

6 UNSPOKEN RULES OF MEETINGS

Meetings have unspoken rules that professionals are expected to follow.

Here are six of those rules with strategies for navigating each one successfully.

1. The Meeting Starts Before the Scheduled Time

The official start time is the time by which everyone should be settled and ready to speak. Arriving exactly on the dot can mean you are late for the pre-meeting context or are delaying the agenda.

The Strategy: Aim to arrive or log on **2 to 3 minutes early**. Use this brief window to test your technology, organize your notes, and engage in light, rapport-building small talk with colleagues.

2. Silence Equals Agreement

If you remain silent during a discussion or when a decision is made, your team will assume you support the outcome. Raising objections after the meeting is often viewed as counterproductive or passive-aggressive.

The Strategy: Speak up early. If you disagree, use **conditional framing** to soften the critique: "I agree with the goal, but what happens if we encounter [Risk X]?" If you do agree, explicitly state your alignment so your voice is on the record.

3. Read the Room Before You Read Your Notes

Every meeting has an underlying emotional tone and power dynamic. Dominating the conversation during a collaborative brainstorming session or pitching unorthodox ideas during a fast-paced status update, disrupts the flow.

The Strategy: Spend the first few minutes **observing the energy and hierarchy**. Match the tone of the meeting leader. If the atmosphere is high stress, keep your updates brief and solution oriented.

4. Status Updates Are for Highlights, Not Daily Diaries

When asked for an update, listing every minor task you completed kills the meeting's momentum. Colleagues want to know the bottom line, roadblocks, and next steps.

The Strategy: Use the **"BLUF" method (Bottom Line Up Front)**. State the result first, mention any critical blockers requiring help, and finish with the next milestone. Keep it under 60 seconds.

5. Multitasking is Never Invisible

Whether it is the clicking of a keyboard, a wandering gaze, or a delayed response when called upon, people always notice when you are distracted or working on other projects during a meeting.

The Strategy: Practice **active listening anchors**. Close unrelated browser tabs, keep your eyes on the speaker, and take physical or digital notes directly related to the conversation. If you must multitask because the meeting isn't relevant to you, consider whether you should decline the invite next time.

6. The Meeting Isn't Over Until the Follow-Up is Set

A meeting can feel productive, but if ownership of the next steps is vague, no action will be taken. Clarity on "who does what by when" must be established before everyone disconnects.

The Strategy: If you are leading, reserve the last **3 to 5 minutes for alignment**. If you are a participant, clarify your ownership by saying: "Just to confirm my action items, I am responsible for delivering [Project Y] by Friday. Is that right?"

