

Improving channel creation in Slack

One user flow, evaluated on Slack desktop/web and Slack for iOS

Product

Slack: a B2B collaboration platform where work is organised in channels.

User

A team member setting up a channel for a new project (e.g. a 120-person company).

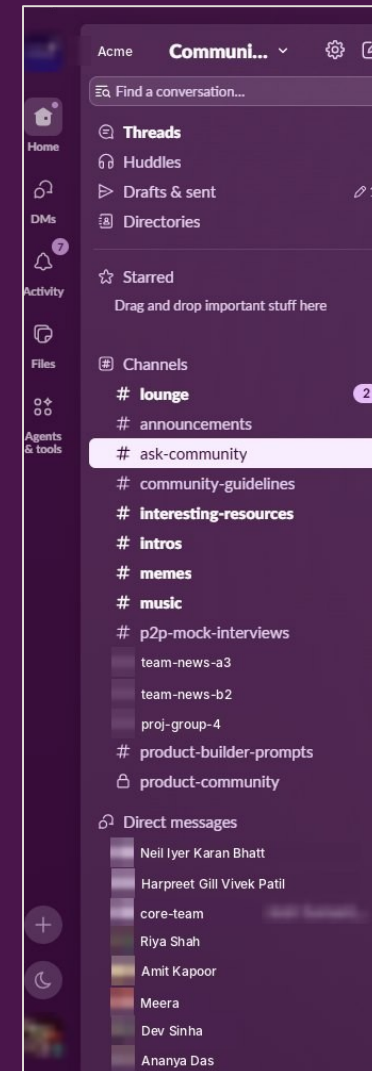
Goal

Create a channel with the right name, purpose, visibility and members, and know setup is complete.

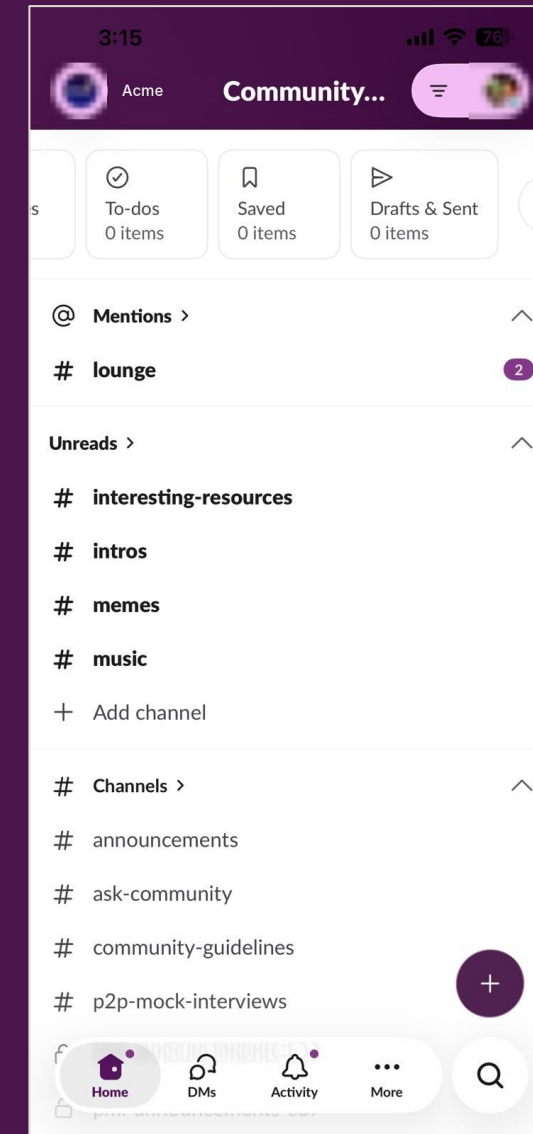
Scope

Find → name → visibility → create → add teammates → confirm. Not covered: sign-up, messaging, search, billing.

Evaluation record 19 Oct 2026 · Slack desktop app (Windows), same interface as app.slack.com in a browser · Slack for iOS 26.10.20 (462746) · Free plan · member role, channel creation allowed · Evidence: 28 real screenshots (names changed, photos and messages blurred) + Slack Help Center. Channel-creation screens were not captured, so they are recreated from the Help Center and labelled.



