



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B1 · BUSINESS ENGLISH

UNIT 8 · B1·8B

The way we used to work

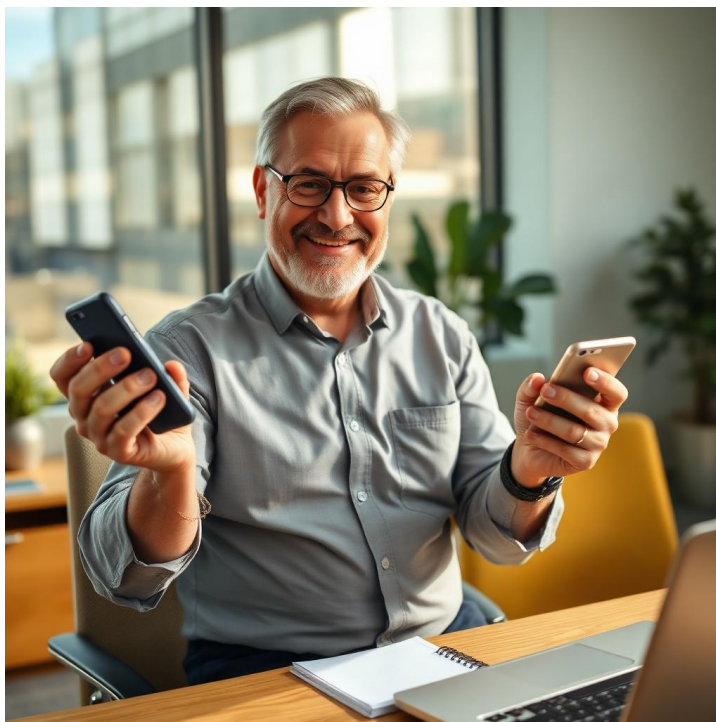
Theme · Problems & solutions

Unit 8 · B1·8B

The way we used to work

Theme: Problems & solutions

B1 · Business English



Learning objectives

- Talk about past habits and past states with 'used to' — and know when to switch to 'would'.
- Compare 'then vs now' in your industry in one calm, non-nostalgic sentence.
- Give six 'process change' phrases that describe how a team improved after an incident.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · One thing you used to do at work

Think of *ONE* professional habit you used to have and don't anymore. Answer three questions in one sentence each.

What did you used to do?

What happened that changed it?

Are you glad the habit is gone, or do you miss it?

Lead-in: how we used to work — myth or fact?

Six claims about how offices used to work versus how they work now. Vote MYTH or FACT for each. Compare with a partner before the reveal.

kind: myths

1. **claim:** Before email, most business communication happened by fax. · **vote:** FACT · **explain:** For roughly the 1980s–early 1990s, fax was standard for contracts, orders and confirmations. Some industries (Japanese notaries, German real estate) still use it.

2. **claim:** People used to work fewer hours in the 1990s than they do now, on average. · **vote:** MYTH · **explain:** OECD data: average annual hours worked in most Western economies has actually FALLEN since 1990. It feels like more because work bleeds into evenings via smartphones.

3. **claim:** Job interviews used to include an unofficial 'meet the family' step in some industries. · **vote:** FACT · **explain:** Common in banking, law and diplomacy up to the 1980s. Now considered illegal or inappropriate in most Western hiring.

4. **claim:** Most offices in the 1980s had a designated smoking area — inside the office. · **vote:** FACT · **explain:** Indoor office smoking was normal until the mid-1990s in most of Europe and the US. Ashtrays on every desk in the 1970s.

5. **claim:** The average worker used to change jobs less than three times in their whole career. · **vote:** FACT · **explain:** Baby-boomer averages sat around 2–3 employer changes for a full career. Gen Z averages 8–10 in the first 15 years alone.

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6. **claim:** Companies used to reply to customer complaints faster because there were fewer channels. · **vote:** MYTH · **explain:** Response times were WORSE — a written complaint might take 2–3 weeks. It only felt calmer because customers had no expectation of a 2-hour reply.

followUp: Which answer surprised you most? Explain in one sentence.

