

**great{with}meetings**



# **Innovative Meetings**

Fresh ways to meet that improve energy, focus and results

**Read time: 10 minutes**

*Know the cost. Make it count.*

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## What Are Innovative Meetings?

Innovative meetings are formats designed to shift how your team convenes. They reduce drift, increase participation, protect attention, and create clearer outcomes.

*Different shapes create different energy. The format you choose shapes what gets talked about, who speaks, and what you walk away with.*

### 01 The Silent Start Meeting

Best for: Brainstorms, complex problems, teams that need thinking space before talking.

Why it works: The first voices in a meeting often dominate the conversation. A few minutes of silent individual thinking—before anyone speaks—levels the playing field. Everyone gets equal space in the idea generation phase.

#### How to run it

- 1. Frame the question:** Pose the problem or topic clearly. "What could we do about X?" or "How might we solve Y?"
- 2. Go silent:** Give everyone 5-10 minutes to write down their thoughts individually. No talking. No discussion. Just thinking.
- 3. Capture individually:** Each person writes their own ideas on a shared doc, sticky notes, or paper. Everyone contributes simultaneously.
- 4. Then discuss:** After the silent window, open discussion. Build on what people wrote down. Reference their thoughts explicitly.

*Script: "Let's spend 8 minutes thinking in silence. Write down any ideas, questions, or concerns. I'll give a 2-minute warning before we start talking."*

### 02 The Walk-and-Talk Meeting

Best for: One-on-ones, sensitive conversations, relationship building, creative thinking.

Why it works: Walking changes the conversation. It removes the table, reduces eye contact pressure, changes the pace, and often makes people more honest and thoughtful.

### How to run it

1. **Pick a route:** Choose a place to walk. Around the building. A nearby park. Outdoors if possible.
2. **Set time:** Aim for 15–30 minutes depending on what you need to cover.
3. **Go:** Walk and talk. The movement and change of scenery often help people open up.
4. **Take notes after:** Don't try to write while walking. After you return, capture what you discussed.

Tip: Walk-and-talks work best for exploratory conversations, not for conveying lengthy lists of information. Save those for sit-down meetings.



## 03 The Standing Meeting

Best for: Status updates, quick decisions, team check-ins, keeping meetings short.

Why it works: Standing meetings naturally run shorter. People are less comfortable standing, so they speak more concisely. It also promotes energy and keeps focus high.

### How to run it

1. **No chairs:** Arrange the space so there's no place to sit. Or literally stand up.
2. **Same time daily:** Daily standup at the same time. Consistency matters.
3. **3 questions:** Have people briefly answer: What did I do? What will I do? Any blockers?
4. **Time limit:** Keep it to 5–15 minutes. Enforce the standing rule—it will keep people focused.

Three questions that work: "What progress did we make yesterday?" "What are we focusing on today?" "What's in the way?"



## 04 The No Slides Meeting

Best for: Strategy discussions, team alignment, any meeting where slides distract from real conversation.

Why it works: Slides invite presentation mode. Someone reads them. Attention goes to the screen, not the conversation. Removing slides forces real dialogue.

### How to run it

1. **Pre-read instead:** Send a written brief or document before the meeting. People read it independently.
2. **Gather to discuss:** Meet to discuss what you've read. Ask questions. Debate. Decide.
3. **Capture live:** Write notes, decisions, and next steps on a shared doc during the meeting.
4. **Use the whiteboard:** If you need visuals, draw them live on a board or collaborative digital whiteboard.

*The golden rule: If you're showing slides, you're not having a meeting. You're giving a presentation.*



## 05 The One Question Meeting

Best for: Brainstorms, exploring ideas, team creativity, when you need depth over breadth.

Why it works: One well-chosen question can focus a whole meeting and produce surprising depth. It prevents topic-hopping and keeps everyone on the same page.

### How to run it

1. **Choose one question:** Something open-ended. "How might we approach X?" "What would change if we Y?" "What's our biggest assumption here?"
2. **Frame it clearly:** Make sure everyone understands the question. Take 30 seconds to explain.
3. **Explore fully:** Spend the whole meeting on that one question. Go deep. Don't rush to other topics.
4. **Capture all perspectives:** Make sure you hear from different voices. Explicitly ask quiet people what they think.