REAL · desktop sidebar (D1)

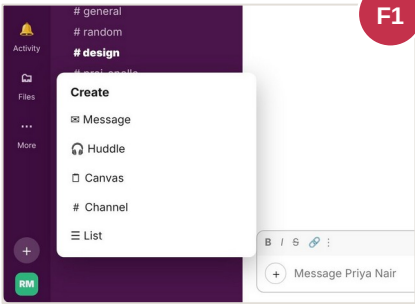


REAL · iOS Home (M12)

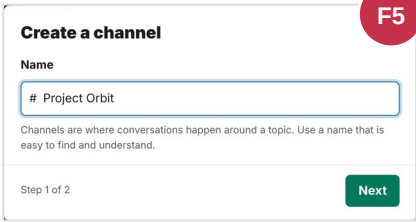
Current journey: five screens on web, five on iOS

Web /
desktop

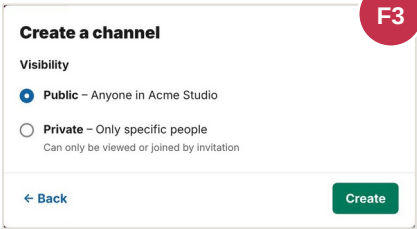
1 Find create



2 Name



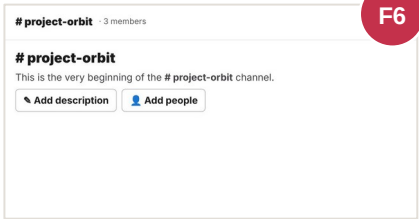
3 Visibility → 4 Create



5 Add teammates

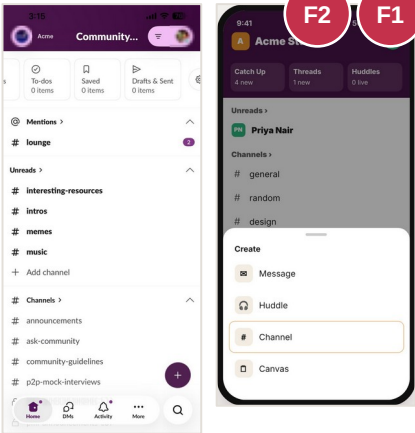


6 Confirm

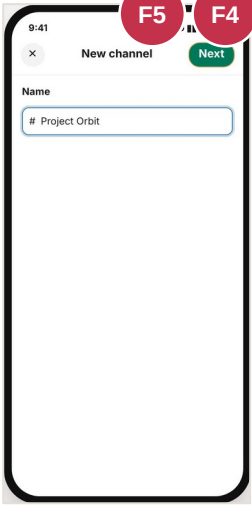


ios

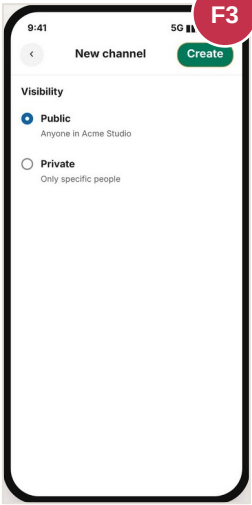
RECREATED



RECREATED



RECREATED



RECREATED



RECREATED



Step order verified with Slack Help Center “Create a channel” (19 Oct 2026). Templates and “Blank channel” appear only on paid plans; this workspace is Free. Red markers = issue IDs on slides 3–4.