Reading · The 3-day meeting is dead

There used to be a ritual in most European offices: the annual planning meeting. Three days, everyone flew in, hotels were booked, a moderator was hired, and Post-its covered every wall. People still talk about the food. Not many people talk about the decisions.

The 3-day meeting was designed for a world where you saw your colleagues once a quarter. It made sense in 1995, when video calls didn't really exist and the alternative was writing memos. It doesn't make sense in 2026, when the same team is on a call together three times a week.

What replaced it? Short, structured meetings — 45 minutes, a written agenda, a decision log at the end. Companies that used to do one 3-day offsite now do six 45-minute working sessions across the quarter. Decisions get made in weeks, not once a year. The Post-its are gone. Nobody misses the Post-its.

The people who miss the 3-day meeting most are the ones who never really wanted to make a decision — they wanted to be seen making a decision. That is a very different thing, and the modern format quietly exposes it.

1. Why did the 3-day meeting exist?
 - (A) Because people love hotels
 - (B) Because remote communication was hard
 - (C) Because Post-its work best in bulk
2. What has replaced the 3-day meeting?
 - (A) Longer offsites
 - (B) Six 45-minute working sessions
 - (C) Only asynchronous email
3. According to the text, who misses the 3-day meeting most?
 - (A) People who really wanted to decide
 - (B) People who wanted to be SEEN deciding
 - (C) People who love Post-its

Vocabulary in context

Match the phrase to the meaning.

there used to be a ritual — a habit that everyone repeated

a decision log — a written record of what was agreed

an offsite — a meeting held away from the office

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to be seen making a decision — to look like you're deciding, without actually deciding

True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text.

1. The 3-day meeting was designed for a world with cheap video calls.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
2. Modern replacements produce faster decisions.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
3. The text says Post-its are still useful in 2026.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
4. Some people miss the 3-day meeting for status reasons.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
5. The 3-day meeting was more expensive than the modern format.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given

React to the text

Discuss briefly.

1. In your company, is the 3-day meeting alive, dying, or already dead?

2. Is the modern format losing something the old one had?

Scan for meaning

Find the phrase in the text that matches each definition.

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1. a written record of what was agreed

2. a meeting held away from the office

3. looking like you're deciding without deciding

Vocabulary · Six 'process change' phrases

- a habit** — something you did regularly, often without thinking
- a workflow** — the ordered steps of how work moves through a team
- a bottleneck** — the slowest point, or friction point, in the workflow
- a workaround** — an unofficial fix people invent to skip the bottleneck
- a post-mortem** — the honest review meeting after a problem
- a legacy system** — an old system still in use, usually reluctantly
- to phase out** — to gradually stop using something
- to roll out** — to introduce something to everyone, step by step
- to streamline** — to make a workflow simpler and faster
- to overhaul** — to redesign something completely
- to sunset (a product / a tool)** — to officially end it after a public deadline
- to migrate to** — to move users or data to a new system

practice

Complete each sentence with *ONE* word or phrase from the lists.

1. The manual copy-paste step is the biggest ____ in our order-to-invoice flow.

2. We're going to ____ the old CRM by the end of Q3.

3. The team ran a two-hour ____ after the incident and identified three fixes.

4. We ____ the new invoicing tool to the sales team last week — support next.

5. The mainframe is a ____ — nobody wants to touch it, but it still runs payroll.

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6. By December we will have ____ all customer data to the new database.

Collocations · process verbs

Match the verb with the noun.

phase out — the old tool

roll out — a new workflow

streamline — the process

run — a post-mortem

migrate — customer data

remove — a bottleneck

Odd one out

Choose the word that does NOT belong.

1. habit · routine · workflow · deadline

(A) habit

(B) routine

(C) workflow

(D) deadline

2. phase out · sunset · roll out · migrate

(A) phase out

(B) sunset

(C) roll out

(D) migrate

3. bottleneck · workaround · post-mortem · celebration

(A) bottleneck

(B) workaround

(C) post-mortem

(D) celebration

Word building · verb ↔ noun

Complete the pair.

