



APEX ENGLISH

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B2 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 1 · B1B

Emails that get replies

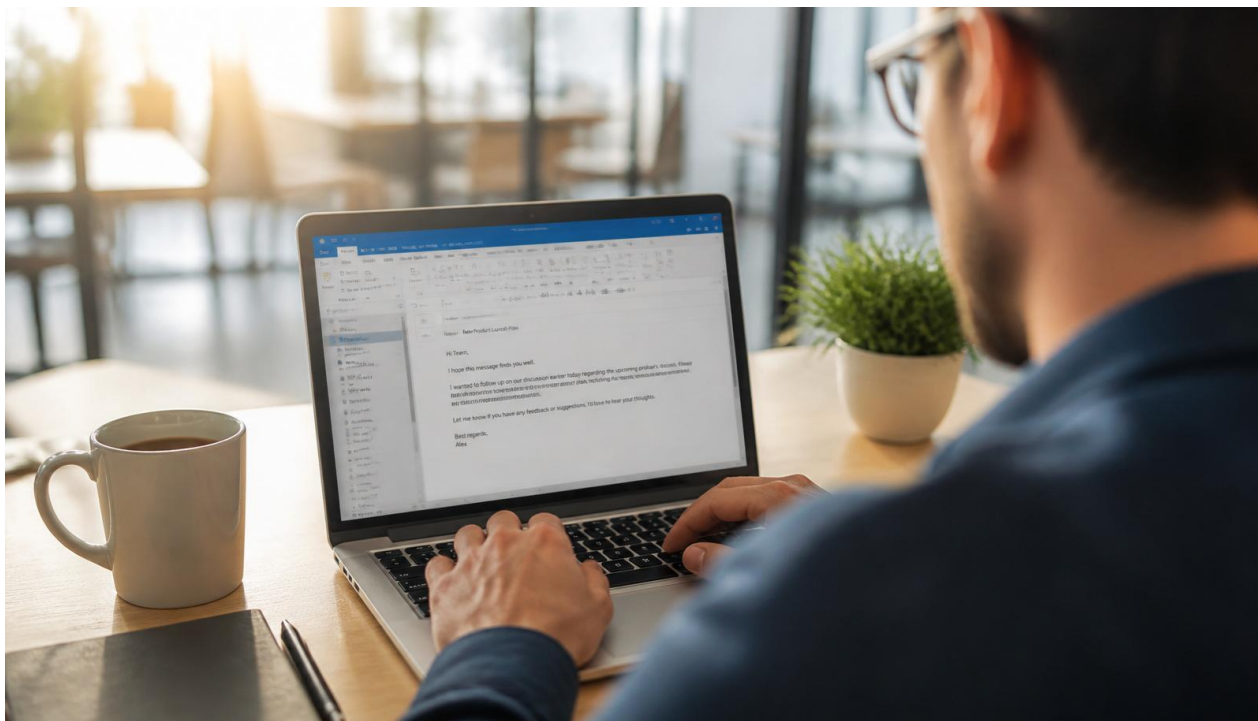
Theme · First Contact



Unit 1 · B1B

Emails that get replies

Theme: First Contact



Learning objectives

- Match email register (formal / neutral / friendly) to the reader and situation.
- Use modal verbs to make requests that feel polite but not weak.
- Write a subject line and opening that actually gets opened.

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Class Book

Warm-up · Quick poll

Vote on each question (raise hand / thumbs). Then defend your vote in ONE sentence.

Inbox zero — realistic goal or corporate myth?

"Reply all" — how often is it actually the right choice?

Emojis in professional email — never / sometimes / always?

Which is worse: the too-long email, or the too-short 'ok'?

Lead-in: subject lines

Rank 1 (open first) → 3 (delete).

1. "Quick question about Q4 forecast"

2. "Following up"

3. "URGENT!!! Please read ASAP!!!"

followUp: What makes the winner work?

Reading: The three registers of professional email

Most professional writing courses talk about 'formal' and 'informal' emails, as if there were only two choices. In practice, there are three: formal, neutral and friendly, and the difference between them is the difference between an email that gets read and one that gets ignored.

A formal email is for regulators, lawyers, senior leaders you have never met, and complaints. It uses full names, no contractions, and phrases like "I am writing to enquire...". It is slow and safe. A friendly email is for colleagues you speak to daily, and it happily uses first names, emojis and "Hey". Between these two lives the neutral register — the workhorse of modern business. It uses first names, allows contractions, and prefers short verbs (help, ask, send) over long ones (facilitate, enquire, forward).

