

# Some Tips to combat Slack and Zoom fatigue especially in our fast past org - AI2-COM

(3 minutes read time)

## Navigating Information Overload: Mastering Slack and Zoom for Enhanced Productivity

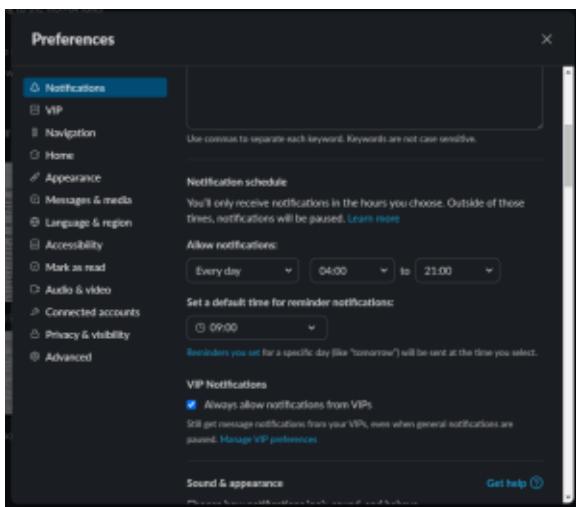
In today's dynamic digital workplace - especially in AI2-COM- Slack and Zoom have become indispensable tools for communication and collaboration. However, the constant stream of information on Slack and the prevalence of back-to-back virtual meetings on Zoom can contribute to fatigue, overwhelm, and decreased productivity. You're not alone if you feel drained by the relentless flow of notifications or the mental exertion of video conferencing.

**TLDR Summary:** Slack and Zoom are essential but can be overwhelming due to constant pings and meetings. Customize Slack notifications, set boundaries, and batch-check messages to reduce fatigue. Limit Zoom time and scheduled breaks and avoid multitasking to stay focused and energized. Use asynchronous updates and diversify meeting formats (like walking meetings) when possible. Establish daily work rhythms, choose the right tool for each task, and prioritize energy management.

## Tackling Slack Fatigue: Strategies for Managing Information Overload

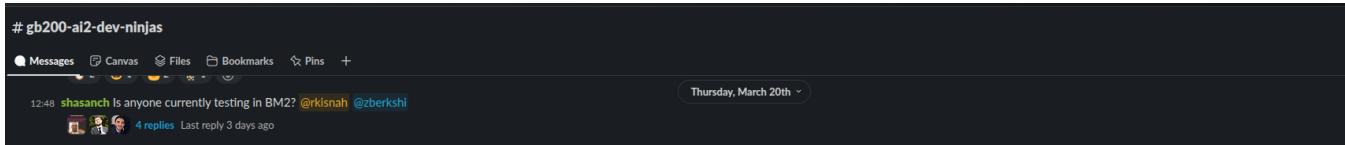
While designed to streamline communication, Slack's real-time messaging can often feel like an overwhelming massive flux of information. Pings, threads, and channel updates can lead to distraction and fatigue. To maintain productivity without being consumed by the noise, I am considering these strategies (you might find them helpful):

- **Refine Your Notification Settings:** Prioritize your focus by customizing your Slack notifications. Navigate to "Preferences" > "Notifications" and configure alerts to notify you only for direct messages, mentions, or specific keywords relevant to your work (e.g., your name or project codes). Utilize the "Do Not Disturb" mode during focused work periods to silence interruptions and reclaim your attention.

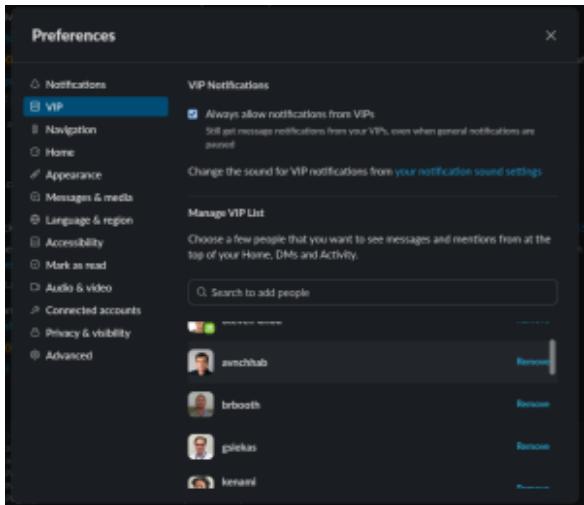


e.g.