1. to migrate → a ____

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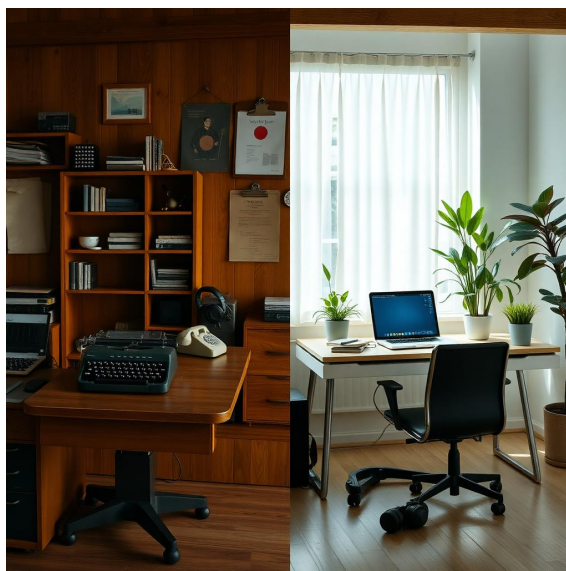


2. to streamline → a ____

3. to overhaul → an ____

4. to remove → a ____

5. to replace → a ____



Grammar · used to / didn't use to / would (past habits)

1. Form: used to + infinitive (past habits & past states) — • We used to fly to Zurich every quarter for the planning meeting. • The office used to be on the third floor.

2. Negative & question: didn't use to / did you use to — • We didn't use to have video calls with the client — everything was by phone. • Did you use to work on Saturdays?

3. 'Would' for past habits (actions only, NOT states) — • Every Monday she would open the mail before anything else. ✓ (habit) • The office would be on the third floor. ✗ (state — use 'used to')

4. NOT the same as 'be used to' / 'get used to' — • I used to work from home. = it was my habit in the past. • I'm used to working from home. = it feels normal now. • I'm getting used to working from home. = it's becoming normal.

5. Common mistake: dropping the 'd' after 'didn't' — • ✓ We didn't use to have Slack. (no 'd' after 'didn't') • ✗ We didn't used to have Slack.

Exercise A — put the verb in the correct form

used to / didn't use to / did you use to.

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1. We (fly) to Zurich every quarter for the planning meeting.

2. The office (be) on the third floor before we moved.

3. We (not / have) video calls with the client — everything was by phone.

4. (you / work) on Saturdays in your first job?

5. People (smoke) at their desks in most European offices.

6. We (not / send) written apologies — a phone call was enough.

Exercise B — 'used to' or 'would'?

Choose the correct form. If both work, prefer 'used to' for the FIRST mention.

1. The office (be) on the third floor.

2. Every Monday she (open) the physical mail first thing.

3. We (own) a warehouse in Coimbra.

4. Every Friday afternoon the whole team (go) for pastel de nata.

Exercise C — 'used to' vs 'be used to' vs 'get used to'

Choose the correct form.

1. I (work) from home in 2019 — now I'm back in the office.

2. I (work) from home now — I've been doing it for three years.

3. It's my first month in the new office and I (still / get) to the noise.

4. The new CRM is different, but we (get) it.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Exercise D — write the 'then vs now' sentence

Write *ONE* sentence about your work life using 'used to' + a change of habit.

1. About how meetings used to be.

2. About how customer support used to work.

3. About how the office itself looked or felt.

Exercise E — process-change paragraph

Write a 4-sentence paragraph starting: 'After the incident, we changed the way we work.' Use *AT LEAST* two 'used to' + *didn't* sentences *AND* one 'streamline / phase out / roll out' from the vocabulary.

1. Company scenario: a 40-minute outage exposed a bad on-call process.

Listening · Three founders, three 'then vs now' stories

Three small-business founders describe how their company used to work — and what changed after one specific incident. Decide whose story sounds the most honest, whose sounds the most polished, and whose sounds the most nostalgic.

pre

In your company, what's the *ONE* process that used to be terrible?

