

WIP meeting methodologies.

Meetings get a bad rap. Many see them as a major obstacle because they have the potential to waste time and hinder productivity.

But they also an efficient and effective method of distributing information. Specifically, studio WIP meetings are used to share information about clients and jobs in a studio.

They are a valuable method to manage 'up' (with studio owners, general managers, new business development managers and other senior staff) because it keeps them in touch with the day to day running of the studio.

Done well, a WIP will highlight potential bottlenecks (avoiding missed deadlines) and cost overruns (for example where freelancers may be needed to keep a job within deadline).

Similarly, WIP meetings are as valuable managing 'down' sharing info with design team members.

Research has shown that studios that work collaboratively have more effective and efficient outputs. That's because everyone is sharing their skills and working to their full potential. But there is a downside. Life as a designer can get pretty boring if you are continually fed small parts of a puzzle and never getting to see the complete picture.

A WIP meeting is the design studio manager's method of sharing the big picture. It should be the chance for everyone to see and get involved.

Keep everyone engaged. Consider a stand up meeting and keep it as short and effective as possible.

Give each person five minutes to report on three points:

- » what are you doing next?
- » what have you completed?
- » what are the roadblocks?

The documentation of a WIP meeting should add value to the information. It should help see potential issues at a glance – something that couldn't be done if the information was presented as a typed list.

Following are four scenarios for WIP meetings.

Example 1: a table.

The tried and tested method of communicating a studio's WIP is as a table.

Columns detail the job: by client and job name and number. Rows detail the job details, the short/medium and long deadline and ownership; naming the designer(s) responsible.

Designer	Job number & name	Deadlines		
		Now	Next	Later
mmmm	mm mmmm mm	mm	mm	mm
mmmm	mmmm mmmmmm	mm	mm	mm
mmmm	mmmm mmmm mm	mm	mm	mm
	mmmm mmmm mm			

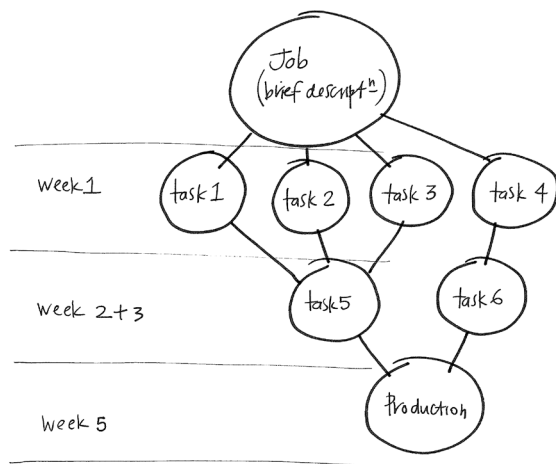
Advantages:

- » tried and tested – it works
- » has all the information needed, displayed in an interface everyone understands.
- » more columns and rows can be added – it can be as simple or complex as needed.

Disadvantages:

- » it doesn't need explanation or interactivity – it's all there in a self explanatory format so it doesn't invite discussion.
- » it's doesn't instil excitement into the tasks at hand nor demonstrate forward thinking.

Example 2: job focussed.



This example breaks a larger project into bite sized chunks and focuses on tasks within a job that need to be accomplished.

It's an invitation not to treat every job the same way – the diagram for each job would be slightly different.

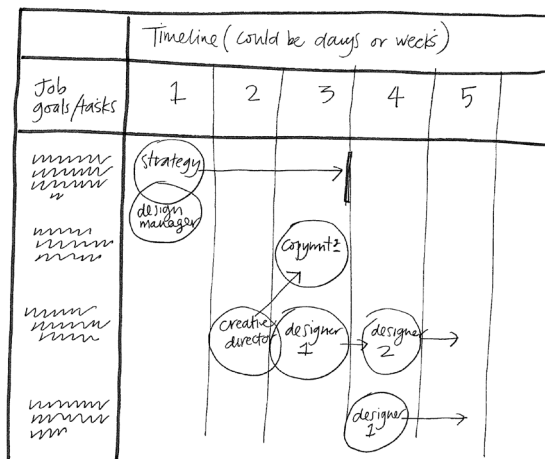
Advantages:

- » facilitates discussion because it's less literal
- » one long lead deadline can be broken into smaller, shorter sprints
- » the load can be shared
- » smaller goals means more opportunity to share the outputs with internal and external key stakeholders (for example the studio manager, and the client) so approvals can be sort and gained at each step
- » the flowchart can work as a roadmap for the job
- » it's a visual solution – it walks the talks of designers
- » it includes a timeline.

Disadvantages:

- » it doesn't show all the jobs in the studio at one time
- » it doesn't directly allocate the tasks to a team member (although the chart could be easily modified to include ownership)
- » could take considerable time to prepare.

Example 3: a timeline.



The aim of this WIP table is to identify potential blockages. Each job is dissected into tasks and then allocate the tasks to team members.

The table should highlight conflicts – where one person is needed in more than one place at the same time.

Advantages:

- » helps scope a project
- » shows cross pollination of studio skills
- » facilitates planning, prioritisation
- » could be used for one project or list all projects
- » can be as detailed or simplified as needed to have a sense of what's happening.

Disadvantages:

- » it's a literal way to diagram information
- » it may need a large sheet to include all the information needed.

Example 4: the big picture.

up next	In studio	with client	being finished	in production (external)	delivered completed
mmmm mmmm mm	mmmm mm	mm mmmm	mmmm mmmm	mmmm mm	mmmm mmmm
mmmm mmmm mmmm	mmmm mmmm mm				
mmmm mmmm					

This method looks at the bigger picture and would work best used in conjunction with studio management software.

The objective is to avoid duplication of information.

When the studio management software holds all the information, why re-state it on paper? Instead, this table shares the bigger picture of what's in the studio now, what's coming up and what's finished.

Using this presentation at a WIP meeting would instil a sense of accomplishment (checking things off).

Advantages:

- » short and sharp summary for a stand up meeting – it doesn't get bogged down in detail
- » it's a roadmap to what's ahead – identify and discuss oncoming obstacles (like holidays)
- » it invites collaboration because it shares the bigger picture
- » it doesn't spoon feed– those that need to know find further detail as needed.

Disadvantages:

- » it doesn't have all the information in the one place so to keep a meeting on track the design studio manager needs to hold a lot of detail in her head .