The single biggest mistake B2-level writers make is to default to formal for everything, because it feels 'safer'. It isn't. To a busy colleague, a message that starts "Dear Ms. Rivera, I hope this email finds you well..." reads as slow, distant, and slightly odd. The neutral version — "Hi María, hope you're doing well. Quick question about..." — is faster to read, easier to reply to, and, crucially, still polite.

1. How many registers does the writer identify?

(A) Two: formal / informal

(B) Three: formal / neutral / friendly

(C) Four

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2. The neutral register is described as...
 - (A) Rude
 - (B) The workhorse of modern business
 - (C) The same as formal
3. According to the writer, defaulting to formal is...
 - (A) Always the safest choice
 - (B) A common mistake because it reads as slow and distant
 - (C) Only appropriate in emojis
4. "Quick question about..." in the last paragraph is offered as an example of...
 - (A) Formal register
 - (B) Neutral register that is still polite
 - (C) Friendly register with emojis

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to its meaning.

register — level of formality in language

workhorse — the reliable, everyday version

default to — automatically choose without thinking

contraction — shortened form like I'm, don't, we've

regulator — official body that enforces rules in an industry

distant — cold, keeping the reader at arm's length

Vocabulary: email register

Dear Mr / Ms Rivera, — opener for regulators, legal counsel, senior stakeholders you've never met

I am writing to enquire... — very formal opening line

Kind regards, / Yours sincerely, — safe formal closings

Please find the attached documentation... — old but still safe for external formal correspondence

Hi María, — the default modern opener

Quick query regarding... — signals a short, specific ask

Could you... / Would you mind... — polite requests

Thanks, / Best, — everyday closings

Hey María, — for close colleagues you liaise with daily

Just a heads-up... — casual advance warning

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Cheers, — casual, common in UK/Aus workplaces

No rush at all ■ — friendly sign-off softening a request

practice

Complete each opening with the phrase that fits the register in brackets.

1. ____ María, quick query regarding the Q4 figures — do you have five minutes today? (neutral)

2. ____ Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire about the terms of the contract. (formal)

3. ____ María ■ just a heads-up that I'll be out of office tomorrow. (friendly)

4. Could you please ____ the deck across by end of day? (neutral verb)

5. ____ regards, — safe formal closing at the end of an email. (formal closing)

6. Thanks so much for the swift turnaround — really appreciate it. ____ (friendly closing, UK-style)

Practice 2 — collocations & rewrite

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

1. Hi María, <u>short question about</u> the Q4 figures — do you have five minutes today?

2. <u>I am writing to ask</u> about the terms of the contract.

3. Hey María ■ <u>just a bit of advance warning</u> that I'll be out of office tomorrow.

4. Could you please <u>transmit</u> the deck across by end of day?

5. <u>Safe formal closing</u> — safe formal closing at the end of an email.

Practice 3 — discursive writing (business memo)

prompt: Write an email to your team proposing a shift from formal to neutral register for internal comms to increase efficiency.

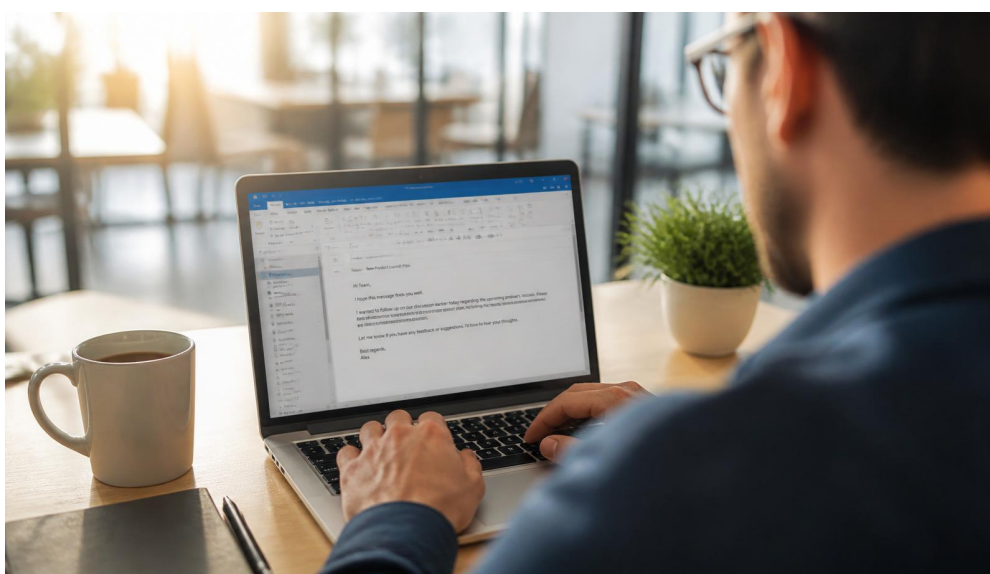
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Use at least FOUR of the target expressions from this unit.

