**Types of Synchronous vs Asynchronous**

**Learning**

Synchronous learning happens in real-time, with students and teachers together. Alternatively, teachers can share information asynchronously. Learners explore on their own time, for example by watching videos, reading, and listening. Teachers use a learning management system (LMS) to share learning materials.

**Programming**

In coding, synchronous operations are performed one at a time. One task finishes, the next step begins. Asynchronous operations can happen at the same time — you can move to the next step while another step finishes.

**Communication**

The key difference between synchronous and asynchronous communication is synchronous communications are scheduled, real-time interactions by phone, video, or in-person. Asynchronous communication happens on your own time and doesn’t need scheduling.

In this article, we'll explore everything you need to know about synchronous vs asynchronous communication, in general.

**Why should you move toward asynchronous communication?**

A Stanford study of 16,000 employees revealed that remote workers are [13% more productive](https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/working-papers/does-working-home-work-evidence-chinese-experiment). In another review, a company that switched to remote work recorded an increased [$1.3 billion annual value](https://hbr.org/2019/08/is-it-time-to-let-employees-work-from-anywhere).

No more rush-hour commute to work, inhaling carbon-fueled air, engaging in office politics, or having to always be present even when you don’t feel like it. You have more time to dedicate to your family and hobbies because you’ve regained control of your day and how you plan your activities.

While many people assume that location independence is the entire reason remote workers are happier, asynchronous communication plays a significant role in giving remote employees control over how they communicate with their teammates.

In a [remote-first, fully asynchronous environment](https://www.getguru.com/solutions/remote-work-knowledge-software), you wake up when you want to, see the emails sitting in your inbox, and feel no pressure to reply. So you grab a beverage and finish your morning routine before settling at your desktop to start work for the day.

While many companies are convinced that remote work is the future, they are also struggling with how to hand control over to their employees and adopt async communication — even when the benefits include a happier workforce, reduced overhead costs, and the ability to hire top talent from anywhere in the world.

**What is asynchronous communication?**

Asynchronous communication means interaction without real-time conversation — replies can be delayed. A great example is email. In this approach, people aren't scheduling meetings and responses are less time-sensitive.

In this scenario, instead of asking your employees to be online at the same time, you give your teammates the flexibility to choose their working hours, irrespective of their location.

For example, if you’ve sent an email requesting a document from a team member, rather than expecting an immediate response, you’re patient and wait for them to respond later on.

**Synchronous vs asynchronous communication**

Synchronous communication takes place in real-time between two or more people. All parties are online at the same time. When a message or request is sent, there’s an immediate response.

Synchronous communication is common in a physical work location where managers can walk up to a team member’s office and ask for a document or question about a process. Work hours and break times are preset, and there’s a ton of pressure to always be available.

Examples of synchronous communication include video conferencing, instant messaging, and telephone conversations.

Situations where synchronous communication is beneficial include:

* Brainstorming sessions
* Weekly team meetings
* Team building activities
* Project discussions
* Interview sessions
* Water cooler conversations

While synchronous communication is instantaneous, there’s an expected lag in asynchronous communication. Rather than determining when employees can work or respond to communications, async communication places control with the employee, not the employer.

**Examples of asynchronous communication**

**Messaging software:**Messaging software like [Microsoft Teams](https://www.getguru.com/integrations/microsoft-teams) and [Slack](https://www.getguru.com/integrations/slack) is helpful for employee communication and collaboration. You send a message and the recipient replies when they come online.

**Email:** There’s no pressure to respond instantly to work emails. Employees can reply at a convenient time with tools like [Gmail](https://www.getguru.com/integrations/gmail) and [Outlook](https://www.getguru.com/integrations/microsoft-outlook).

**Video recording:**Video recordings or demos work great when you need to explain a process. Popular video recording tools include [Zoom](https://app.getguru.com/card/Txgr6M6c/ZOOM-MEETING-HOWTO-GUIDE) and [Loom](https://help.getguru.com/en/articles/5686990-embedding-a-video-into-a-guru-card).

**Cloud collaboration:**With tools like [Google Workspace](https://workspace.google.com/) and [Microsoft Teams](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software), you can collaborate on documents with your teammates, make edits, and leave comments they can address at a convenient time.  