## 06 The Fishbowl Meeting

Best for: Facilitating difficult conversations, modelling dialogue, teaching teams how to have a conversation, high-stakes topics.

Why it works: A small group discusses in the centre while others listen. It allows real conversation while everyone learns from observing. After the inner discussion, the outer group offers thoughts.

### How to run it

1. **Inner circle:** Select 4-6 people to sit in the centre and discuss the topic in front of the larger group.
2. **Outer circle watches:** The rest of the team sits around and listens. They don't interrupt.
3. **Inner group discusses:** The centre group has a real conversation about the topic for 10-15 minutes.
4. **Outer group responds:** After, the outer circle shares observations, questions, and thoughts.

*Facilitator line: "We're going to listen to a conversation about [topic]. Your job is to listen and notice patterns. After, we'll hear your thoughts."*

## 07 The Lightning Round Meeting

Best for: Ideation, quick feedback, voting on ideas, getting input from many people fast.

Why it works: Rapid-fire rounds keep energy high and prevent overthinking. Time pressure often produces better ideas. It's also more inclusive because people get equal airtime.

### How to run it

1. **Set a timer:** Each person gets 1-2 minutes to pitch an idea or share a thought.
5. **Go around the room:** Everyone pitches in order. One idea per turn.
6. **Capture live:** Write down every idea on a visible list.
7. **No discussion yet:** Save discussion and feedback for after all ideas are shared.

Example prompts: "One thing we should stop doing..." "One unexpected opportunity..." "One bold idea for next year..." "One thing I learned this month..."



## 08 The Office Hours Model

Best for: Cross-team questions, mentorship, accessibility for team members who want input but don't need a formal meeting.

Why it works: Office hours (regular, scheduled availability) give people a reliable place to ask questions or get input. It's less formal than a meeting but more efficient than ad hoc Slack conversations.

### How to run it

1. **Schedule regularly:** Block the same time every week or every other week. Thursday from 2–3pm. Make it predictable.
2. **Open format:** People can drop in with questions, ideas, or updates. No agenda needed.
3. **One-on-one or small group:** Usually office hours work best for quick conversations or small clusters of people.
4. **Encourage sign-ups:** Let people know they can book time in advance, or they can drop in.



## 09 The Async-First Meeting

Best for: Distributed teams, asynchronous-friendly orgs, updates and decisions that don't require real-time interaction.

Why it works: Async-first means the real work happens before you meet. People share written thoughts. You read them. You meet to discuss, decide, and clarify—not to get the information for the first time.

### How to run it

1. **Pre-work doc:** Before the meeting, share a written brief or updates. Everyone reads it on their own time.
2. **Async comments:** People add questions, thoughts, and concerns in the doc over 24–48 hours.
3. **Then meet:** Meet to discuss sticky points, make decisions, and address what came up in async.
4. **Capture decisions:** Document what you decided and what happens next.

## 10 The Decision Sprint

Best for: Time-sensitive decisions, clearing blockers, making quick progress when you need to decide fast.

Why it works: A structured, time-boxed discussion keeps the meeting moving. Clear phases (context, options, discussion, decision) ensure you make progress.

### How to run it

- 1. 0-5 minutes (Context):** Someone explains the decision that needs to be made and why it matters.
- 2. 5-10 minutes (Options):** Lay out the real options. 2-4 choices. Say what each option means.
- 3. 10-20 minutes (Discussion):** Talk through the options. Ask for input. Listen to concerns.
- 4. 20-25 minutes (Decide):** Make the call. Summarize what you decided and next steps.

*Facilitator line: "We need to decide X by the end of this meeting. Here's what we're choosing between. Let's talk through it."*

## 11 The Pre-Mortem Meeting

Best for: Planning launches, projects, initiatives; surfacing hidden risks; getting honest feedback before you're locked in.

Why it works: A pre-mortem asks: "Imagine this project failed. What went wrong?" It's easier to criticize a hypothetical failure than to voice concerns about a plan in progress. It surfaces risks early.