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

Include a clear recommendation or takeaway in the final sentence.

sample: Subject: Proposal — Shifting our internal email register. As we scale, I've noticed a tendency to default to a very formal register for internal requests, which often feels distant and slows down our response times. To keep our pace high, I suggest we adopt the neutral register as our team workhorse for everyday queries. This means using first names, contractions, and shorter verbs like 'help' or 'send' instead of 'facilitate' or 'forward'. Of course, we should still use a formal tone when emailing a regulator or senior stakeholders we haven't met, but for internal collaboration, a 'Hi' and a 'Quick query' are perfectly professional. This shift will ensure our messages don't read as slightly odd or cold to busy colleagues. Please flag any concerns before our Friday sync; I'd like to get this on record as our new team norm.



Grammar focus: Modals for polite requests

1. Could / Would you... — the workhorses — The safest neutral requests use could / would: • Could you send me the deck by 3pm? • Would you be able to review this before Friday? Both are polite without sounding weak.

2. Would you mind + -ing — extra soft — Use when the ask is bigger, or the person is senior / busy: • Would you mind taking a quick look at slide 7? • Would you mind if I moved our call to Thursday?

3. Might / May — formal, distant — Reserved for formal emails to people you don't know: • Might I suggest a slight change to the agenda? • May I ask for your feedback by Monday? Don't use these with your everyday teammate — they'll sound odd.

Exercise A — Rewrite the request

Rewrite each blunt request in a neutral, polite form.

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1. Send me the deck by 3pm.

2. Review this before Friday.

3. Take a quick look at slide 7.

4. Move our call to Thursday.

5. Reply by Monday.

Exercise B — Choose the right register

Read each situation. Pick the phrase that fits best.

1. Emailing the CFO you've never met, about a compliance question.

2. Emailing a teammate you Slack every day, about lunch plans.

3. Emailing a colleague from another team you know a little.

4. Following up on an invoice that's 30 days late.

Exercise C — Find and fix

Each email opener has ONE problem. Rewrite it.

1. Hey Ms Rivera ■ I am writing to enquire about the compliance report.

2. Please send me the deck.

3. Would you mind to review this before Friday?

Listening: Voicemail from a client

Alex has just missed a call from Nadia, a client. Nadia's voicemail is followed by a short reply call from Alex.

pre

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How do you think Nadia will describe the problem?

What tone do you expect from a client leaving a voicemail — formal, neutral or friendly?

gist

1. What is Nadia's main request?

2. How urgent is it?

3. What does Alex offer in the reply call?

detail

1. What has changed since the last proposal?

2. What does Alex ask Nadia to confirm?

3. How does the call end?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

1. How would you describe Nadia's tone — friendly, neutral or formal — and what evidence supports it?

2. Why does Alex propose a DRAFT on Tuesday before the final on Wednesday?

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3. What does Alex's line 'I'll follow up in writing straight after this call' tell you about how he manages risk?

Language from the audio — what does it DO?

Find each phrase in the transcript and match it to its function.

"Quick one —" — signals the request will be short and specific

"if possible" — softens a firm deadline without weakening it

"Would it work if I sent a draft...?" — polite modal request that protects the sender's timeline

"One quick question —" — opens a second ask without derailing the first

"flag it in the draft" — invites early warning instead of a late surprise

"so we've got it on record" — moves an agreement from spoken to written for accountability

Voice A (voicemail): Hi Alex, Nadia here. Quick one — I'll need the updated proposal by Wednesday morning if possible. Our board meets in the afternoon and I'd love to walk them through it. One important change: the scope is bigger now — we want to include LATAM. Give me a call back when you can. Thanks.

Voice B: Hi Nadia, thanks for the voicemail. So — updated proposal, LATAM included, in your inbox by Wednesday morning. Would it work if I sent a draft by Tuesday evening, so you have time to react before the final version at 9am Wednesday?

