



## How can I keep meetings to their allotted time?

There is a general consensus amongst NWR members that when meetings last too long they become less enjoyable. Everyone is different, and a meeting length that suits some members would not suit others. Some find long meetings tiring and, if hosting, they will be aware of the inconvenience to other members of their household and, if the meeting is held in the evening, will have to stay up late to tidy up when everyone has left.

### Why do meetings become too long?

There are two main reasons:

- Discussion topics are too lengthy. Can you enable all members to contribute fully within the time available?
- The social side of meetings takes too long, how do you let people know gently that it is time to end the meeting?

### What can you do about it?

#### Consider changing the structure of the meeting

- **Set time limits.** In both large and small groups, meetings getting too long can be a problem, particularly when everyone wants to share at length the fascinating research they have done!

The simple way to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to talk is to allocate a set amount of time and ring a bell when their time is over. You might find it much gentler to ring the bell when they have a minute left, so people aren't stopped mid-sentence!

- **Break-out groups.** For larger groups you may want to consider breaking up into smaller groups for discussion in different rooms, then coming together afterwards to share their thoughts.

Also, for larger groups, instead of everyone researching a topic and having to speak about it, small groups of perhaps one to five people prepare aspects of the topic, and the rest of the group listens and asks questions. Or even dividing the group so that perhaps half the members do the research on one topic, and next time the other half do it.

- **Introduce a set system.** This would involve dividing your group into sets of approx. seven people who then plan the meetings for that programme and deliver the research on the topic. If you have a bigger group you could have



more sets. Thus, each member of the set would talk about the given subject and once each member of the set has spoken other members of the group then join the discussion. It means that the members of the set will get more of an opportunity to speak, but over the course of the year everyone will get plenty of chances to be in a set.

- **Invite a speaker and have a Q&A with the speaker afterwards.** Or, agree to listen to one of the speakers organised by the NWR Office Team, then divide into groups to discuss it at the meeting.

### Consider carefully if the discussion topic is suitable for larger groups

Members have reported that some topics work better face to face rather than Zoom, particularly those that require an element of discussion. Likewise, in large groups, topics where members take it in turn to present their research work better than discussion (discussion could be taken in smaller break-out groups).

#### **Below is a list of topics that work well if time is limited because they can be covered succinctly.**

- Talk about a bizarre experience or coincidence which happened to you.
- What was happening in the world the year your mother was born?
- The house I grew up in and/or tell us about where you grew up.
- What is the most interesting or unusual job that you have had?
- Find out the origins of expressions. What are your favourites? Where do they come from?
- Do you like your name and, if not, what would you choose instead?

### Finishing the meeting on time

Many members will agree that having the opportunity to catch up with each other for a social chit-chat is just as enjoyable as the main topic part of the meeting. But what should the host/LO do if the meeting is lasting too long and no one wants to be the first to go home?

1. Ensure that the meeting starts on time. Do not wait for people if they are late, instead, offer to talk to them after the meeting about the bits they missed. Everyone is unavoidably late sometimes, but if the meeting continuously starts late people tend to join it when they think it will start, not when it should start.
2. Make it clear in the programme when the meeting is due to finish.



3. Avoid social chat before the main topic. It is best to launch straight into the topic without giving people an opportunity to share their news. When the main topic of discussion is over, this is a sign for refreshments to be brought out and the social part of the evening to begin.
4. Offer to arrange additional meetings specifically for social catch-ups.
5. It is important that there is consensus across the group as to when they want the meeting to finish. This should be pre-arranged and written in the programme. You could use this wording in the programme: Prompt start. Please leave by [insert agreed time] in consideration of your host.