### How to run it

- 1. Set the frame:** "We're launching [X]. Imagine it's 6 months from now and it completely failed. What happened?"
- 2. Go silent:** Give people 5-10 minutes to write down failure scenarios. What could go wrong? Why might this fail?
- 3. Collect ideas:** Gather all the failures on a list. Don't filter. Include everything.
- 4. Discuss patterns:** Talk about what you're hearing. What are the biggest risks? What needs attention before launch?



## 12 The Retro in 20 Minutes

Best for: Team reflection, learning from work, continuous improvement, agile teams.

Why it works: A structured retrospective forces you to reflect on what happened and what to change. The 20-minute format keeps it lean and actionable.

### How to run it

1. **0-5 minutes (What went well?):** Share what you're proud of from the last sprint or project. Good decisions, good collaboration, wins.
2. **5-10 minutes (What was hard?):** What got in the way? What slowed us down? Where did we struggle?
3. **10-15 minutes (What do we change?):** Pick 1-3 things you'll do differently next time. Make them specific and actionable.
4. **15-20 minutes (Commit):** Recap the changes. Make sure everyone knows what's different next time.



## 13 The Meeting in Reverse

Best for: Brainstorms, creative problem solving, when you need fresh thinking, pushing past conventional ideas.

Why it works: Instead of asking "How do we solve X?" you ask "How do we make this worse?" Paradoxically, this produces better ideas. It breaks your mental patterns.

### How to run it

1. **Frame the opposite:** "If we wanted to make [X] fail, what would we do?" "How could we make the customer experience worse?" "What's the opposite of what we want?"
2. **Brainstorm freely:** Generate ideas for the opposite outcome. Have fun with it.
3. **Flip it back:** Take each opposite idea and flip it. "If that's what makes it worse, what would make it better?"
4. **See what emerges:** Often the flipped ideas are more creative than what you would have come up with directly.

## 14 The Guest Chair Meeting

Best for: Sharing knowledge, mentoring, bringing in fresh perspectives, making someone feel heard.

Why it works: A guest chair is someone outside the core group who's invited to join and share expertise or perspective. It signals that you value their input and want to learn from them.

### How to run it

- 1. Invite a guest:** Someone from another team, a mentor, a customer, an expert. Anyone with relevant insight.
- 2. Brief them:** Before the meeting, explain what you're working on and what you want their perspective on.
- 3. Ask for input:** Ask them questions. Listen to how they see the problem. What would they do?
- 4. Thank and follow up:** Capture what they said. Tell them how it helped.

## 15 The Two Rooms Meeting

Best for: Complex problems needing parallel work, simultaneous exploration, decisions with interdependencies.

Why it works: Divide the team into two groups working on related but different parts of a problem. Parallel thinking often solves problems faster. You meet afterward to integrate what each group found.

### How to run it

- 1. Split the question:** Break the problem into two related parts. Group A works on part 1. Group B works on part 2.
- 2. Separate conversations:** Each group has 20–30 minutes to explore their piece and come up with ideas.
- 3. Reconvene:** Groups present their thinking. Usually you discover how the pieces connect.
- 4. Integrate:** Build a unified approach that incorporates insights from both groups.



## 16 How to Choose

Too many meeting formats to choose from? Use these three questions to narrow it down:

- What's the real work? (Decide? Brainstorm? Share? Learn?) Choose a format that matches the work.
- Who needs to participate? (Everyone? Core team? Leadership?) Choose a format that gives the right people a voice.
- How much time do we have? (5 minutes? 60 minutes? 2 hours?) Choose a format that fits your schedule.

### Quick Checklist

- I've chosen a format that matches the type of work.
- I've told people which format we're using and why.
- I've set clear time limits and stuck to them.
- I've made sure quieter people have a way to contribute.

### Copy & Paste Invite Line

*We're trying [FORMAT NAME] for this [TYPE] meeting. It's designed to [OUTCOME]. Here's how it works: [BRIEF DESCRIPTION]. Looking forward to a different kind of conversation.*

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## A Quick Reminder

**Sometimes meetings don't need better facilitation.**

They need a different shape—and the courage to try it.