

# Cognitive Systems Slack

## An Introduction

Hello! If you're reading this, you most likely made it to the Slack team (or "workspace" as it was recently re-branded) of the Cognitive Systems Master's program in Potsdam. This is our main way of communicating, organizing social events, sharing information, posting pictures of puppies, etc. This document is intended to give you some general information about Slack, as well as hopefully making your transition into the existing ecosystem a little easier.

This document is subject to change in the future. If you have questions or ideas to make it better, feel free to contact @jensinator!

## 1 General Information

### 1.1 Organization

Slack organizes people into *workspaces*. Our workspace is *Cognitive Systems*.

**Channels** Within a workspace, members may create channels for specific topics. There are two types of channels: Public and private.

Any member of the workspace may join all public channels: Simply click on *Channels*, browse the list, and join any you may like. Also, anyone in the channel can invite other people to join.

Private channels are invite-only and don't show up in the channel list for non-members. Use these if you a) don't want others to join your channel or b) the channel is only intended for a few others and you don't want to pollute the list of channels for everybody else (e.g. your three-people project group for some class).

**Messages** Slack also offers private messages directly between members. Just click on *Direct Messages* and search for the person(s) you want to write. You can also have private chats with multiple people. The difference to private channels is: Newly-invited members can see the history of a private channel from *before* they were invited; this is not true for private chats. You can convert private chats to private channels at any time.

## 1.2 Settings

You will probably want to update your *Preferences* after joining. Here are some important ones:

- *Notifications*: You most likely don't want to be notified for *every* message someone posts in some channel. Instead, you can choose to only be notified for direct messages, or when you're "mentioned" in a channel.
- *Notifications* again: By default, you enter "do not disturb" mode between 10pm and 8am. You will not receive any notifications during this time. You might want to edit these times or deactivate this feature completely.
- *Language & Region*: Make sure this is set correctly!
- *Messages & Media* and *Sidebar*: The main ways to customize how your Slack looks.

## 1.3 Customization

There are lots of possibilities to customize the Slack experience, and some of us probably spend way too much time doing so. Via *Customize Slack*, you can:

- Create custom emoji!

There's other things you can do, but who cares? Custom emoji!

# 2 CogSys Specifics

## 2.1 Interesting Channels

Once invited to the workspace, you automatically join the "most important" channels. However, there are others that you might find interesting. Because the amount of currently existing channels might be somewhat overwhelming, here is a selection of channels that might be worth a look along with a short description:

- Default channels (you join these automatically, but can leave them if you wish (but why would you?)):
  - *#freshmen2017*: Your number one channel to ask questions regarding the enrollment process, German bureaucracy, life in general etc. Remember, there are no stupid questions (but only in this channel)!
  - *#general*: The one channel you can't escape from. Use this for questions/announcements that don't fit any other channel (and don't warrant creating a new one) and/or concern all students.

- #party-like-gatherings: The “social channel”. Whether it’s a birthday party or just meeting for a beer, you should consider organizing it here. Don’t be shy! It’s definitely more convenient than writing emails.
- #random: Things that aren’t particularly important and don’t fit anywhere else. Sort of like #general, but more spam.
- #stammtisch: A weekly social gathering throughout the semester that usually dies at some point during the break. It’s on the freshmen to get this going again! ;)
- #ws2017: The first channel created by the freshmen! You better ask them what it’s about.
- Course channels: Usually someone creates a channel for pretty much every class there is. Here are the most relevant for the first semester:
  - #advancednlp
  - #answersetsolving
  - #fmcomputerscience
  - #linguistics
  - #mathematics
- Other channels: Channels catering to “special interests”.
  - #cafeteria: Formerly the place to discuss when to get lunch, this place is now a wasteland. A bot used to post the university Mensa menu every day, but it seems to have died recently. Lunch is usually discussed in the course channels now. ;)
  - #conferences-etc: Share info about cool conferences, find people to go there with you etc.
  - #food: Post recipes, discuss cheese, or anything else food-related.
  - #fsr: Here, the student council discusses meeting times, agendas etc. Member or not, feel free to join! Rumor has it this is also the place to post your vacation pictures...
  - #late-nights: Kinda like random, but for particularly deranged posts late at night.
  - #music: Share your favorite songs!
  - #python: Questions specific to the most-used programming language in the Master’s.
  - #sports: Meet up with other people for your favorite physical activities! Boulderling, cycling, dancing...

Most of the channels *not* on this list concern classes that happened in the past. Don’t worry about those! Also, feel free to create your own channels if you think any are missing. No need to ask permission (but do consider whether this channel is *really* needed)!

## 2.2 Fun facts

- Students only! No instructor can read the stuff you write here.
- This also means that Slack is no place for “official” communications! It’s run entirely by students and is, in principle, completely independent of and separate from the study program.
- Only admins can invite new people. Generally, the members of the student council are the admins. Again, students only! Please don’t ask us to invite your friends.
- Slack is a commercial app; we are using the free version. This is *mostly* irrelevant: It means we don’t have access to some advanced customizations as well as analytics. However, the main limitation is that we only have access to the *last 10,000 messages posted*, including private messages. Older messages will “disappear”. In the last few months, we had around 2,000 messages per week in very busy times (or only a few hundred during quiet weeks). This means the 10,000 can fill up very quickly. Don’t expect your posts to stay for very long.
  - Admins can create *exports* of the data that will contain older messages as well. However, this does not include private messages/channels.
  - Files are not affected. There is a separate storage space for those (which could also fill up).
  - If you can spare a few-thousand euros per year, we could upgrade to a paid plan that gives access to all messages.
  - There are free alternatives to Slack that don’t have this issue, such as mattermost. We’ve thought about switching, but decided against it for now, mainly because these alternatives usually require a server to host them.