

# TIME ZONE MEETING COORDINATION



How to schedule virtual team meetings across different time zones without losing your hair

UTC-time	Boston	Chicago	Dubai	New Delhi	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 10:30:00	Mon 6:30 AM *	Mon 5:30 AM *	Mon 2:30 PM	Mon 4:00 PM	3 <sup>rd</sup> Best Time Range
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 11:00:00	Mon 7:00 AM *	Mon 6:00 AM *	Mon 3:00 PM	Mon 4:30 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 11:30:00	Mon 7:30 AM *	Mon 6:30 AM *	Mon 3:30 PM	Mon 5:00 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 12:00:00	Mon 8:00 AM *	Mon 7:00 AM *	Mon 4:00 PM	Mon 5:30 PM	2 <sup>nd</sup> Best Time Range
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 12:30:00	Mon 8:30 AM *	Mon 7:30 AM *	Mon 4:30 PM	Mon 6:00 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 13:00:00	Mon 9:00 AM *	Mon 8:00 AM *	Mon 5:00 PM	Mon 6:30 PM	Best Time Range
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 13:30:00	Mon 9:30 AM *	Mon 8:30 AM *	Mon 5:30 PM	Mon 7:00 PM	2 <sup>nd</sup> Best Time Range
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 14:00:00	Mon 10:00 AM *	Mon 9:00 AM *	Mon 6:00 PM	Mon 7:30 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 14:30:00	Mon 10:30 AM *	Mon 9:30 AM *	Mon 6:30 PM	Mon 8:00 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 15:00:00	Mon 11:00 AM *	Mon 10:00 AM *	Mon 7:00 PM	Mon 8:30 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 15:30:00	Mon 11:30 AM *	Mon 10:30 AM *	Mon 7:30 PM	Mon 9:00 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 16:00:00	Mon 12:00 Noon *	Mon 11:00 AM *	Mon 8:00 PM	Mon 9:30 PM	3 <sup>rd</sup> Best Time Range
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 16:30:00	Mon 12:30 PM *	Mon 11:30 AM *	Mon 8:30 PM	Mon 10:00 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 17:00:00	Mon 1:00 PM *	Mon 12:00 Noon *	Mon 9:00 PM	Mon 10:30 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 17:30:00	Mon 1:30 PM *	Mon 12:30 PM *	Mon 9:30 PM	Mon 11:00 PM	
Monday, May 28, 2012 at 18:00:00	Mon 2:00 PM *	Mon 1:00 PM *	Mon 10:00 PM	Mon 11:30 PM	

Source: [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com)

# **Time Zone Meeting Coordination**

## **In 7 Easy Steps**

**How to schedule virtual team meetings across different time zones**

**Without losing your hair**

**(Using free online tools and templates)**

By *Hassan Osman* from TheCouchManager.com

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“Thanks for downloading my ebook!

As someone who manages virtual teams for a living, I know how frustrating and annoying it could get when you need to schedule team meetings across different time zones and countries.

So I put together this 7-step guide to help ease the pain in coordinating those schedules. The steps in this guide are primarily geared towards virtual project managers who manage and communicate with dispersed teams on a regular basis.

However, if all you need to do is schedule a single meeting with your team, then you can skip the first few steps and go directly to “Step 5.”

I hope you’ll find the ebook helpful, and please feel free to drop me a line at [hassan@thecouchmanager.com](mailto:hassan@thecouchmanager.com) if you have any comments, questions or general feedback about it.

Thanks again!

Hassan Osman

# Step 1 Gather team members' names & locations, and create a spreadsheet

The first step you need to do is find out what cities, states, and countries each of your team members work in. While this may seem obvious, a lot of international folks don't realize that *different cities* within the same country could *fall into different time zones* – even if they're relatively close to each other (e.g., Detroit is 1 hour ahead of Chicago), so it is important to gather exact information about every team member's location.

