

- state that the meeting will begin promptly at the scheduled time and that all participants should be on time.
- send a reminder e-mail thirty minutes before the meeting begins and ensure that you begin the meeting at the scheduled time.
- if you've encouraged others to be prompt, don't embarrass yourself by showing up late. Meeting participants to arrive on time.
- close the meeting room doors at the scheduled time. There's nothing like late attendees to disrupt the flow of a meeting! Consider posting a note outside the door stating the meeting's time. This may seem harsh, but it clearly communicates how serious you are about keeping your meetings on time. If the tardy participants don't consider your meeting important enough to arrive on time, perhaps they shouldn't have committed to attend at all.
- if your meeting starts a little late, you should still finish the meeting at the scheduled time. It's inconsiderate to assume the participants' schedules revolve around your meeting, so wrap up the meeting when you promised.
- consider creating a "latecomer jar" to which meeting participants must contribute one pound for each minute they arrive late to meetings. At the end of the week, you can buy cakes for everyone who attended the meeting... courtesy of the latecomers!

If you're the Attendee:

- quickly review the agenda before heading to the meeting. It's a good idea to remind yourself why you're attending the meeting. Reviewing the agenda helps attendees be better prepared for the meeting and, in turn, will help focus the meeting, enable all of the agenda items to be covered and allow the meeting to finish on time!
- make your way to the meeting ten minutes before it actually begins. This will give you enough time to visit the toilet, pour a cup of coffee or deal with any issues that may come up along the way. Plus, you can choose your seat for the meeting!
- consider speaking up if the meeting organiser shows up late. There are several ways to do this tactfully without insulting anyone. For example, if the organiser consistently arrives ten minutes late to your weekly meetings, ask him if it would be more convenient to start 15 minutes later next week.
- try to ask only relevant questions during the meeting. If your comment isn't directly related to the topic at hand, don't mention it. Getting off track is one of the main reasons that meetings go over time. If your group can avoid getting off track, you'll all spend less time in meetings.
- leave the meeting when it was scheduled to end. When the organiser extended the invitation to meet, he stated when the meeting would finish. It was on this condition that you accepted the meeting and committed your time. If you have work to which you must attend, politely tell the organiser that you have to leave and excuse yourself from the meeting – it's your judgement on this one!!

By acting on these ideas, you can indicate how important punctual meetings are. You may even influence others whose meetings frequently run over time.