



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 5 · B5A

What would you do?

Theme · People & Culture



Unit 5 · B5A

What would you do?

Theme: People & Culture



Learning objectives

- Give and receive feedback without sounding harsh — or vague.
- Use unreal (second) conditionals to explore workplace scenarios safely.
- Talk about leadership choices using values-language ('what I care about is...').

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · One boss, one habit

Think about the best manager you've ever had (real, one person). In 45 seconds out loud: name ONE thing they did every week that you'd steal if you ran a team tomorrow. Then record it as a 30-second voice note.

Name the HABIT, not the personality ('she did X every Monday...').

Say what it made YOU do differently.

One sentence: what would you copy tomorrow if you had five reports?

Bonus: what's the WORST habit you've inherited from a former boss?

Lead-in: kind or clear?

Decide: CLEAR (behaviour + impact + ask), CUSHIONED (kind but vague) or LOADED (personal attack).

1. 'You need to be more of a team player.'

2. 'In stand-up you interrupted Ana three times. Can you let people finish?'

3. 'Honestly, you're doing great, just keep going!'

4. 'Some people have raised concerns about your communication.'

followUp: Which CLEAR line could you copy into your next 1:1?

Reading: Feedback that lands (and feedback that leaks)

Most feedback fails not because it's too harsh, but because it's too fuzzy. 'You need to be more strategic' tells someone nothing they can do on Monday morning. Feedback that lands almost always has three moving parts: a specific behaviour ('in Tuesday's stand-up, you interrupted three times'), an impact ('the room went quiet for the rest of the meeting') and an ask ('please let people finish next time'). Behaviour + impact + ask. Miss any one of the three and the feedback either bruises or evaporates.

The second-conditional is a surprisingly useful tool here — because 'if I were you, I'd send the deck 24 hours before, not 20 minutes before' is coaching, while 'you always send the deck too late' is an accusation. The unreal conditional does two things at once: it invites the other person into the scenario ('IF I were you'), and it separates who they ARE from what they DID. That's why great coaches ask 'if you ran that meeting again next Tuesday, what would you do differently?' — it's a rewind button without a blame button.

The trap is confusing kindness with clarity. 'You're doing great, keep going!' feels kind, but it leaves the person without a compass. And the mirror-image trap — 'you always miss deadlines' — feels clear but it's actually a label, not a behaviour. Real feedback is boringly specific about what happened, honest

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about the impact, and generous about the next step. Everything else is either theatre or damage.

1. Feedback that lands has three parts. They are...
 - (A) Kind words, praise sandwich, smile
 - (B) Behaviour, impact and ask
 - (C) Strategy, alignment and synergy
2. The second-conditional works in coaching because it...
 - (A) Sounds academic
 - (B) Separates who someone IS from what they DID
 - (C) Is more polite
3. 'You're doing great, keep going!' is criticised because it...
 - (A) Is too harsh
 - (B) Leaves the person without a compass
 - (C) Uses the wrong tense
4. 'You always miss deadlines' is a label because...
 - (A) 'Always' is exaggerated and it's not a behaviour
 - (B) Deadlines are subjective
 - (C) It's in the present simple

Vocabulary in context

Match the feedback / leadership term to its plain-English meaning.

- 1:1 (one-to-one)** — a regular short meeting between manager and report
- retrospective / retro** — a look-back at what worked and what didn't after a project
- psychological safety** — people feel safe to admit mistakes without being punished
- actionable feedback** — feedback the receiver can actually do something with
- blind spot** — something you don't see about yourself that others do
- praise sandwich** — praise → criticism → praise; often more theatre than help

Vocabulary: feedback moves, leadership words, values-language

- give / receive feedback** — the reciprocal halves of a single interpersonal competency
- call something out** — name a problem behaviour openly
- push back (on)** — disagree, professionally
- own (a mistake)** — candidly acknowledge accountability rather than attributing fault elsewhere
- circle back** — return to a topic in a later conversation

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set the tone — model, deliberately and visibly, the conduct the team is expected to emulate

hold someone to account — ensure rigorous follow-through on stated commitments

coach vs. tell — ask questions to help them think, vs. give the answer

give someone air time — let a quieter person speak in a meeting

lead by example — show, don't just say

what I care about is... — name your value before your critique

the standard here is... — make the norm explicit, not implied

I'd rather be honest than comfortable — flag when you're choosing candour over ease

that's not a hill I'll die on — signal you can live with the other choice

trust battery — how charged your relationship with someone is right now

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word / phrase.