Then create a spreadsheet (I use **MS Excel**, but you can use **Google Docs** if you want a free option), to capture the info, and add some column headers as shown in the example below (I'll explain the purpose of each column in the following steps). I listed only 4 individuals here (including myself), but you can add as many rows as you need:

Name	Location (City, State & Country)	Time Zone Abbreviation	Standard Time Zone (or Current time zone offset)	Daylight Saving Time (DST)	Time Zone Difference (relative to Boston's time zone)	Local Workdays
Hassan	Boston, MA, USA					
Sarah	Chicago, IL, USA					
Danny	Dubai, UAE					
Abhishek	New Delhi, India					

This spreadsheet will help in centralizing all the information in one place for you to reference later on. It could also be shared in a document repository if anyone in your team needs to view it.

**Note:** if you haven't already done so, you can download a free copy of my excel template from the same webpage link I sent you to download this ebook.

# Step 2 Document Time Zone data for each city

- 1) Click on <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/>
- 2) Enter the name of your city in the "Search for city" input box
- 3) Copy the following three things from the webpage into your spreadsheet as shown below: 1) *Time zone abbreviation*; 2) *Standard time zone* (if there's a "Current time zone offset" field then copy that instead; 3) *Daylight saving time*, along with the start and end dates of the Daylight Saving Time.

The acronyms for each time zone come in handy as people tend to abbreviate what time they're referring to in emails (e.g., "I'll call you at 8:30am IST")

Name	Location (City, State & Country)	Time Zone Abbreviation	Standard Time Zone (or Current time zone offset)	Daylight Saving Time (DST)	Time Zone Difference (relative to Boston's time zone)	Local Workdays
Hassan	Boston, MA, USA	EDT - Eastern Daylight Time	UTC/GMT -4 hours	*Daylight saving time: +1 hour *DST started on Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 2:00 AM local standard time *DST ends on Sunday, November 4, 2012 at 2:00 AM local daylight time		
Sarah	Chicago, IL, USA	CDT - Central Daylight Time	UTC/GMT -5 hours	*Daylight saving time: +1 hour *DST started on Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 2:00 AM local standard time *DST ends on Sunday, November 4, 2012 at 2:00 AM local daylight time		
Danny	Dubai, UAE	GST - Gulf Standard Time	UTC/GMT +4 hours	No daylight saving time in 2012		
Abhishek	New Delhi, India	IST - India Standard Time	UTC/GMT +5:30 hours	No daylight saving time in 2012		

This is the Coordinated Universal Time (UTC)/ Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) in hours. If the country follows a daylight saving time schedule, then you'll also see a "Current time zone offset" field, which is the standard time zone adjusted for daylight saving time (so you should use the *Current time zone offset* value when that's available). When you look at this column, you can easily tell how far apart each city is from a time zone perspective by doing a quick calculation. E.g., Chicago is UTC/GMT -5 hours and Dubai is UTC/GMT +4 hours, so you can tell there's an 8-hour difference between both.

This reflects the number of hours that the city offsets by during Daylight Saving Time. The dates will help you figure out when the different cities adjust their clocks for Daylight Saving Time so you can change your time zone differences and calculations accordingly.

# Step 3 Find out Time Zone differences relative to where you live

- 1) Now go to <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html>
- 2) In the "Select time and place to convert from" field, choose the city you (i.e., the project manager/ meeting scheduler) live in (in my case, this is **USA-Massachusetts-Boston**), and select today's date. In the "Select place to convert to" field, choose the city you want to find the time in (for my example, I chose **India-Delhi-New Delhi**). Now click on "Convert time."
- 3) Look at the top of the result page and get the noted time difference between both countries. In my example, it reads: "**At the specified time, local time in New Delhi is 9:30 hours ahead of Boston,**" so I enter **+9:30 Hrs** in my spreadsheet under the "Time Zone Difference (relative to Boston's time zone)" column.

This is the difference relative to where you live. I live in Boston, so I've entered all values compared to my location. This will help you quickly figure out the time difference so you don't always have to calculate it.