**Video libraries:**A video library is a collection of training videos that employees can watch as part of the [onboarding process](https://www.getguru.com/reference/employee-onboarding-process) or regular training intervals. You can [integrate Guru](https://help.getguru.com/en/articles/4739829-how-to-embed-a-guru-card-into-a-webpage) with learning management software like Lessonly and Skilljar to help employees learn at their own pace.

**Project management software:**Project management tools are a great way to collaborate on projects, communicate deliverables and track project activity. Examples to explore with Guru include [Asana](https://asana.com/case-study/guru) and [Trello](https://trello.com/).

**Wikis and intranets:**[Wikis](https://www.getguru.com/reference/what-is-an-internal-wiki) and [intranets](https://www.getguru.com/reference/what-is-intranet-and-is-it-relevant) serve as the [single source of truth](https://www.getguru.com/reference/what-is-a-single-source-of-truth) within an organization. It’s a repository of company documents, processes, and other resources employees need to perform their job functions. With an [intranet CMS](https://www.getguru.com./templates/intranet-cms) like Guru, anyone can create content and share [verifiable knowledge](https://www.getguru.com/reference/knowledge-management-for-knowledge-sharing) so employees are always using [best practices](https://www.getguru.com/template/internal-communication). 

**What are the benefits of asynchronous communication?**

**Flexibility to respond when you can**

Async communication gives you the freedom to plan your workday based on your most productive hours. Instead of switching tabs to reply to non-stop messages, you can batch your responses when you have time.

With more flexibility, you spend extended periods on more important tasks, resulting in improved performance and productivity.

**More honest communication**

While asynchronous communication is slower, it also tends to be of higher quality than knee-jerk responses. It allows you to think through a particular idea, gather your thoughts, and offer responses when you’re ready. This makes it easier for other people to understand your message effectively and avoid unnecessary back-and-forths.

**Greater transparency since communication is saved by default**

Chat messages and Slack threads all happen in writing and are automatically saved so you and your team can reference them later. This results in greater transparency across your company and ensures nobody misses important information.

**Better for people in different time zones**

Communicating in real-time across different time zones is hard when one teammate is sleeping peacefully just as another is coming back from their morning run.

Since async communication doesn't require remote workers to be connected at the same time, you can send a message to an employee in Europe from your apartment in San Francisco and they’ll respond later in the day when they sit at their workstation.

**Increased productivity**

In a synchronous environment, the average employee spends [12 hours per week](https://www.inc.com/john-white/ineffective-meetings-cost-companies-up-to-283-billion-a-year-streamline-collaboration-with-these-tips.html) preparing and attending meetings.

Without distractions, employees can block off time for deep work, then batch responses a few times a day instead of checking their phone every 30 minutes.

Not to mention, employees can skyrocket productivity with [asynchronous information sharing](https://www.getguru.com/template/internal-communication) to save time and stress. We curated the best business templates to save your team time and quickly build confidence for new hires.

**Finding the balance between synchronous and asynchronous communication**

To be clear, we’re not asking you to ditch real-time communication entirely. There are situations where it makes sense.

Remote work, for example,  can be extremely isolating. Synchronous communication can help you build rapport with teammates and develop personal relationships that lead to better collaboration at work.

It’s also useful when you want to discuss sensitive topics, give critical feedback, performance review, or brainstorm a lot of ideas at once.

When a project is moving quickly and you want to get everyone in sync, a Zoom conference meeting can help you achieve this goal. In a crisis or emergency, it makes sense to get everyone on board fast, to mitigate the problem.

However, it can be a time suck when:

* Employees have to show up to meetings and wait for everyone to arrive
* You wake up in the morning and the first thing you do is respond to work emails and Slack messages
* You spend an entire day replying to an endless email thread instead of finishing that task that’s due in an hour

The trick is to keep synchronous communication to a minimum. Give your team autonomy but set rules that keep everyone aligned. Don’t micromanage but stay available when they need help getting past a roadblock.

Organize regular team bonding events to manage isolation and maintain social relationships. Combine async and synchronous communication and you’ll have a happy team with a healthy work-life balance.

**Quiz: Is your company’s current communication working?**

Take our free quiz to find out how your company’s internal communication stacks up.