1. Astute managers deliberately ____ the tone in week one — thereafter, the team simply emulates it.

2. I don't need you to agree with me; I need you to ____ when you don't.

3. The fastest way to earn respect from a team is to ____ your mistakes publicly.

4. In yesterday's brainstorm, Ana didn't speak. Next time, give her ____.

5. That decision isn't perfect but ____ — let's ship it.

6. Before you critique, name ____ — 'what I care about is the customer'.

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

Rewrite each sentence replacing the underlined phrase with ONE word/phrase from this lesson's vocabulary. Keep the meaning identical.

1. You need to <u>disagree, professionally</u> more often in our planning meetings.

2. Great managers deliberately <u>model, visibly, the conduct expected</u> in week one.

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3. The fastest way to earn trust is to <u>candidly acknowledge accountability</u> for your mistakes.
4. In yesterday's brainstorm, Ana didn't speak — next time, <u>let her speak in the meeting</u>.
5. That decision isn't perfect, but <u>I can live with the other choice</u> — let's ship it.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write a short LinkedIn-style reflection to your team explaining a leadership lesson from a recent feedback conversation, using values-language.

Use at least FOUR of the target expressions from this unit.

Adopt a professional register: concise, structured, executive-friendly.

Include a clear recommendation or takeaway in the final sentence.

sample: This week I gave a piece of feedback I'd been avoiding, and it taught me something about leadership. What I care about is that our meetings work for everyone, not just the loudest voice. I named the behaviour directly, then asked a coaching question instead of a label. The result: the person didn't get defensive — they pushed back, and we found a better answer together. The lesson I'm taking into next quarter: set the tone early, give quieter colleagues air time, and own your own mistakes before asking others to own theirs. None of this works if you wait for the perfect moment. My takeaway for the team: give feedback this week, not next.



Grammar focus: Second (unreal) conditional

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1. Form — if + past simple, would + verb — The 'past' here is grammatical, not real time. Use for imagined / hypothetical / hard-to-happen situations. • 'If I were your manager, I'd send you into the room with the CFO for a week.' • 'If we cut the meeting from 60 to 30 minutes, would decisions get faster?' • 'If she left tomorrow, we'd lose two years of context in one afternoon.' Note: use WERE (not was) with I / he / she / it in formal / written English — 'If I were you'.

2. Why it's a great coaching tool — Second conditional lets you talk about someone's behaviour WITHOUT accusing. 'If you were running that meeting again, what would you do differently?' is a rewind button — no blame, just repair. 'You always run bad meetings' has already lost the room.

3. Softening advice — 'If I were you, I'd...' — This is the classic soft-advice frame at B2. It signals: this is my opinion, not an order. • 'If I were you, I'd send the deck 24 hours before, not 20 minutes before.' • 'If I were you, I wouldn't reply to that Slack message until Monday morning.'

4. Common trap — WOULD in the if-clause — 'If I would be your manager, I would talk to you' ✗ Correct: 'If I were your manager, I'd talk to you.' ■ The WOULD lives in the main clause only. Also: 'If I was' is acceptable in speech, but 'If I were' is safer in writing and coaching contexts.

Exercise A — Put the verb in the right form

Fill in the blanks. All items are second conditional.

1. If I ____ (be) you, I ____ (send) the deck the night before.

2. If we ____ (cut) the meeting to 30 minutes, ____ we ____ (decide) faster?

3. If she ____ (leave) tomorrow, we ____ (lose) two years of context.

4. If you ____ (run) that 1:1 again next Tuesday, what ____ you ____ (do) differently?

5. If I ____ (not/care) about you, I ____ (not/give) you this feedback.

Exercise B — Rewrite the accusation as coaching

Rewrite each 'label' into a second-conditional coaching question or 'If I were you' advice.

1. 'You always send the deck at the last minute.'

2. 'You dominated the meeting again.'

3. 'You need to be more strategic.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. 'You never push back on the CEO.'

Exercise C — 'What would you do?' — real workplace dilemmas

For each dilemma, answer in *ONE* sentence using a second conditional. Then, in a second sentence, give a reason using 'what I care about is...'.

1. A senior colleague takes credit for your idea in front of the CEO. What would you do?

2. A direct report is clearly burning out but insists 'I'm fine, I'm fine'. What would you do?

3. You inherit a team where two people quietly hate each other and it's poisoning meetings. What would you do?

Listening: three managers, one piece of feedback

You're a director. Three of your managers have to give the same feedback to the same person: 'Sam's Monday updates are too long — the team has stopped reading them.' You're deciding which style to coach the others toward.

pre

Which manager do you predict will land the feedback best — and what will land it?