- **Prioritize / Optimize Channel Management:** Streamline your workspace by strategically managing channels and conversations. **Star** or **pin** essential channels (e.g., team or project-specific) for easy access, and mute or leave irrelevant ones.



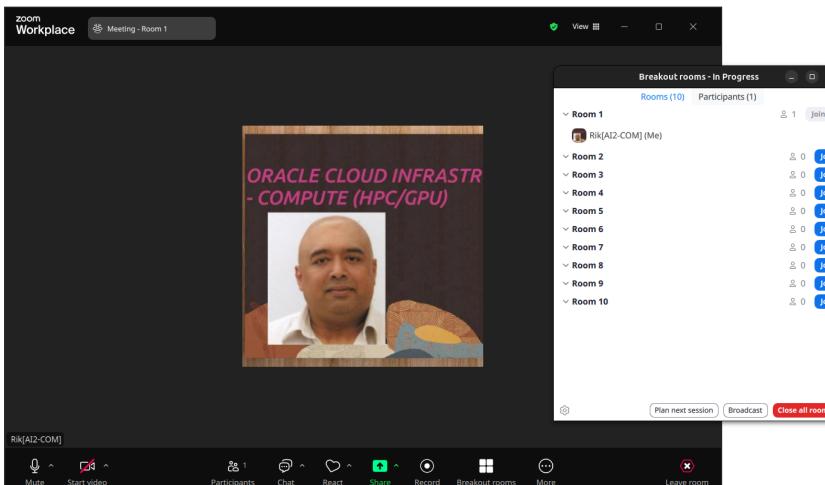
- **Implement Scheduled Check-Ins:** Treat Slack like an email inbox by checking it periodically (e.g., hourly) rather than reacting to every message in real-time. This approach minimizes context-switching, which can deplete your focus and energy.
- **Establish Availability Boundaries:** Communicate your availability by updating your status (e.g., "Focused Work" or "In a Meeting") to discourage interruptions. Collaborate with your team to establish clear Slack etiquette, such as reserving @mentions for urgent matters and using email or calls for more in-depth discussions.
- **Batch Process Information:** Instead of immediately engaging with every thread, designate specific times (e.g., mid-morning and late afternoon) to catch up on Slack activity. This practice reduces the cognitive load associated with constant task switching. Utilize Slack's "Saved Items" feature to bookmark messages or tasks for later review, maintaining mental clarity.
- **Promote Asynchronous Communication:** Encourage your team to utilize asynchronous communication methods, such as concise messages or video clips (using Slack's "Clips" feature), to minimize the need for immediate responses. This reduces the pressure to be constantly available.
- **Create a list of folks you know you need to respond to** - VIP List Slack feature (ensure they respect your boundaries)



## Conquering Zoom Fatigue: Optimizing Video Calls for Productivity

Zoom fatigue is a legitimate concern and has created known health problems (accelerated during the COVID-19 quarantine years). The demands of prolonged screen time, processing nonverbal cues, and maintaining stillness can quickly drain energy. I am following the below recipe to help me:

- **Minimize Video Time:** Evaluate whether video is necessary for every meeting. Suggest audio-only calls or Slack updates for quick check-ins or less critical discussions.
- **Schedule Meeting-Free Blocks:** Allocate "no-meeting" zones on your calendar (e.g., Wednesday mornings) to provide yourself with a break from screen time.
- **Incorporate Breaks Between Calls:** Avoid scheduling back-to-back Zoom meetings. Even a brief 5-10 minute interval to stretch, step away, or rest your eyes can help you recharge. During longer calls, briefly turn off your camera (with a quick explanation) or look away from the screen to alleviate strain.
- **Simplify Your Visual Setup:** Reduce cognitive load by hiding your self-view on Zoom (right-click your video and select "Hide Me"). Additionally, consider shrinking the Zoom window and positioning it off-center to create a more natural interaction.
- **Prioritize Presence Over Multitasking:** Resist the temptation to check Slack or email during calls. Research indicates that multitasking can significantly reduce productivity. Close irrelevant tabs and focus on the conversation to enhance engagement and efficiency. Take concise notes to stay on track without dividing your attention.
- **Diversify Meeting Formats:** Suggest "walking meetings" where participants join via phone and move around, offering a less taxing alternative to stationary screen time. Consider brief 15-minute stand-up-style calls for team updates instead of lengthy hour-long sessions.
- **Create working pods for projects on tight deadlines such as GB200 - (Not war rooms - war room even though a necessity when there are outages, during fast development, has a bad psychological effect of micro-management and big brother watching over its dominion).**
  - IBE Team (Greg Siekas's team) - has created a new experiment of Working Pods - where each SDE is given a cube (Room), and the main lobby is where main discussions occur. The contract of that engagement is that everyone is respectful and doesn't talk over each other (no peacock or stealing each other's thunder). This has worked successfully in the last 3 weeks since its inception