Voice A: That would be perfect, actually.

Voice B: Great. One quick question — are we still working with the same 12-month timeline, or does the bigger scope push that out?

Voice A: Same timeline for now. If that turns out to be unrealistic, flag it in the draft and we'll talk.

Voice B: Understood. I'll follow up in writing straight after this call so we've got it on record. Thanks Nadia — talk Tuesday.

Speaking: role-play — turn an email into a call

Choose ONE situation. One of you plays the sender, one plays the receiver, on a short phone call. Use at least TWO polite modal requests.

Scene: Late invoice

A: You're a freelancer whose invoice is 30 days overdue.

B: You're the client's accounts contact, apologetic but busy.

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**Scene:** Slipping deadline

A: You're the vendor. You need one more week on a deliverable.

B: You're the customer. The launch date is fixed.

Scene: Meeting reschedule

A: You need to move a client meeting from Thursday to Monday.

B: You're the client — Monday is genuinely difficult.

Writing mini-task

Write *TWO* versions of the *SAME* email (60–80 words each): one *FORMAL* to a regulator, one *NEUTRAL* to a colleague. The topic: you need the Q3 report by end of week.

Wrap-up

One phrase from today you'll steal for your next email.

One register mistake you'll try to stop making.

One polite modal you'll use more often.

Quiz

1. Which register uses 'Dear Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire...'?
(A) Friendly
(B) Neutral
(C) Formal
2. Which is the **SOFTTEST** way to ask someone senior for a favour?
(A) Send the deck.
(B) Could you send the deck?
(C) Would you mind sending the deck?
3. 'Would you mind ____ the report?' — pick the correct form.
(A) review
(B) to review
(C) reviewing

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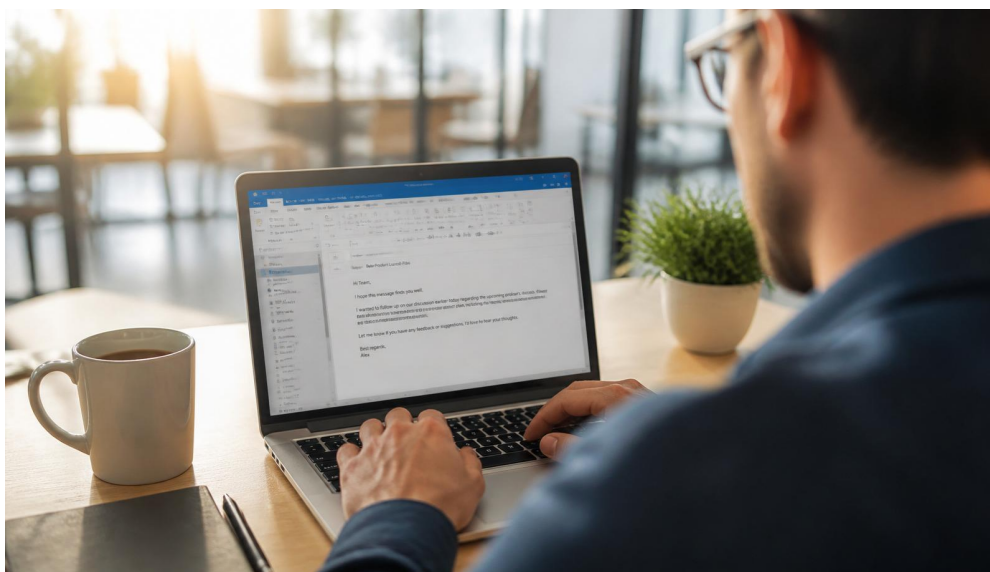


4. A subject line reading 'Following up' is usually...
- (A) Effective
 - (B) Ignored — no context
 - (C) Formal
5. The best subject line, from the lead-in, was...
- (A) Following up
 - (B) Quick question about Q4 forecast
 - (C) URGENT!!! Please read ASAP!!!

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Workbook — home practice



1. Match the phrase to its function

Match each line to what it *DOES* in the meeting-arranging flow.

1. **phrase:** Would you have 20 minutes next week to discuss X? · **answer:** Proposing

2. **phrase:** Would Tuesday at 10 or Thursday at 3 work for you? · **answer:** Offering time

3. **phrase:** Thursday at 3 works well — I'll send a calendar invite. · **answer:** Accepting / confirming

4. **phrase:** Something urgent has come up — would you mind if we moved to Wednesday? ·
answer: Rescheduling

5. **phrase:** I'll drop a quick recap in writing afterwards. · **answer:** Closing

6. **phrase:** Could I get your direct mobile, just in case? · **answer:** Exchanging contact details

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2. Meeting-arranging gap-fill

Complete with **ONE** word from the box.