Findings 1–3: where to start, and what “private” really means

ID · platform · severity	Issue (where and what)	Which heuristic is violated	How to improve
F1 Web + iOS Severity 2/4	Creating a channel has several doors with different names: the global “+” (rail on desktop, floating on iOS), “Add channels” in the sidebar, and the Channels-header menu. “Add” mixes creating a new channel with joining one. <i>Observed: D1, M12, M13 · Help Center · Slack PM in 2023: create options were “a bit admittedly scattered”.</i>	#4 Consistency & standards; #6 Recognition rather than recall: users must remember which door creates and which joins.	Use one label everywhere: “Create channel”. Split the sidebar item into “Create channel” and “Browse channels”. Keep the global + as a shortcut.
F2 iOS Severity 2/4	“Add channel” sits at the very end of the Channels list. With more channels it is below the fold, and the floating “+” covers list rows. <i>Observed: M12, M13 (button overlaps the last rows).</i>	#7 Flexibility & efficiency of use; #8 Aesthetic & minimalist design (overlapping controls).	Put a “+” in the Channels section header (44×44 pt), label it “Create channel” for VoiceOver, and pad the list so the floating + never hides a row.
F3 Web + iOS Severity 3/4	Public / Private is a one-line choice. It does not say who will read messages and files, that public content shows in everyone’s search, or what changing it later takes. Public looks pre-selected (verify). <i>Recreated from Help Center; impact is expert interpretation, to be tested.</i>	#5 Error prevention; #2 Match with the real world: the consequence is written in system terms, not people terms.	Two cards stating the audience (“124 people in Acme”) and search impact; nothing pre-selected; note “making it public later may need an admin”.

Severity 0–4 = impact × frequency × recoverability. Frequency is unknown without Slack analytics, so severity leans on impact and recoverability.

Findings 4–7: progress, purpose and “am I done?”

ID · platform · severity	Issue (where and what)	Which heuristic is violated	How to improve
F4 iOS Severity 2/4	Name → Next → Visibility → Create → Add people runs across separate screens with no step count, so users cannot tell how much is left. <i>Recreated from Help Center mobile steps.</i>	#1 Visibility of system status.	Show “Step 1 of 3”, keep Back on every step, and repeat the chosen name on later steps.
F5 Web + iOS Severity 2/4	No purpose or description is asked while creating. Teammates later see a bare name like #proj-orbit. <i>Help Center steps omit it; Slack’s Trailhead guide says to add a topic or description after creating.</i>	#6 Recognition rather than recall; #10 Help & documentation.	Optional “What’s this channel for?” with three example chips, plus naming tips (proj-, team-, help-).
F6 Web + iOS Severity 3/4	After Create, “Add people” can be skipped and the user lands in an empty channel. Nothing sums up name, visibility and members. <i>Expert interpretation of the recreated flow; verify on a paid plan.</i>	#1 Visibility of system status; #3 User control & freedom (fixes are scattered).	A “#proj-orbit is ready” card: who can see it, member count, purpose, with one-tap fixes; a gentle note if you are the only member.
F7 Free plan Severity 1/4	Upgrade banners (“Compare Plans”, “See Upgrade Options”) in Files and Apps; templates and “Blank channel” are paid-only, so the flow differs by plan. <i>Observed: D4, D6 · Help Center plan note.</i>	#8 Aesthetic & minimalist design; #4 Consistency across plans.	Remember dismissals. Offer templates as an optional “Start from a template” link after naming, not a gate before it.

Platform differences

Web / desktop

A create menu and one dialog with Next and Back. Mouse and keyboard; Enter submits.

iOS

Full screens, a floating + and a list link. Thumb reach and screen length matter more.

Counted once

F1, F3, F5 and F6 appear on both platforms but are listed once. F2 and F4 are iOS-only. Different patterns are fine; the labels and the outcome should match.

Severity scale (Nielsen)

0 not a problem · 1 cosmetic · 2 minor · 3 major · 4 catastrophe. Rated on impact, frequency (unknown here) and how easy it is to recover.

Three laws explain three issues, and set the order of fixes

Hick's law F7 (and F3)

Observed Paid plans show a template gallery before the name field; visibility has only two options.

Reasoning More or harder choices take longer. The template gallery adds choices to a simple task. Two visibility options are not too many: the problem is unclear consequences (F3), so keep both.

Change Blank by default; templates as an optional link. Measure time to first keystroke.

Fitts's law F2 (and F1)

Observed iOS "Add channel" is at the end of a list, partly under the floating +. Desktop + is bottom-left, far from the Channels list (estimated from D1, about 32 px).

Reasoning Time to hit a target grows with distance and shrinks with size. Users look at the Channels header, but the target is far away or hidden.

Change + in the section header: 44×44 pt on iOS, 24 px or more on web with a focus ring. Measure time and taps to start.

