

# How we communicate at Sift

## Slack vs Email vs Meetings vs PM Tools Vs Texting:

### How to know which one to use when.

We're lucky to live in a world with so many ways to get in touch with our colleagues, just a generation ago a long-distance call was a big deal, and a generation before that you had to plan way ahead of time to talk to someone on their side of the country.

But as Spider-man taught us, with great power comes great responsibility. This guide exists to set the ground rules for how Sifters decide which way to communicate with their colleagues

## When to Slack

Slack makes it easy to discuss things quickly. That's great! Talking with your colleagues should be super simple!

Slack is the best tool in these situations:

- If you need a quick answer to something simple/small
- If you want to share/collaborate with someone in real time
- If you need a response quickly
- If you're looking to share something interesting/funny/only semi-on-topic

## The challenges of Slack

One of the best criticisms of Slack I've heard is that it can act like a meeting that never ends and you have to constantly be keeping up with. We don't want folks who are in the zone to miss out on important details because they are working! Remember, not everyone is on Slack at all times!

Here are some times when it's best NOT to slack:

- When you want to make sure the entire team understands something
- If you want to make sure what you say can easily be found and referenced by others later (Slack is not as a system of record or a Project Management tool!)
- If you're giving specific instructions

## Expectations on Slack

- During work hours (9-6ish) Sifters should be checking slack around once every 90 minutes to make sure there are no small details others are asking of them.
- If you're working on something, set yourself to do not disturb mode so that others can see you are not available.
- If you see someone is away or offline, don't expect an instant response!

## When to Email

As most of our internal communications happen on Slack, emails become MORE important as there are fewer of them. Emails typically are reserved for more serious/important communications.

*Of course, nearly all external communication happens on email. Hopefully, there will be more of that as we grow! Because of this remember those team members who deal primarily with external actions are likely to be more active in email than those with more internally focused roles.*

Use email when:

- You're sharing a communication you want people to reference in the future
- You're sharing something with lots of detail
- You're sharing something important and you want to underscore the level of import
- When you're outlining a medium or larger task (especially to a group)

- *External folks (obviously)*

## Expectations on Email

- Sifters will check their email at least once a day to ensure they are in the loop
- Emails that require action should be responded to within one business day

## When to communicate in a project management tool (i.e. Asana, Trello, Sketch)

Project management tools exist to help us work towards common goals. They typically are a bit heavier than Slack, but that is by design as what you put into the tool is what others will spend hours working towards.

In general, all discussions related to a scope of work should be had in the system of record. If you've got a question about a spec, ask on the task in the PM tool! If you have conversations in other systems, others won't be aware of the conversations and won't be able to see what decisions were made.

Lastly, most PM tools can be integrated with Slack so you can get notifications when things that affect you happen. Ask if you need help setting this up!

Message in project management tools when:

- You're asking questions that will affect the scope of a project
- The question you're asking will impact others
- You want to keep track of the conversations and your points so others can easily reference them again
- If in doubt and it's project related, put it in the project management tool!

## Expectations on Project Management Tools

- Sifters will default to having conversations in the systems of record

- Sifters will remind their peers to use systems of record to discuss work so that everyone can be informed

## When to text

We've all got phones, and most of us have each other's numbers. We're going to text each other from time to time.

That's great! But texting should not be your primary means of communication for work-related topics. Sometimes you've got to do it and we'll trust that everyone knows the right context, but in general, one of the other methods is probably a better way to share information about the goings-on at Sift.

You should text other sifters if:

- You really need to share information immediately (especially if one party is off-site)
- You have a good relationship and want to discuss something completely unrelated to work.

## Expectations on Texting

- Sifters will use their best judgment about when and what is appropriate to text a colleague

## When to have an in-person conversation

Despite all the fancy gizmos and tools, sometimes it's best to just talk face to face (whiteboards also can be helpful!). Direct conversations allow us humans to better judge body language, the tone of voice, and understand if the points we are making are being understood.

That said, in-person conversations have their challenges, too. Individuals have to work to ensure the outcomes of the meeting are shared and recorded, or important decisions may not be effectively communicated.

In-person conversations can also be disruptive to a workflow **ensure you ask permission before tapping someone on the shoulder** as you may interrupt their flow of thoughts. It's always best to ask when the best time for a conversation would be and respect the fact that it may be tomorrow.

Talk in person when:

- You need to discuss something sensitive
- You're talking through something complicated where you expect a lot of back and forth
- You've been going back and forth on digital platforms and it's clearly not working

Note: In person may mean a google hangout. Try to do a video chat if you are going to connect digitally so you can better leverage your non-verbal jujitsu to solve the issue.

### Expectations on in-person conversations

- Sifters will be respectful of each other's time and request to set up a face to face at a convenient time: chances are good someone is not going to drop everything to meet with you right this second!
- If decisions are made during a face to face, they will be communicated appropriately to other interested parties