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**How can asynchronous communication be improved?**

**As an individual**

**Write your thoughts down**

It’s harder to misunderstand or lose context when you write. Writing down your thoughts gives people the time to read and think about your message versus reacting immediately. As you write your thoughts you can refine them and provide more context that helps others understand your messaging quickly which reduces the need for one-on-one meetings or long messaging threads.

**Overcommunicate**

The time lag between responses offers an opportunity to send clear messages. What does the next person need to know about the task or meeting? Give as much background detail as possible.

Use screenshots and screen recording to provide context. Send links to relevant past conversations and resources that will help your colleagues understand your message better. Set clear deadlines so they know when a task is due. You save more time when you provide context upfront.

**Create stellar documentation**

It would be great if everyone in your company had superhuman recall abilities and only had to be told things once. Unfortunately, unless you’re working in a really cool top-secret program we probably shouldn’t know about, people are going to need plenty of reminders about rules for work and communication.

Focus on creating informative documentation that can easily explain tasks and answer basic questions that are likely to pop up throughout the day. You can create documentation around communication processes, specific guidelines around project work, and anything you think your people will find particularly useful.

It’s important to not limit yourself to written documents when you’re thinking about the best way to communicate certain things. Instructional videos, infographics, and audio files can be a great way to keep people informed.

Having the right documentation gives people much more flexibility and helps ensure that information is accessible and easy to understand. This can help reduce endless back-and-forth messages (so long shoulder taps) and lets everyone work more autonomously and efficiently.

**Plan ahead**

Rather than sending a message that reads:

“Hi Linda, could you send me the updated onboarding checklist for our sales team right now?”

You could say:

“Hi Linda, I’ll need the updated onboarding checklist for our sales team in three days.”

Planning gives employees time to prepare and eliminates pressure to complete tasks immediately.

**Make sure everyone has access to the right documents**

Check your document sharing settings and make sure your coworkers have access to the appropriate files. This might seem minor, but if someone needs to request access, it can result in unnecessary delays of several hours or even an entire day.

**Use threads to communicate effectively**

The purpose of threads is to make it easy to have text-based conversations. Email discussions are fragmented and lock information inside an inbox where it can only be accessed by the sender and recipient.

Threads are great for conversations where multiple team members can share ideas and make decisions.

Before meetings, use threads to share relevant information to help your team understand the topic at hand. After the meeting, continue the thread so those who couldn’t attend can find the information. You can share a link to the video of the meeting in the thread and anyone who asks questions will get answers right inside the thread.

[Communication tools](https://www.getguru.com/reference/internal-communication-tools) like Slack allow you to manage group projects by adding tasks straight into the project discussion threads. Instead of going through various disjointed conversations, your team can quickly find the relevant thread along with the information they need to get started.

**Turn off notifications when working**

Notifications ruin your productivity. It keeps you in a state of hyper-responsiveness when you’re always waiting for the sound of a smartphone or desktop notification. Each time you respond, it takes [25 minutes](https://www.ics.uci.edu/~gmark/chi08-mark.pdf) to get back on track, which results in lost productivity.

Instead, use time blocks to get more from each day. If you work 8 hours a day, you can check notifications every three hours and respond at once.

**As a Manager**

**Know when to use asynchronous vs synchronous communication**

What can you communicate via email, in a thread, or through a Zoom conference call?

While team members can set their working hours under async communication, it’s important for managers to know when to expect (or not expect) real-time responses.

Establish a protocol for situations that require an instant response and create a dedicated channel so employees know to reply instantly when they receive such messages.

For example, your website going offline is an emergency and requires all hands on deck to fix it immediately. A report for a task that’s due next week could be communicated via Slack or a reminder sent on Asana.

**Have clear communication processes in place**

One of the biggest reasons asynchronous communication ends up failing is because people don’t have rules around communication in place. This is why it’s important to establish very clear expectations around how people talk to one another. When you do it correctly, you reduce the chances of misunderstanding or miscommunicating information.

Consider having employees create designated working hours where they know they’ll be by their computer and available to work. Utilize different labels, names, and topic settings in your Slack channels so employees know what conversations they should be having in them

**Define urgency**

A broken public feature on a website or app is an urgent work problem. A question about which color Post-it® notes your team prefers is not. If you don’t find a way to differentiate between the two, every incoming email or Slack is going to feel like it’s an emergency.