What is ONE phrase you're allergic to hearing in feedback ('some people have said...')?

gist

1. Which manager lands the feedback, and why?

2. Which manager cushions until the feedback disappears?

3. Which manager is technically clear but leaves the relationship worse?

detail

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. What is the exact BEHAVIOUR Nadia names?

2. What IMPACT does she name?

3. What is her ASK, phrased as a second conditional?

Third listen — feedback craft

Focus on HOW each manager delivers it. Answer from what they DO, not what they say.

1. Nadia opens with 'what I care about is'. What work does that do?

2. Marc uses six softeners in 40 seconds ('maybe', 'a tiny bit', 'no worries', 'when you can', 'just a thought', 'if you feel like it'). What's the effect?

3. Ade's feedback is technically accurate but Sam quits within a month. What ONE change would fix it?

Language from the audio — high-trust feedback moves

Match each phrase to what it DOES.

"What I care about is that the team actually reads it." — names the value BEFORE the critique — anchors trust

"If you were writing next Monday's again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words?" — second conditional coaching question — rewind without blame

"I've counted — it's grown from 200 to 1,100 words in eight weeks." — specific behaviour with a number — kills 'no it hasn't'

"Three people told me in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph." — names the impact with evidence, not opinion

"That's the standard here — updates the team will actually open." — makes the norm explicit, not implied

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"If I were you, I'd try one week at 250 words and see who reads it." — soft-advice frame — my opinion, not an order

Voice A (Marc): Hi Sam! Just a really quick one — no worries at all — your Monday updates are absolutely great, honestly, but maybe, if you feel like it, when you have time, you could just, you know, tighten them up a tiny bit? Just a thought. But honestly, all good, no rush at all, love your work.

Voice B (Nadia): Sam, quick one and I want to be straight with you — what I care about is that the team actually reads your update, because it's a good one. I've counted: it's grown from about 200 words to 1,100 words over the last eight weeks. Three people told me in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph and don't read the rest. If you were writing next Monday's again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words? If I were you, I'd try one week at 250 and see who reads it — that's the standard here.

Voice C (Ade): Sam. Your Monday updates are bloated. Nobody reads them. They're way too long, they've been too long for weeks, and it's frankly a waste of everyone's time. Sort it out for next Monday.

Speaking: solo role-play — 90-second feedback

Solo task. Pick ONE scenario. Record yourself (voice note, up to 90 seconds) delivering the feedback. You MUST include: (1) 'what I care about is...' opener, (2) a specific behaviour with a number or a date, (3) the impact with evidence, (4) at least ONE second-conditional coaching question, (5) a clear ask.

Scene: Your real 1:1 (recommended)

A: You give feedback.

B: Imagined listener: a real direct report or peer you owe a piece of feedback to.

Scene: The teammate who dominates meetings

A: You give the feedback.

B: Imagined listener: a peer who interrupted three times in Tuesday's stand-up.

Scene: The manager who's your boss

A: You give upward feedback.

B: Imagined listener: your boss, who reschedules your 1:1 four weeks in a row.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Extra speaking task — 30-second 'trust-battery repair'

Now imagine the feedback conversation went badly — the person walked out defensive. Record a **30-second voice note** you'd send them the next morning to repair. Two sentences only: (1) 'What I care about is our working relationship, not being right yesterday.' (2) ONE second-conditional invitation to rewind ('if we had that conversation again on Monday, what would you want from me?').

Writing mini-task

Write the 3-sentence version of your feedback (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'What I care about is...' (the value). Sentence 2: behaviour + impact with one specific number. Sentence 3: ONE second-conditional coaching question — no order, no label.

Wrap-up

One piece of feedback you'll stop cushioning and start delivering clearly.

One 'If I were you, I'd...' line you'll use in your next 1:1.

One value ('what I care about is...') you'll name out loud before you critique.

Quiz

- Feedback that lands has three parts. They are...
 - Praise, criticism, praise
 - Behaviour, impact and ask
 - Kind, clear, quick
- 'If I were you, I'd send the deck the night before' is...
 - First conditional
 - Second conditional
 - Zero conditional
- 'If I would be your manager, I would talk to you' is wrong because...
 - 'would' cannot appear in the if-clause of a second conditional
 - 'talk' should be past
 - 'you' should be 'to you'
- 'You need to be more strategic' fails as feedback because it...
 - Is too formal
 - Is a label, not a behaviour + impact + ask
 - Uses the wrong tense
- The manager who lands the feedback and keeps the relationship is the one who...
 - Softens six times in one sentence
 - Names the value first, then behaviour + impact + a second-conditional question
 - Says 'sort it out'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



Exercise 1 — Feedback & leadership vocabulary

Complete each sentence with **ONE** phrase from the box.