Location	Local time	Time zone	UTC offset	Standard Time Zone (or current time zone offset)	Daylight Saving Time (DST)	Time Zone Difference (relative to Boston's time zone)	Local Workdays
Boston (U.S.A. - Massachusetts)	Midnight between Thursday, May 24, 2012 and Friday, May 25, 2012	EDT	UTC-4 hours	UTC/GMT -4 hours	*Daylight saving time: +1 hour *DST started on Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 2:00 AM local standard time *DST ends on Sunday, November 4, 2012 at 2:00 AM local daylight time	0	
Sarah	Chicago, IL, USA	CDT - Central Daylight Time	UTC-5 hours	UTC/GMT -5 hours	*Daylight saving time: +1 hour *DST started on Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 2:00 AM local standard time *DST ends on Sunday, November 4, 2012 at 2:00 AM local daylight time	-1 Hr	
Danny	Dubai, UAE	GST - Gulf Standard Time	UTC+4 hours	UTC/GMT +4 hours	No daylight saving time in 2012	+8 Hrs	
Abhishek	New Delhi, India	IST - India Standard Time	UTC+5:30 hours	UTC/GMT +5:30 hours	No daylight saving time in 2012	+9:30 Hrs	

## Step 4 Find out regular workweek schedules for each city

- 1) Now go to the following Wikipedia site [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workweek\\_and\\_weekend](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Workweek_and_weekend) to find out the workdays of each country.
- 2) You'll need to do a bit of digging here (sorry, this is the only free online resource that I know!) to find out what the local workweeks are and enter them in your spreadsheet. For example, in Dubai, employees usually work Sundays through Thursdays (and take Fridays & Saturdays off as opposed to Saturdays & Sundays like most countries). You'll now have a completed spreadsheet which looks like this:

Name	Location (City, State & Country)	Time Zone Abbreviation	Standard Time Zone (or Current time zone offset)	Daylight Saving Time (DST)	Time Zone Difference (relative to Boston's time zone)	Local Workdays
Hassan	Boston, MA, USA	EDT - Eastern Daylight Time	UTC/GMT -4 hours	*Daylight saving time: +1 hour *DST started on Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 2:00 AM local standard time *DST ends on Sunday, November 4, 2012 at 2:00 AM local daylight time	0	Mon - Fri
Sarah	Chicago, IL, USA	CDT - Central Daylight Time	UTC/GMT -5 hours	*Daylight saving time: +1 hour *DST started on Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 2:00 AM local standard time *DST ends on Sunday, November 4, 2012 at 2:00 AM local daylight time	-1 Hr	Mon - Fri
Danny	Dubai, UAE	GST - Gulf Standard Time	UTC/GMT +4 hours	No daylight saving time in 2012	+8 Hrs	Sun - Thu
Abhishek	New Delhi, India	IST - India Standard Time	UTC/GMT +5:30 hours	No daylight saving time in 2012	+9:30 Hrs	Mon - Fri

### What's the purpose of this spreadsheet?

Again, the whole idea is that you have all that information in one location when you need it – especially as your team grows in size. Trust me, it starts getting really frustrating when you have team members in more than 4 or 5 different time zones if you're not organized. There are two things to keep in mind about the spreadsheet:

- 1) The spreadsheet is used to help **YOU** (the project manager/ meeting scheduler) find the best time to schedule meetings, so the times noted in the spreadsheet should be relative to YOUR OWN LOCAL TIME ZONE – this could get confusing if you share the spreadsheet with someone else.
- 2) The spreadsheet is **date-specific**, which means that it will need to be adjusted depending on what time of the year you're in. For example, a spreadsheet you create on *May 25, 2012* will look different than one created on *Nov 15, 2012* because you'll have to adjust for Daylight Saving Time in different countries.

# Step 5 Analyze time range options for team members

**Quick Tip**

If all you need to do is schedule a meeting 'on the fly' with your team (as opposed to manage their schedules over time), then this step is the only one you need

- 1) Go to <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html>
- 2) Choose a date you'd want to plan your meeting for (I usually select a date that falls on Monday)
- 3) Enter the locations of all your cities and click "Show timetable"
- 4) On the following results page, you'll get a colored table like the one below. Before you go through the results, change your interval to "Every half-hour" instead of the "Every hour" default at the top and then click on "Show" (you'll get more refined results that way)
- 5) Now here's where you need to do some analysis. Scan for **ROWS** that have **all-green cells** in them. Those will be your best common time ranges. If all-green rows are not available, look for ones that have mostly green, with the least number of yellow cells – those are second best. Finally, look for rows that have mostly green & yellow, and as few red as possible (third best). Any rows that are mostly red means those are times where nearly everyone is sleeping, so you want to avoid those. Here's a snapshot of my example:

**What do the table cell colors mean?**

**Green** - first half of day when most people are at work in that location

**Yellow** - second half of day when most people are awake but not necessarily at work in that location

**Red** – night time or normal sleeping hours for that location

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Source: www.timeanddate.com



## Step 6 **Share everything with your team members and get their feedback**

After you make a note of your time ranges, you want to share the results separately with EACH team member to get their feedback on the different options. I highly recommend that you have one-on-one conversations with your team members when sharing time schedules because people tend to be more open about their personal preferences when they're conversing privately as opposed to in front of an entire team.