In order for asynchronous communication to work, employees will need to know the difference between urgent matters and those that can wait.

Set up guidelines around what truly constitutes an urgent matter and the best way to flag that. Have a set plan of action around whom to contact, the right steps to take, and how to document the problem.

Want to take a deeper dive into the best way to handle communication issues at work? Check out our post on [our approach to internal communication](https://blog.getguru.com/how-were-fixing-internal-comms-at-guru) at Guru.

**Evaluate team members based on output and results**

Make it clear to employees that they’ll be judged based on contributions to the team’s objectives not how many hours they spent on the job.

Employees can set their work hours as long they are productive. If they prefer to work three hours in the morning and four hours in the evening for uninterrupted deep work, that’s okay as long as they meet their monthly targets.

**Abolish rigid work hours**

Adopting a flexible work schedule allows you to recruit top talent from anywhere in the world. You’ll naturally gravitate towards async communications when everyone can’t be online at the same.

**Schedule asynchronous check-ins**

When there’s a lot of dependencies on your team, you end up with more meetings. Before Rick sends an update to a customer about a bug the customer found, he has to check with Anna from engineering to see if the issue was fixed. Nobody knows what anyone is working on, which leads to meetings and long email threads.

Use remote check-ins to make meetings asynchronous. It’s a way for teams to share what they’re working on without disrupting their workflow.

A few ways to do this include:

* A central portal where teams share projects they’re working on each day
* A project management tool like Asana where you build workflows and track progress across multiple projects
* A messaging tool like Slack where teams can post what they’re working on and it seamlessly integrates with [internal communication platforms](https://www.getguru.com/solutions/internal-communications) like Guru

**Encourage routines, but don't revert to old habits**

While there’s less need to maintain traditional working hours in a remote environment, encourage your team to have a work routine that replaces the old 9-5 schedule.

As a team leader, you can set:

* Times for weekly check-ins when everyone should be in attendance
* A timeline for responses on emails and messages on Slack (could be 12-24 hours)
* Procedures to communicate for those in different time zones and in case of an emergency

**Build trust, independence, and accountability into your work culture**

Trust and independence are the values that asynchronous communication is built on. You need to trust that your team will deliver on time, so teammates don’t have to worry about anyone not keeping their word. When employees work independently without being micromanaged, it encourages innovation and builds up their confidence.

Let’s cut people some slack. Up until very recently, it was nearly impossible for asynchronous work to well...work. Thanks to innovations in modern technology, working remotely is easier than ever, but it’s important to keep in mind that the work environment we’re enjoying now wouldn’t have been possible 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago in some cases.

Remember, you and your colleagues are working together for a reason. You’ve all been deemed efficient, talented, and capable employees. Unless someone has given you a reason to believe that they can’t handle the responsibility that comes with asynchronous work, trust that they can handle the next step in your work environment.

**Make information easily accessible with a knowledge management system**

[81% of employees](https://www.panopto.com/resource/valuing-workplace-knowledge/#Report) feel frustrated when they can’t access the information they need to complete a task.

An internal [knowledge management](https://www.getguru.com/reference/what-is-knowledge-management) (KM) system minimizes the need for employees to ask questions. It becomes the central repository for all company documents such as employee onboarding, process documentation, publishing guidelines, and brand values. The system you choose should be intuitive, easy to search and integrate with your workflow.

**Use your meeting time well**

We said before that embracing an asynchronous communication model doesn’t mean that you’re rejecting synchronous work. When you’re part of a distributed workforce, every meeting counts. The pandemic forced us to take a hard look at how we were using our meeting times and really think about the best ways to utilize everyone’s time.

Take time to think about a meeting’s purpose and main objectives before you pull up your scheduling tool. Ask yourself if this is something that needs to be discussed live, or if you could get the same result after sending an email or Slack.

Pre-meeting work can be a valuable tool for people that are working asynchronously. Having people review documents, watch videos, or come prepared with questions or ideas before you officially meet can cut down on meeting time and make the time you spend together even more impactful.

And don’t forget about the value of recorded meetings. Despite your best efforts, there will be times where some people won’t be able to meet. Recorded meetings can give people the information they need to continue working.

