

Using and Navigating Slack

by Aaron Lee, modified by Jessica Kintner

I (Jessica) am looking for ways to build community while we are online. I personally use Slack for both professional and hobby-level interests and hanging out with people. I've really enjoyed the sense of being able to walk into someone's office and chat. Or have a student or colleague walk into mine. I hope that you will find this works as well for you.

I would really like to get to the point where our outside-of-class communications is primarily through Slack, an application that is commonly used in companies and research groups around the world. The physics faculty have their own Slack room, for example, and all of my local and remote research groups communicate primarily through Slack.

I would like to use Slack as our main form of communication outside of class—rather than email, say.

Slack is an application that you can download to your computer as well as your smartphone. For this class, the smartphone version is optional. The desktop version should be downloaded to the computer you primarily use.

The Slack channel is primarily for you. While Slack does not completely replace having an in-person community, I hope that Slack will help in this regard. (Aaron) My research students liked it this past summer, and I hope you enjoy using it, too. If you are familiar with Discord, you will find Slack is very similar.

Instructions

1. Install the desktop application from here: www.slack.com
2. Once installed, on our course web page will be a link to our Slack room.
3. Create an account. Please associate the account with your SMC email.
4. Sign into our class's room on the desktop application. (directions below)

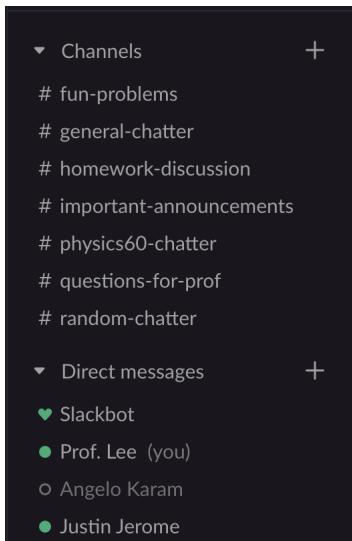


When Slack is open on the desktop app, all the Slack rooms you are signed into are on the side panel. This may not appear if you are new to Slack. On the desktop app (and phone app if you download it), you will need to sign into our 110 Slack again. You can find “Sign into another workspace” under the Windows menu at the top. You can look for it using your email or look on Moodle to find the URL to for our space.

As you can see in this example figure, I (Aaron and Jessica) have a few additional Slack rooms that I am a part of. Clicking between them allows you to move between rooms/groups/whatever. Anyone is free to make their own Slack rooms, e.g., if you wanted to start rooms for other courses or study groups.

Making other Slack rooms for 110 is discouraged. There are other/easier ways for you to communicate with each other about this course, as we will get to now. If you feel like you need a new channel, ask me about it!

Once you are in the Slack room, you have access to different channels where conversations can take place. As of this writing, the channels look something like this:

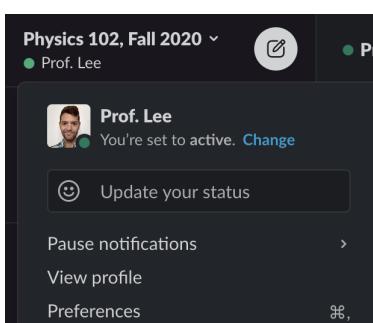


This displays the channels you are currently part of and the option to directly message other people in the class. Channels are open to everyone. You are added to many channels as soon as you enter Slack, but others may be made during the semester. You can also create your own channels and invite others to join. Anyone can view or join channels. No private channels are allowed. If I notice private channels are made, I will delete them.

Channels focus the discussion. For example, the homework-discussion channel should be where you talk about the homework questions. Any important announcements will go in the important-announcements channel. You should NOT ask about the homework in the important-announcements channel, for example, since that is not the channel's intention. Check the '+' next to channels to see what other channels are available.

Below the channels is the Direct Message panel. Here you can send private direct messages to individuals or groups of individuals in the class. You can also see if the person is currently online (meaning they have their Slack app open... that doesn't mean they are necessarily paying attention to it). For example, the green dot shows that Prof. Lee and Justin are currently online, while Angelo is currently offline. You can still send messages to people who are offline, and they will see the message when they next sign online (or may get a push notification on their phone, if they have Slack installed on their phone also). Using the '+' sign allows you to search for names that do not appear in the shortlist on the screen. You can also create direct messages between groups of people. For example, I could create a chat between Angelo, Justin, and myself, which would be private to only the three of us (unlike channels, which can be seen by everyone). You can also send direct messages to only yourself, which serves as a private repo of notes that only you can see.

Just to warn you, I (Jessica) always forget to show myself as away, and so the green dot next to my name does not actually always mean I can respond instantly. So please don't assume I'm there. This is a general etiquette thing with Slack in the work place, don't assume everyone can answer instantly.



Everyone should have a full profile so we can all know who we are talking to. While you may self-identify as *SurferKing-101*, I have no idea who that is. If you click on the name of the course above the channels, you should be taken to a new menu.

Your active status is whether you are able to interact and engage. If you are online, you should set your status to active (green dot). You can augment your status with an emoji and description—

creative and frequent use of this feature is encouraged.

If you view your profile, you can edit the profile and upload a photo and change your display name. Your display name should be the same as your full name (first and last). Your profile photo should be your face. Your profession is yours to decide. The rest is optional. Under preferences, you can select when you appear online. After a certain hour, even if your computer is open, a set of “Zzzz” will appear next to your photo, meaning that notifications are being silenced. Adjust these as is appropriate for your schedule.

Slack has many additional features, but this should get you going! A few items to review:

Privacy Review

- Channels: Anyone can see. Any new channels you create are freely available for anyone to preview or join. Discussions about the course should take place primarily in channels, so that everyone can benefit from the discussion.
- Direct Messages: Only those included in the direct message can see. Private or sensitive discussions should take place here.
- You should use Slack as makes the most sense for you. Do not assume I am watching over every message that is being sent. I will ignore 99% of them, honestly, unless I am directly messaged or the messages are in the “questions-for-prof” channel. Once the semester gets going, I will likely take myself out of most of the channels (I can still peep back in, though).

Behavior Review

- You should act respectfully and professionally to all of your colleagues. We must not forget that each of the user names corresponds to a human being. Please report inappropriate behavior to me via Direct Message.
- While I prefer this class to be casual, please treat everyone with respect.
- Misuse of the channels and direct messages will result in you being removed (which, essentially means you lose access to any future announcements...). Do not spam or troll, do not use inappropriate language, and do not use channels for discussion other than their purpose (keep the memes in the random-chatter channel).

HW01b: Assignment

Complete the following before the end of the first week of class:

- Get Slack and set up Slack as is described above.
- Once you have set up your profile (photo, name), send me a Direct Message and let me know:
 - Are you living on campus or attending remotely?

- How well does your internet support Zoom, live cameras and audio, and remote collaboration? Are you in a different time zone than SMC?
- What is something you are looking forward to learning about this semester (in this class or another)?