Do founders in your industry admit past mistakes publicly or hide them?

gist

1. Which founder's story is the most concrete?

2. Which founder sounds the most nostalgic?

3. Which founder sounds rehearsed rather than honest?

detail

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. What specific process did Voice B change?

2. What did Voice A actually STOP doing that they used to do?

3. Why does Voice C's polish backfire?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

1. Which founder would you want as a boss during a crisis?

2. What is Voice A afraid to say directly?

Useful language from the audio

Match each phrase to what it does.

"We used to be a real family." — nostalgic — describes feeling, not process

"We used to run payroll manually every month." — concrete past habit — the setup for a change

"Now we do a weekly finance review and two-person approval." — the specific process fix

"We lean into failure and grow through it." — polished, non-specific — a leadership quote

"After the €12,000 payroll bug, we ran a real post-mortem." — names the exact incident that triggered the change

Voice A: You know, we used to be a real family here. Everyone knew everyone. Now, honestly, we're bigger, and I miss those days. We used to have Friday drinks every week, and everyone would stay. I don't know when that stopped. It just... did.

Voice B: So, we used to run payroll manually every month, one person, no review. In April a bug overcharged the tax line by €12,000 across the whole team. After the incident we ran a real post-mortem — root cause was a copy-paste error into the spreadsheet. Now we do a weekly finance review and two-person approval on any payroll change. Zero repeats in five months.

Voice C: We're a company that leans into failure. We used to be scared of mistakes; now we grow through them. Every setback is a stepping stone. I really believe that if you don't fail, you're not moving fast enough. So we embrace it, and we keep going.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Fourth listen — fill the gaps

Complete the exact phrases from the audio.

1. We used to be a real ____.

2. We used to run payroll ____ every month.

3. A bug overcharged the tax line by ____ across the whole team.

4. Now we do a weekly finance review and two-person ____.

5. We used to be ____ of mistakes; now we grow through them.

Speaking · Your 60-second 'then vs now'

Prepare a 60-second oral story about your company (or a team you've been in). Use AT LEAST two 'used to' sentences, one 'didn't use to' sentence, ONE named incident that changed things, and ONE specific process fix.

Scene: The onboarding story

A: You: an HR lead. Your onboarding used to take 6 weeks and half of new hires felt lost. Something changed.

B: You: a new hire from last month. React — say what worked and what didn't.

Scene: The support story

A: You: a support lead. Your team used to close tickets in 5+ days. Something changed after one bad review.

B: You: a repeat customer. React — say whether you noticed the change or not.

Scene: The meeting story

A: You: a team lead. Your Monday meeting used to be 3 hours. Something changed after nobody made a decision for 6 weeks.

B: You: a colleague on the same team. React — say if the new format actually works.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class discussion

Discuss briefly.

Is 'we used to be a family' a strength or a red flag when you hear it in an interview?

What is the ONE habit your industry needs to phase out this year?

Are 'then vs now' stories a marketing tool or genuine transparency?

Role-play · the interview question

Student A is the interviewer. Student B is the candidate. A asks: 'Tell me about ONE thing your last team used to do badly — and what changed.' B answers in 60 seconds using 'used to' + one named incident + one specific fix.

Scene: For an ops role

A: Student A: interviewer. Ask the question and one follow-up: 'and what did you personally do?'

B: Student B: candidate. Use one 'used to' + one incident + one fix + your own action.