## Thriving in a Fast-Paced Information Environment

The rapid pace of information in today's workplace is a reality. However, you can adapt and thrive by implementing these overarching strategies:

- **Establish a Daily Rhythm:** Structure your day into "focus blocks" (e.g., 90 minutes of deep work) and "communication blocks" (e.g., 30 minutes for Slack and Zoom). This balanced approach supports productivity while preventing burnout. Begin your day with a clear plan, prioritizing critical tasks before engaging with Slack or Zoom.
- **Communicate Expectations with Your Team:** Foster open communication about how you will utilize these tools. For example, establish guidelines that Slack is not for emergencies (use a phone call instead) and that Zoom attendance is optional for certain updates. Clear norms can minimize confusion and enhance efficiency.
- **Utilize the Right Tool for the Task:** Leverage Slack for quick updates or informal conversations, Zoom for discussions requiring face-to-face interaction, and email for detailed or non-urgent matters. Selecting the appropriate tool for each task can reduce overload.
- **Prioritize Energy Management:** Schedule regular breaks from screens to recharge. Incorporate activities such as walking outdoors, hydrating, or simply closing your eyes for a few minutes. Consistent rest is essential to prevent fatigue. Conclude your workday by fully logging off Slack and Zoom to avoid late-night engagement.

## References

### On Slack, Fatigue and Information Overload

1. **"The Productivity Cost of Information Overload"**
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  - Link: [hbr.org](https://hbr.org)
  - Relevance: Discusses how constant notifications and multitasking erode focus, with strategies to manage digital communication tools.
2. **Slack's Official Productivity Tips**
  - Source: *Slack Blog*
  - Citation: Slack Team. (2023). "How to Manage Notifications and Stay Focused."
  - Link: [slack.com/blog/productivity](https://slack.com/blog/productivity)
  - Relevance: Offers practical advice directly from Slack on curating notifications and setting boundaries.
3. **"Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World"**
  - Author: Cal Newport
  - Citation: Newport, C. (2016). *Deep Work*. Grand Central Publishing.
  - Relevance: Advocates for batching communication and minimizing interruptions, applicable to tools like Slack.

### On Zoom Fatigue

1. **"Zoom Fatigue Is Real, According to Brain Scans"**
  - Source: *Stanford News*
  - Citation: Bailenson, J. N. (2021). "Nonverbal Overload: A Theoretical Argument for the Causes of Zoom Fatigue." *Technology, Mind, and Behavior*.
  - Link: [news.stanford.edu](https://news.stanford.edu)
  - Relevance: Research by Stanford professor Jeremy Bailenson explains the cognitive toll of video calls and suggests solutions like audio-only breaks.
2. **"The Multitasking Myth"**
  - Source: *American Psychological Association*
  - Citation: Rubinstein, J. S., Meyer, D. E., & Evans, J. E. (2001). "Executive Control of Cognitive Processes in Task Switching." *Journal of Experimental Psychology*.
  - Link: [apa.org](https://apa.org)
  - Relevance: Highlights how multitasking during Zoom calls reduces efficiency, supporting the advice to stay present.

### On Productivity in a Digital World

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  - Source: *McKinsey & Company*
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  - Link: [mckinsey.com](https://mckinsey.com)
  - Relevance: Discusses adapting to digital tools and setting rhythms for productivity in remote settings.
2. **"Atomic Habits"**
  - Author: James Clear
  - Citation: Clear, J. (2018). *Atomic Habits*. Avery Publishing.
  - Relevance: It provides a framework for building small, sustainable habits—like scheduling focus blocks—that enhance productivity amidst distractions.

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