Word bank: set the tone · push back · own · air time · trust battery · what I care about is

1. Great managers ____ ____ ____ in week one — the team just copies from then on.

2. I don't need you to agree; I need you to ____ ____ when you don't.

3. The surest way to build credibility is to ____ your mistakes publicly.

4. In yesterday's brainstorm, give Ana ____ ____ — she didn't speak.

5. After that call, my ____ ____ with the client is running perilously low.

6. Before you critique, name the value — '____ ____ ____ the customer'.

1b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a 150-word personal 'Leadership Philosophy' statement for your team's internal wiki. Explain how you want to manage feedback and communication, using terms like 'trust battery', 'pushing back', and 'owning' mistakes.

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id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Use second conditional for coaching/hypothetical scenarios.

Maintain an authentic and professional tone.

Focus on values and expected behaviors.

model: My Leadership Philosophy As your manager, my goal is to create an environment where everyone feels empowered to do their best work. What I care about is transparency and accountability. I believe that leaders must set the tone for the rest of the team; therefore, I will always own my mistakes publicly and I expect you to do the same. This honesty is essential to maintaining our collective trust battery. I don't just want you to agree with my decisions; I want you to push back when you see a better way forward. If you were to disagree with a strategy I proposed, I would expect you to bring evidence to the table so we can improve it together. I will also ensure that everyone gets equal air time in our brainstorming sessions, regardless of their seniority. If we were to work this way consistently, I am confident we would become the highest-performing team in the company. My door is always open for honest, constructive dialogue.

Exercise 2 — Second conditional

Put the verbs in brackets in the correct second-conditional form.

1. If I ____ (be) you, I ____ (send) the deck the night before.

2. If we ____ (cut) that meeting to 30 minutes, ____ we ____ (decide) faster?

3. If she ____ (leave) tomorrow, we ____ (lose) two years of context.

4. If you ____ (run) that 1:1 again next Tuesday, what ____ you ____ (do) differently?

5. If I ____ (not/care), I ____ (not/give) you this feedback.

Exercise 3 — Clear, cushioned or loaded?

Which kind of feedback is each line — CLEAR (behaviour + impact + ask), CUSHIONED (kind but not actionable) or LOADED (personal attack)?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. 'You need to be more of a team player.'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
2. 'In Tuesday's stand-up you interrupted Ana three times — the room went quiet. Can you let people finish next time?'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
3. 'Honestly, you're doing great — just keep going!'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
4. 'Your report was messy again.'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED
5. 'If I were you, I'd send the deck 24 hours before, not 20 minutes before.'
(A) CLEAR
(B) CUSHIONED
(C) LOADED

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the accusation as a coaching question

Rewrite each 'label' into a second-conditional coaching question ('If you were doing X again, what would you...?').

1. 'You always send the deck at the last minute.'

2. 'You dominated the meeting again.'

3. 'You need to be more strategic.'

4. 'You never push back on the CEO.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise 5 — Three managers, one piece of feedback

You'll hear three managers give the same feedback to Sam: 'Monday updates are too long — the team has stopped reading them.'

1. Which manager lands the feedback?

2. Which manager cushions until the feedback disappears?

3. Which manager is technically clear but breaks the relationship?

Voice A (Marc): Hi Sam — no worries at all — your updates are great, but maybe, if you have time, you could tighten them up a tiny bit. Just a thought. All good, no rush.

Voice B (Nadia): Sam — what I care about is that the team actually reads your update. It's grown from about 200 to 1,100 words in eight weeks. Three people told me in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph. If you were writing next Monday's again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words? If I were you, I'd try one week at 250 and see who reads it.

Voice C (Ade): Sam. Your updates are bloated. Nobody reads them. Sort it out for next Monday.

Exercise 6 — Write a 3-sentence piece of feedback

Think of one real piece of feedback you owe someone. Write it in 3 sentences (max 60 words). Sentence 1: 'What I care about is...' (value). Sentence 2: behaviour + impact with a specific number or date. Sentence 3: ONE second-conditional coaching question — no label, no order.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: kind or clear?

1. LOADED — vague label, no ask.
2. CLEAR — behaviour + impact + ask.
3. CUSHIONED — kind but unactionable.
4. LOADED — anonymous, unspecific.

