Collaborating Remotely

Student guide

Scheduling challenges. Personal illness. COVID-19. There are many reasons a team may need to move to remote collaboration. While remote collaboration can be challenging, it is possible. Here are some ideas to help your team work remotely.

Getting started

Decide on tools. Check out [tools you have access to at U-M](#). As a team, decide which tools to use for collaborating. Reevaluate and adapt them as needed.

Be flexible and patient. It may be hard for everyone to meet at the same time depending on their schedules and access to the internet. When possible, be flexible about scheduling. Discuss what work can happen asynchronously versus what needs to be done in real-time.

Working well

Make meetings efficient. Try to set the purpose of your meeting in advance. Team members can rotate the responsibility of being the meeting leader. It may help to:
- Create a rough agenda
- Set specific goals for each meeting
- End with a summary of action steps

Use a shared notes document. Take notes in a shared Google doc so you can all contribute and follow along. This is a good place to record any decisions your team makes so you can revisit later if needed.

Know when to chat vs call. Quick, easy questions or check-ins are easy on chat. But sometimes it's worth hopping on a call to work things out:
- **If you need to talk about sensitive topics.** It's easy to misinterpret emotions in written words. If you need to talk about anything sensitive (like a project getting behind), a video call will be much safer.
- **If you're making a complex decision.** Sometimes chats can go round and round in circles, and a video all would probably get you to a resolution much more quickly.
- **To have personal check-ins**. Even a 10-minute conversation can help you stay connected and check-in to make sure everyone's doing ok and have what they need to be productive.
- **To encourage open feedback from everyone.** Some people might be comfortable chatting, others are more comfortable talking. Pick the mode(s) that will help your team communicate well.

Develop video call norms. Decide what your team norms will be for video calls and stick to them whenever possible. For example:
- Mute when you're not speaking
- Keep your video on to stay engaged
- Use "do not disturb" mode on your computer to reduce distraction
- Use earbuds or a headset to help with sound quality
- Avoid taking calls in areas with background noise

Make space for everyone to contribute. Set aside a few minutes in your meeting agenda for each person to give a personal update or ask questions, if possible. Consider having a "raise your hand" norm for video calls to avoid talking over one another.

Staying on track

Set a schedule for regular meetings and check-ins. If you're used to checking in face-to-face, remote collaboration may feel like a lot more work to coordinate. A regular schedule of meetings can help keep your team on track.

- **Text, email, or group chat** messages work well for quick updates
- **Video or phone conversations** are better for more complex discussions or team decision-making

Try remote coworking. If you find it motivating to work next to someone on a shared or individual task, you may still be able to do so remotely. Even if you aren't talking the whole time, you can be on a video call and share ideas or ask questions as you work.

Assume people are doing their best. It can be easy to get frustrated with teammates when communication challenges come up. Speak openly about conflicts when they arise but remember to be kind and treat your teammates with understanding.