Word bank: work · send · mind · agenda · recap · look

1. Would Tuesday at 10 or Thursday at 3 ____ for you?

2. I'll ____ a calendar invite this afternoon.

3. Something urgent has come up — would you ____ if we moved to Wednesday?

4. I'll send an ____ beforehand so we make the most of the time.

5. Thursday's tricky — could we ____ at Friday morning instead?

6. I'll drop a quick ____ in writing afterwards.

2b. Vocabulary — discursive writing

Write a formal email to a potential international partner (150 words) to arrange a high-stakes alignment meeting. You must propose a time, offer flexibility, mention an 'agenda', and promise a 'recap' afterwards. Use the target vocabulary effectively.

id: vocab-discursive

type: writing

Use all 6 target vocabulary items.

Use professional meeting-arrangement phrases.

Maintain a polite and collaborative tone.

Clearly state the purpose and desired outcome.

model: Subject: Alignment Meeting: Global Expansion Partnership Dear Mr. Tanaka, Following our brief conversation at the summit, I would like to propose a meeting to discuss our potential partnership. Would Wednesday at 10:00 AM JST work for you? If not, please let me know if you would mind if we look at Friday morning instead. I want to ensure we make the most of our time, so I will send a detailed agenda by the end of today for your review. This will allow us to focus on the key LATAM integration points. After our call, I will drop a quick recap in writing to ensure we are aligned on next steps and deliverables. Could I also obtain your direct mobile number, just in case we encounter any connection issues with the video link? I look forward to your confirmation and to the possibility of working together on this ambitious project.

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3. Rewrite as a professional meeting request

Rewrite each blunt request as a polite, specific meeting request.

1. Give me 20 minutes this week.

2. I need to move our Tuesday call.

3. Send me your number.

4. Let's talk about pricing.

4. Fix the meeting request

Each request has ONE main problem. Identify it.

1. Subject: Following up Hi, Let's catch up soon! Thanks.

(A) Register is too formal.

(B) No topic, no duration, no proposed time — places the entire burden on the recipient.

(C) The email is too long.

2. Subject: URGENT!!! Meeting ASAP!!! Hi María, When you get a chance, could we chat about Q3? Thanks!

(A) The subject line screams urgency that doesn't match the calm body.

(B) The register is too friendly.

(C) It's missing a signature.

3. Hi Alex, I'll call you Tuesday at 10.

(A) It's grammatically wrong.

(B) It announces rather than proposes — no chance for Alex to say the time doesn't work.

(C) It's too polite.

5. Contact-details spelling drill

In pairs, take turns dictating the following email addresses and phone numbers over the phone. The partner must read them back digit-by-digit / letter-by-letter to confirm.

1. aditi.rao@brightlights.com

2. j.o'connor@nkg-partners.io

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3. +34 612 445 890

4. +81 3 6712 4098

6. Listening — from voicemail to booked meeting

Nadia leaves a voicemail for Alex asking for a follow-up meeting. Alex calls back. Listen for the topic, the time, the format and the contact detail they exchange.

1. What time and format do they agree on?

2. Which contact detail does Alex ask for?

3. What's the fallback plan if Wednesday collapses?

Voice A (voicemail): Hi Alex, Nadia here. Quick one — I'll need us to walk my board through the updated proposal on Wednesday morning if possible. Two changes since we last spoke: we now want to include LATAM, and we'll need a short executive-summary version. Call me back when you can.

Voice B: Hi Nadia, thanks for the voicemail. Would 9:30 Wednesday work for a 45-minute video call? I'll send a shorter draft the evening before so you can react.

Voice A: Perfect.

Voice B: One quick thing — could I get your direct mobile, in case the office line drops out?

Voice A: Sure. +34 612 445 890.

Voice B: Let me read that back — +34 612 445 890. And if Wednesday collapses, we'll move to Thursday afternoon. Have your assistant confirm by end of Tuesday and I'll send an agenda today.

7. Writing — the calendar-invite text

Write the *SHORT* invitation text (60–80 words) for the Wednesday call above. Include: topic, length, time in *BOTH* time zones (Ams / Madrid), format, one-line agenda, and a closing that offers flexibility. Use at least *THREE* phrases from the Unit 1B phrase bank.