Reading: Feedback that lands (and feedback that leaks)

1. (B) Behaviour, impact and ask
2. (B) Separates who someone IS from what they DID
3. (B) Leaves the person without a compass
4. (A) 'Always' is exaggerated and it's not a behaviour

Vocabulary: feedback moves, leadership words, values-language

1. set
2. push back
3. own
4. air time
5. that's not a hill I'll die on
6. what I care about is
1. You need to push back more often in our planning meetings.
2. Great managers deliberately set the tone in week one.
3. The fastest way to earn trust is to own your mistakes.
4. In yesterday's brainstorm, Ana didn't speak — next time, give her air time.
5. That decision isn't perfect, but that's not a hill I'll die on — let's ship it.

Grammar focus: Second (unreal) conditional

1. were; would send / 'd send
2. cut; would we decide
3. left; would lose / 'd lose
4. ran; would you do
5. didn't care; wouldn't give
1. Model: 'If you were sending it again next Thursday, when would you get it to us — and what would you need to make that possible?'
2. Model: 'If you were chairing that meeting again, how would you make sure Ana and Marc both got 3 minutes each?'
3. Model: 'If you had one hour a week protected for strategy — no calls, no Slack — what's the ONE thing you'd use it for?'
4. Model: 'If you disagreed with a CEO decision tomorrow, what would you need — permission, evidence, an ally — to say so?'
1. Model: 'If it were the first time, I'd let it go and flag it privately to her afterwards — what I care about is the working relationship, not the ownership.' (Model B: 'If it were the third time, I'd name it in the moment — what I care about is the pattern, not this one meeting.')'
2. Model: 'If I were her manager, I'd make her take Friday off — not ask, tell — and cover her calls myself. What I care about is that she's still here in six months.'
3. Model: 'If I inherited that team, I'd have a 20-minute 1:1 with each of them in week one and name the elephant — what I care about is not pretending I don't see it.'

Listening: three managers, one piece of feedback

1. Voice B (Nadia). Names the behaviour, the impact and the ask; uses 'if I were you' to soften; ends with 'what I care about is that the team actually reads it'.
2. Voice A (Marc) — 'you're doing great, just maybe a tiny tweak, no worries at all' — Sam will walk out believing everything is fine.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Voice C (Ade) — accurate but weaponised: 'they're bloated, nobody reads them, sort it out'. No second conditional, no value named, no ask.

1. The Monday update has grown from 200 words to 1,100 words over eight weeks.

2. Three team members admitted in 1:1s that they skim the first paragraph and don't read the rest.

3. 'If you were writing next Monday's update again, what would happen if you capped it at 250 words?'

1. It anchors the feedback in a value BEFORE the critique. Sam hears 'she's on my side' before hearing 'and here's the problem'. It halves the defensiveness.

2. Six softeners = the message doesn't land at all. Sam walks out thinking 'she liked it, sounds like maybe reduce it slightly'. Nothing changes.

3. Add a value ('what I care about is you not burning out over an update no one reads') and swap 'sort it out' for a second-conditional coaching question ('if you were writing it again, what would you cut first?').

Quiz

1. (B) Behaviour, impact and ask
2. (B) Second conditional
3. (A) 'would' cannot appear in the if-clause of a second conditional
4. (B) Is a label, not a behaviour + impact + ask
5. (B) Names the value first, then behaviour + impact + a second-conditional question

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

Exercise 1 — Feedback & leadership vocabulary

1. set the tone
2. push back
3. own
4. air time
5. trust battery
6. what I care about is

Exercise 2 — Second conditional

1. were; would send / 'd send
2. cut; would we decide
3. left; would lose / 'd lose
4. ran; would you do
5. didn't care; wouldn't give

Exercise 3 — Clear, cushioned or loaded?

1. (C) LOADED
2. (A) CLEAR
3. (B) CUSHIONED
4. (C) LOADED
5. (A) CLEAR

Exercise 4 — Rewrite the accusation as a coaching question

1. Model: 'If you were sending it again next Thursday, when would you get it to us — and what would you need to make that possible?'
2. Model: 'If you were chairing that meeting again, how would you make sure Ana and Marc both got 3 minutes each?'
3. Model: 'If you had one hour a week protected for strategy, what's the ONE thing you'd use it for?'
4. Model: 'If you disagreed with a CEO decision tomorrow, what would you need — permission, evidence, an ally — to say so?'

Exercise 5 — Three managers, one piece of feedback

1. Voice B (Nadia) — behaviour, impact, second-conditional question, value named ('what I care about is').
2. Voice A (Marc) — six softeners in one sentence; Sam thinks everything is fine.
3. Voice C (Ade) — accurate but weaponised; no value, no coaching question.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class
