

HANDBOOK

The Working *Async* Handbook

Fully asynchronous work is worth 25 points of a listing's Geo-Flex score, and it is worth them because it is hard. This is how to be good at it, so the roles that let you live anywhere let you keep the job.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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What async actually asks of you

An async team is one where work moves forward while most of the people involved are asleep. It is not a team that never meets; it is a team where meetings are the exception and writing is the default, where a decision made at 4pm in Berlin is readable, with its reasoning, at 9am in Bogotá, and where a blocked person unblocks themselves or writes the question so precisely that the answer is one line.

For the person, that means three habits: write for a reader who cannot ask a follow-up, close each day so someone else can continue, and make progress visible in the work itself rather than in status updates. People who have these habits are the ones "worldwide, fully async" listings are written for, and they are the ones who keep those jobs.

THE TEST

Could a competent colleague who has never spoken to you pick up your work tomorrow morning, from what you wrote today, without a call? If yes, you are working async. If no, you are working remotely and waiting.

01

Writing that gets decisions made

Most async failures are writing failures: a message that needs three replies to understand, a question with no proposed answer, a thread that ends in "let's hop on a call". The fix is a small number of habits that feel mechanical until they are automatic.

HABIT	INSTEAD OF	WRITE
Lead with the ask	"Hey, quick question about the onboarding flow, I was looking at it and..."	" Decision needed by Thursday: keep the phone-number step or drop it? Context and my recommendation below."
Propose, don't just ask	"What should we do about the failing tests?"	"The tests fail because X. I propose Y (30 min). Alternative Z (2 days). I will do Y at 9am my time unless someone objects."
One topic per message	A message with three unrelated questions	Three messages, each answerable with one reply.
State the deadline and the default	"Let me know what you think."	"If I don't hear back by Wednesday 18:00 UTC, I will go with option A."
Write the decision down where it lives	A decision in a chat thread	A dated line in the project doc: what was decided, by whom, why, and what was rejected.
Put the time in UTC or both zones	"Let's meet at 3"	"15:00 CET / 09:00 ET / 14:00 UTC"

A MESSAGE THAT NEEDS NO FOLLOW-UP

"**Decision needed by Thu 12 Sep, 18:00 UTC: launch the pricing page with or without the annual toggle?** Context: the toggle works but the annual price copy is not approved. Recommendation: launch without it Friday, add the toggle next week when copy lands. Risk of waiting: we miss the newsletter that goes out Friday. Default if no reply: launch without. Thread for objections below; the design is at [link]."

02

The hand-off

The last fifteen minutes of your day are the most valuable fifteen minutes of someone else's morning.

When your day ends and a colleague's begins, the work either continues or it waits eight hours. A hand-off is a short note, in the place where the work lives, that lets it continue. It is not a status report for a manager; it is instructions for the next person, who may be you tomorrow.

The hand-off note

- **Where it is:** what state the work is in, with a link.
- **What is next:** the very next action, small enough to start cold.
- **What is blocked:** and on whom, and what would unblock it.
- **What I need from you:** a decision, a review, a file. With a deadline in their time.
- **What I decided alone:** anything you would want to know about.

Where it goes

- On the task or ticket, not in a DM.
- In the pull request, the document, the design file: the artefact itself.
- In a team channel only if several people need it, with the artefact linked.
- Never in a place that only you will look at tomorrow.

LEAVE IT RUNNABLE

The best hand-off is work that runs without a note: a branch that builds, a document with a "next" heading at the top, a design with the open question written on the canvas. The note is for what the artefact cannot say.

03

Visible work without performing

Employers cannot see you working. Make the work visible; do not make yourself visible.

The remote worker who posts "heads down on the report!" at 9am and "done!" at 5pm is performing presence, and experienced managers see through it. Visibility that counts lives in the work: the commit, the draft, the updated task, the decision recorded. The habit is to make those things exist as you go, in the places the team already looks.

VISIBLE (IN THE WORK)	PERFORMING (IN THE CHAT)
A task moved to "in progress" with a one-line plan on it	"Starting on the report now"
A draft shared at 40%, labelled "draft, structure only, feedback on scope please"	"Report going well!"
A weekly written summary: done, next, blocked, with links	Daily "still working on it" messages
A decision logged where the decision lives	A long chat thread that ends in a call
A calendar that shows your working window and your deep-work blocks	Green dot at all hours

One written summary a week, in the same format every week, is worth more to a distant manager than any amount of chat presence. It takes twenty minutes and it is the document they read before your review.

04

A day built around the gap

The timezone gap is not a problem to survive. It is structure to use.

When your working day overlaps with the team's for only a few hours, those hours are for what needs other people: decisions, reviews, questions. The rest of the day is the thing office workers never get: long, uninterrupted stretches. The mistake is to spread the same interrupt-driven day across both.

Before the overlap

Read everything that happened while you slept, in order, before replying to anything. Reply to what needs you, in the order of who is about to go offline. Then deep work: the day's hardest thing, with notifications off.

During the overlap

Everything that needs a live person: the decisions you queued, reviews, pairing, the one meeting. Ask every question you have been saving. Confirm what you will hand off.

After the overlap

Second deep-work block, or the shallow work that needs no one. Write the hand-off. Close the day at a fixed time; async work with no end time becomes all the time.

My day

My timezone _____ Team core zone _____ Overlap window (my time) _____

BLOCK	MY TIME	WHAT GOES HERE
Catch-up and replies		
Deep work 1		
Overlap: decisions, reviews, meeting		
Deep work 2 / shallow work		
Hand-off and close		

05

Five message templates

The messages async teams run on. Copy the shape; the words are yours.

1. The decision request

Decision needed by [date, time, UTC]: [the question, as a choice].

Context: [two sentences].

Recommendation: [option and why].

Alternatives considered: [one line each].

Default if no reply: [what you will do].

2. The status update (weekly)

Week of [date]

Done: [three bullets with links].

Next: [three bullets].

Blocked: [what, on whom, since when].

Risks: [anything that might slip and why].

3. The hand-off

Hand-off, [task]: at [state, link]. Next action: [small, specific]. Blocked on: [person, thing]. I need from you: [ask, by when in your time]. Decided alone: [anything notable].

4. The precise question

Question for [person], not urgent, by [time]: [the question]. What I have tried: [two lines]. What I think the answer is: [your guess]. If you confirm, I will [action].

5. The disagreement

I want to push back on [decision], before it ships. What I understand was decided: [restate it fairly]. My concern: [specific, with evidence]. What I propose instead: [alternative]. Happy to be overruled; I wanted it written down.

Async is not a workplace policy. It is a way of writing, closing the day, and leaving work in a state someone else can pick up. Learn it and the map opens.

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