8. Case study reflection

Go back to the *Bright Lights* case (Aditi's first-week meetings). Answer briefly.

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1. Which of Aditi's SIX meetings would you schedule FIRST, and why?

2. What's ONE contact-detail habit Aditi should adopt from day one?

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Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in: subject lines

1. Opened first — specific + short
2. Often ignored — no context
3. Deleted — feels like spam

Reading: The three registers of professional email

1. (B) Three: formal / neutral / friendly
2. (B) The workhorse of modern business
3. (B) A common mistake because it reads as slow and distant
4. (B) Neutral register that is still polite

Vocabulary: email register

1. Hi
2. Dear
3. Hey
4. send
5. Kind
6. Cheers
1. Hi María, quick query regarding the Q4 figures — do you have five minutes today?
2. I am writing to enquire about the terms of the contract.
3. Hey María ■ just a heads-up that I'll be out of office tomorrow.
4. Could you please send the deck across by end of day?
5. Kind regards, — safe formal closing at the end of an email.

Grammar focus: Modals for polite requests

1. Could you send me the deck by 3pm?
2. Would you be able to review this before Friday?
3. Would you mind taking a quick look at slide 7?
4. Would you mind if we moved our call to Thursday?
5. Could you reply by Monday?
1. "Dear Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire..." (formal)
2. "Hey, quick one — lunch at 1?" (friendly)
3. "Hi María, quick question about the Q4 numbers..." (neutral)
4. "Hi María, just a quick follow-up on invoice #204 — could you let me know the status?" (firm neutral)
1. Dear Ms Rivera, I am writing to enquire about the compliance report. (register mismatch)
2. Could you send me the deck by [time]? (add polite modal + deadline)
3. Would you mind reviewing this before Friday? (mind + -ing, not to + verb)

Listening: Voicemail from a client

1. She needs the updated proposal by Wednesday morning.
2. Fairly — her board meets Wednesday afternoon.
3. To send a draft by Tuesday evening and a final version by 9am Wednesday.
1. The scope is bigger — they now want to include the LATAM region.
2. Whether they still want the same 12-month timeline.
3. Alex thanks her and says he'll follow up in writing.
1. Neutral, leaning warm: 'Hi Alex', 'Quick one', 'if possible', 'Thanks'. No formal openers, no emojis.
2. To protect the deadline by giving Nadia reaction time — so the final version isn't the first version she sees.
3. He gets the agreement 'on record' so nothing important lives only in a phone call — protects both sides if the scope drifts.

Quiz

1. (C) Formal
2. (C) Would you mind sending the deck?

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3. (C) reviewing
4. (B) Ignored — no context
5. (B) Quick question about Q4 forecast

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Answer key — Workbook

2. Meeting-arranging gap-fill

1. work
2. send
3. mind
4. agenda
5. look
6. recap

3. Rewrite as a professional meeting request

1. Might you have 20 minutes this week to discuss [topic]? Tuesday or Thursday afternoon would be convenient for me.
2. Something has come up on Tuesday — would you mind if we moved our call to Wednesday afternoon?
3. Could I obtain your direct number, in case the office line becomes unreachable?
4. Could we set up a 30-minute call about pricing next week? I have a slot open at 2pm on Wednesday.

4. Fix the meeting request

1. (B) No topic, no duration, no proposed time — places the entire burden on the recipient.
2. (A) The subject line screams urgency that doesn't match the calm body.
3. (B) It announces rather than proposes — no chance for Alex to say the time doesn't work.

5. Contact-details spelling drill

1. A-D-I-T-I dot R-A-O at brightlights dot com.
2. J dot O apostrophe C-O-N-N-O-R at N-K-G dash partners dot I-O.
3. Plus three-four, six-one-two, four-four-five, eight-nine-zero.
4. Plus eight-one, three, six-seven-one-two, four-zero-nine-eight.

6. Listening — from voicemail to booked meeting

1. Wednesday 9:30 (Amsterdam) for a 45-minute video call, with a draft sent the evening before.
2. Nadia's direct mobile — he reads it back digit-by-digit to confirm.
3. Move to Thursday afternoon — Nadia's assistant will confirm by end of Tuesday.

8. Case study reflection

1. Model: Joris on Friday — she needs manager alignment before her first client-facing calls, and it's his only 20-minute window.
2. Model: always confirm channel preference explicitly ('WhatsApp for urgent, email for the rest') and read back numbers digit-by-digit on the phone.

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