Scene: For a customer-facing role

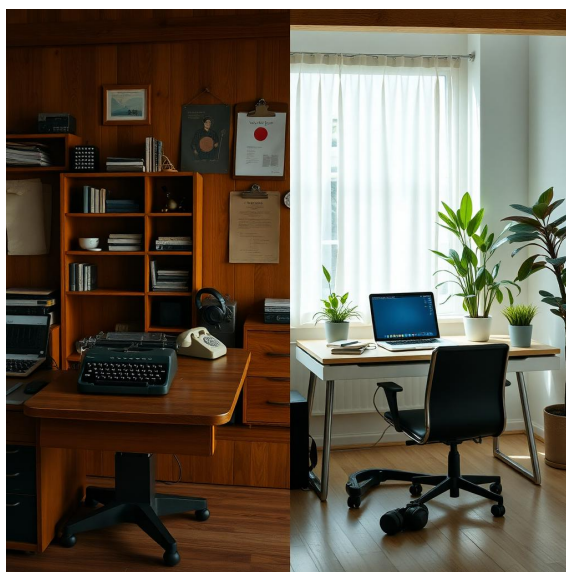
A: Student A: interviewer. Ask the question and one follow-up: 'how would the customer describe the change?'

B: Student B: candidate. Use one 'used to' + one incident + one fix + a customer-visible outcome.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary gap-fill

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

Word bank: bottleneck · phase out · post-mortem · roll out · legacy system · migrated

1. The manual copy-paste step is the biggest ____ in our order flow.

2. We're going to ____ the old CRM by the end of Q3.

3. The team ran a two-hour ____ after the incident.

4. We ____ the new invoicing tool to the sales team last week.

5. The mainframe is a ____ — nobody wants to touch it, but it still runs payroll.

6. By December we will have ____ all customer data to the new database.

2. used to / didn't use to / did you use to

Put the verb in the correct form.

1. We (fly) to Zurich every quarter for the planning meeting.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



-
2. The office (be) on the third floor before we moved.
-
3. We (not / have) video calls with the client — everything was by phone.
-
4. (you / work) on Saturdays in your first job?
-
5. People (smoke) at their desks in most European offices.
-
6. We (not / send) written apologies — a phone call was enough.
-

3. 'used to' vs 'be used to' vs 'get used to'

Choose the correct option.

1. I ____ work from home in 2019 — now I'm back in the office.
(A) used to
(B) am used to
(C) am getting used to
2. I ____ working from home now — I've done it for three years.
(A) used to
(B) am used to
(C) am getting used to
3. It's my first month in the new office and I ____ the noise.
(A) used to
(B) am used to
(C) am still getting used to
4. The new CRM is different, but we ____ it.
(A) used to
(B) are getting used to
(C) used to be

4. Which sentence is stronger?

Choose the version that sounds more honest and concrete.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Describing a real change:
 - (A) 'We used to be a family.'
 - (B) 'We used to run payroll manually — now two people approve every change.'
 - (C) 'We lean into failure.'
2. Naming what changed:
 - (A) 'After the €12,000 bug, we ran a real post-mortem.'
 - (B) 'We grow through setbacks.'
 - (C) 'Mistakes are stepping stones.'
3. 'Then vs now':
 - (A) 'We didn't use to run a weekly finance review — now we do.'
 - (B) 'Everything is much better now.'
 - (C) 'We embrace change.'
4. In an interview answer:
 - (A) 'Our old process was fine.'
 - (B) 'We used to close support tickets in 5 days; after one 1-star review we cut it to 8 hours.'
 - (C) 'I've always been customer-obsessed.'

5. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake.

1. We didn't used to have Slack.

2. Every Monday she would be on the third floor.

3. I'm used to work from home.

4. Did you used to work on Saturdays?

6. Listening — three founders, three 'then vs now' stories

Three small-business founders describe how their company used to work — and what changed after one specific incident.

1. Which founder's story is the most concrete?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Which founder sounds nostalgic without naming a real change?

3. Which founder sounds rehearsed rather than honest?

Voice A: We used to be a real family here. Now we're bigger. We used to have Friday drinks every week — I don't know when that stopped.

Voice B: We used to run payroll manually, one person, no review. In April a bug overcharged tax by €12,000. After the incident we ran a real post-mortem. Now we do a weekly finance review and two-person approval on any payroll change.

Voice C: We used to be scared of mistakes; now we grow through them. Every setback is a stepping stone. We lean into failure.