Jakob's law F1

Observed "Add channels" vs "Create", and two different + patterns (floating on iOS, rail on desktop).

Reasoning People expect an app to work like others they use, and like Slack itself. A + beside a list title usually adds to that list.

Change Say "Create channel" everywhere, add a header +, keep the global + for power users.

Rank	Issue	Severity	User benefit	Effort*	Confidence
1	F3 Explain visibility, no default	3	High	Low-medium	Medium
2	F6 "Channel is ready" summary	3	High	Medium	Medium
3	F1 + F2 One label, header +	2	Medium	Low	High (observed)
4	F4 Step indicator on iOS	2	Medium	Low	Medium
5	F5 Optional purpose field	2	Medium	Low	Medium
6	F7 Calmer plan prompts	1	Low	Low	High

*Effort is my assumption and has not been checked with engineering. Order = severity × benefit ÷ effort, adjusted for confidence.

Before and after: three changes on web and iOS

A · Web: who can see it (F3, F4)

BEFORE · RECREATED

Create a channel

Visibility

☒ **Public** – Anyone in Acme Studio

☐ **Private** – Only specific people
Can only be viewed or joined by invitation

[← Back](#) [Create](#)

AFTER · PROPOSED

Who can see #project-orbit?

1 Name ✓ 2 Who can see it 3 People

Public · anyone in Acme Studio

- 124 people can find, read and join it
- Messages and files show up in search for everyone
- Good for open topics and announcements

Private · only people you add

- Only invited members can see it or find it in search
- Good for confidential projects, HR, clients
- Making it public later may need an admin

[← Back](#) [Next: add people](#)

A: Cards name the audience (124 people) and the search impact. A step bar shows 2 of 3. Nothing is pre-selected. Trade-off: one deliberate click. Accessibility: radio-group semantics, arrow-key navigation, 4.5:1 text contrast.

B · iOS: start creating (F1, F2)

BEFORE

AFTER

B: + in the Channels header, “Create” split from “Browse”, padding under the floating +. Trade-off: one more header icon. 44×44 pt target; VoiceOver label “Create channel”.

C · Both: confirm it's ready (F6)

BEFORE

project-orbit

This is the very beginning of the # project-orbit channel.

[Add description](#) [Add people](#)

AFTER

project-orbit

Plan and ship Project Orbit by Dec 15

✓ #project-orbit is ready

Who can see it: **Only members** (3 members) Purpose: **Added**

[Post first message](#) [Copy link](#) [Add more people](#)

C: Summary of privacy, members and purpose with one-tap fixes, announced to screen readers. Trade-off: an extra card; it hides after the first message.

Keeps every existing choice and permission: public and private, admin rules, guests. Dependencies: member count API, plan-aware templates, localisation of longer copy.

How we would test it, and what would count as success

Study

10 people: 5 new to Slack, 5 weekly users; half on web, half on iOS. Moderated, 30 minutes. Each person tries the current flow and the prototype, in counterbalanced order, on two equal projects.

Task: “Create a private channel for Project Orbit and invite Priya and Arjun.”

Guardrails

- Accidental public channels (target: none)
- Wrong or missing invitations
- Drop-off at the visibility step
- Extra time from the added step

Expected impact (to be tested)

- Clear cards cut accidental public channels
- Summary raises confidence that setup is done
- Header + shortens time to start

Measure	How	Success (hypothesis)
Task success	Private + 2 right people, no help	90% or more on both
Time on task	Start to summary seen	Not more than 10 s slower
Errors, backtracking	Wrong visibility, Back taps, wrong invitee	Fewer than current
Understands access	“Who can read this channel?”	9 of 10 correct
Confidence	1–7: “Setup is complete”	Median 6 or more

If Slack ran it live (A/B)

- Share of new channels with a purpose
- Public → private changes in first 24 h
- Channels with 2+ members after a day

Evidence limits

- No access to Slack analytics
- Creation screens recreated from Help Center
- Free plan, member role only
- 10 people gives direction, not proof

Sources: Slack Help Center “Create a channel” (accessed 19 Oct 2026) · Diginomica, Slack UI update, 2023 · Slack Trailhead “Create channels with purpose” · Slack Feature Drop, 13 May 2026.