When sharing the options, you want to ask about a couple of things:

- **Constraints:** Are there any specific constraints or restrictions that they have during those time ranges? For example, are there any other internal meetings scheduled they have during those periods that they can't get out of? Do they commute from/ to work at a time that clashes with any of those time slots?
- **Preferences:** Are there any preferences that they have during those times? For example, would they rather have meetings late at night because they're usually awake? Or are they early morning risers and wouldn't mind having calls at 6am? As a side note, you want to be careful about not making any promises about preferences here, so after you ask them, say something like *"I understand it might be tough for you on some days to stay up late (or wake up early), and while I'll try my best to accommodate everyone's personal preferences, I'll have to ask everyone to be a bit flexible given the nature of our dispersed team."*

After you gather all those constraints & preferences, document them in a notes column next to each time range as shown in the table below ([a template of this table is also in the same excel file you downloaded in step 1, but it is on a separate worksheet](#)):

	Time Range (in Boston's time zone)	Notes
Best Option	9:00am to 9:30am; Mon to Thu	Slightly late for New Delhi, but all team members are ok with this time. Cannot schedule any meetings on Fridays because that is a weekend day in Dubai
Other Option 1	7:30am to 9:00am; Mon to Thu	Very early for Chicago, consider starting a bit later at around 8:00am Boston time if possible
Other Option 2	9:30am to 12:30pm; Mon to Thu	Very late for New Delhi; For Thursday meetings, this time will be the evening right before the weekend in Dubai, so try to avoid meeting during this time range on Thursdays

## Step 7 Finalize time ranges and schedule any standing meetings

After going through the preferences and notes, you can now finalize the time ranges that work for all members, and do two things:

- 1) Schedule any standing meetings (e.g., recurring status update meetings) during the best time range options. In my example, the best time was between **9:00am and 9:30am Boston time (EDT) Mondays through Thursdays**, so I would probably choose Tuesday at 9:00am for my weekly call. If, in your case, the best time range is still a bit too late or too early for some team members, then consider being fair to those team members and rotate the recurring meeting every 2 to 4 weeks.
- 2) Ask your team members to try and keep their schedules clear during the other good time ranges so that you can schedule any follow-up or ad-hoc virtual meetings with the team during those times if needed.

And that's it!

Now, all you have to do is just make sure you keep track of the Daylight Saving Time dates so that you know when you need to update your spreadsheet with new time ranges and reschedule any meetings. What I usually do is put a reminder in my own personal calendar a couple of weeks before the first Daylight Saving Time change so that I don't forget.

# Bonus Tools That Help in Scheduling

Here are two additional tools that could help you with your meetings:

- **Google Search “time” shortcut:** There’s a cool shortcut you can use with Google Search when you want to know what the current time is in a specific city. Go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), and just type the word “time” followed by the country or city name (e.g., type “time New Delhi”). The result will pop up as the first answer.
- **Doodle:** Doodle ([www.doodle.com](http://www.doodle.com)) is a great tool that helps you quickly schedule a common time to meet with your teammates without having to rely on multiple back & forth emails. It’s free and you don’t even need to register with an email to use it. However, it doesn’t do any time zone adjustments, so team members need to do the conversions on their own. You just set it up, send out a link, and everyone fills in their free timeslots. Doodle then shows you when the best common timeframes are.

## Thank you so much!

I hope this ebook was helpful and I appreciate you taking the time to read it. If you do have some time, I would absolutely love to know what you think about it (and whether I can improve it in any way). You can drop me a line at [hassan@thecouchmanager.com](mailto:hassan@thecouchmanager.com), follow me on [Twitter](#), or join my conversations on my [Facebook Page](#).

Thanks again and all the best to you,

- Hassan