**Invest in team-bonding activities**

When you adopt asynchronous communication, there are fewer opportunities for teams to connect in person or socialize, especially when you’re remote.

You can fill the void by arranging regular activities that promote relationship building and team unity. For example, you could arrange a monthly Friday game hour, drinks over Zoom to catch up, or bi-annual in-person retreats.

It gives your team something to look forward to on days when they feel isolated or demotivated.

**Use tools that promote asynchronous communications**

**Guru**

[Guru](https://www.getguru.com/) is an internal communication tool and knowledge sharing platform that provides verified information from experts on your team. The information can be accessed by employees right where they work. Think of Guru like a company wiki that integrates with your workflow so you always have the information you need to do your job.

**Google Workspace**

[Google Workspace](https://workspace.google.com/) is a collection of cloud computing and productivity tools that make it easy to collaborate across projects in one location. Tools in Google Workspace include Chat, Gmail, Calendar, Docs, Slides, Sheets, Forms, and Drive.

Multiple people can collaborate on a doc, leave comments where anything is unclear and resolve issues in real-time. Everything is saved on Google Drive so you don’t have to worry about losing documents or access to files.

**Messaging Apps**

Messaging apps like [Slack](https://slack.com/) and [Microsoft Teams](https://www.microsoft.com/en-ww/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software) eliminate the need to have long discussions over email threads and streamline communication via a messaging platform.

You can organize topics by channels for different teams to improve the quality and relevance of conversations. Team members can choose how they want to be notified based on topics of interest or availability.

Thankfully, Slack doesn’t show a read receipt which takes off the pressure to respond immediately you receive a private message.

**Asana**

Use [Asana](https://asana.com/) to assign projects and deadlines to your teammates without sending an email or organizing a meeting. You can tag your employees, comment on projects, and even link key project documents in Asana to provide everything they need to get the job done effectively.

**Loom**

[Loom](https://www.loom.com/) is a video messaging tool where you can record your screen, face, and voice to create videos and share instantly either via email or a link. You can use Loom to document processes, onboard new employees, and share knowledge with your colleagues.

As a tool for async communication, you send video messages in your own time frame and your colleague consumes the video at their leisure. It’s a great way to explain a product roadmap, show your teammates how to fix an error, or explain why you made certain decisions.

**Beware of creating an always "on" culture**

Collaborative overload happens when an employee spends too much time responding to requests and engaging with the team to the detriment of their own work. A few causes of collaborative overload include:

**Prioritizing communication over productivity**

According to Harvard Business Review, employees currently spend [50% more time](https://hbr.org/2016/01/collaborative-overload) on collaboration than they did 20 years ago.

Think[80% of a workday day](https://theblog.adobe.com/email/) on email communication, [15% of company time](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/meet-is-murder.html) on meetings, and[over 200 Slack messages](https://www.vox.com/recode/2019/5/1/18511575/productivity-slack-google-microsoft-facebook) a day. Employee time is precious, and companies should [evaluate if their current internal communication practices work](https://blog.getguru.com/how-were-fixing-internal-comms-at-guru) for or against them.

This trend of constant communication means that entire their day is arranged around meetings with time in between spent on core job functions. It usually results in employees working overtime on weekdays and weekends (without extra pay) to complete assigned tasks.

**Unnecessary pressure for employees to always be available**

If workers are always engaged in real-time communication, then they have no control over their schedules. Rather than setting their own agendas and being productive, your team spends the day responding to requests. To compensate for lost time, they work faster, which leads to more pressure, higher frustration, and stress. The result is burnout and a lack of motivation to show up.

**Low-quality conversations**

The first response is probably not your best response. When you have to respond immediately, there’s no time to think your answers through and provide a thoughtful response because you’re under pressure.  The quality of conversation suffers and solutions are often below par.

**Remote work is here to stay: promote efficiency over constant communication**

The future of work is distributed and diverse. More companies are realizing that they don’t need to be in the same time zone to get results. Hence, success now depends on results and output not how many hours you show up.

Adopting an asynchronous system enables you to tap into the best talent around the world. It gives your team the autonomy to choose hours when they’re most productive and maximize output without having to always be on. It’s a great way to do more deep work, disconnect when you need to and come back recharged.

For those times when you need in-person conversations, choose tools that blend synchronous with asynchronous communication for a streamlined workflow.