7. Writing — your 'then vs now' paragraph

Write a 4–5 sentence paragraph starting: 'After the incident, we changed the way we work.' Use **AT LEAST** two 'used to' sentences, one 'didn't use to' sentence, **ONE** named incident and **ONE** specific process fix. Max 90 words.

8. Case study preview

Before Case Study 8, answer briefly.

1. A food-delivery app gets 40 one-star reviews in one weekend after a bug. Do you send one company statement or reply to each review?

2. The founder wants to say 'we've learned from this'. Rewrite that sentence in a way an actual customer would believe.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Reading · The 3-day meeting is dead

1. (B) Because remote communication was hard
2. (B) Six 45-minute working sessions
3. (B) People who wanted to be SEEN deciding
1. (B) False
2. (A) True
3. (B) False
4. (A) True
5. (C) Not Given
1. Model: alive in name only. We still do it once a year — the real decisions happen in the 45-minute sessions between them.
2. Model: yes — informal time. The corridor conversations at the offsite still generate 20% of the real ideas.
1. a decision log
2. an offsite
3. to be seen making a decision

Vocabulary · Six 'process change' phrases

1. bottleneck
2. phase out
3. post-mortem
4. rolled out
5. legacy system
6. migrated
1. (D) deadline
2. (C) roll out
3. (D) celebration
1. migration
2. streamlining / a streamlined process
3. overhaul
4. removal
5. replacement

Grammar · used to / didn't use to / would (past habits)

1. used to fly
2. used to be
3. didn't use to have
4. Did you use to work
5. used to smoke
6. didn't use to send
1. used to be (state)
2. used to open / would open (both fine — habit)
3. used to own (state)
4. used to go / would go (habit)
1. used to work (past habit)
2. 'm used to working (feels normal now)
3. 'm still getting used to the noise
4. 're getting used to it
1. Model: 'We used to spend 3 hours every Monday on a status meeting — now it's a 15-line message in Slack.'
2. Model: 'We used to reply to complaints in 3–5 working days — now our SLA is 2 hours.'
3. Model: 'The office used to be full every Tuesday — now it's only really busy on Wednesdays and Thursdays.'
1. Model: 'After the incident, we changed the way we work. We used to page a single engineer at 3am — now three of us are on rotation. We didn't use to run a post-mortem after every outage; now we do, and we publish it internally within 48 hours. We're phasing out the old paging tool by the end of Q3.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Listening · Three founders, three 'then vs now' stories

1. Voice B — names the incident (the payroll bug), the change (weekly finance review), and the outcome (zero repeats).
2. Voice A — 'we used to be a real family' — talks about the vibe, not the work.
3. Voice C — every sentence is a leadership quote, no incident is ever named.
1. Introduced a weekly finance review + a two-person approval on payroll changes after a bug overcharged tax by €12,000.
2. Nothing specific — 'we used to be a family' is a feeling, not a process. That's the weakness of the story.
3. Every phrase is a LinkedIn quote ('we lean into failure'). Listeners can't tell what was actually different last year vs this year.
1. Voice B — the one who names one incident and one specific change is the one who owns problems in real life.
2. That the 'family' era included bad hiring, bad boundaries, and probably underpaid overtime. 'Family' often means 'no process'.
1. family
2. manually
3. €12,000
4. approval
5. scared

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. bottleneck
2. phase out
3. post-mortem
4. rolled out
5. legacy system
6. migrated

2. used to / didn't use to / did you use to

1. used to fly
2. used to be
3. didn't use to have
4. Did you use to work
5. used to smoke
6. didn't use to send

3. 'used to' vs 'be used to' vs 'get used to'

1. (A) used to
2. (B) am used to
3. (C) am still getting used to
4. (B) are getting used to

4. Which sentence is stronger?

1. (B) 'We used to run payroll manually — now two people approve every change.'
2. (A) 'After the €12,000 bug, we ran a real post-mortem.'
3. (A) 'We didn't use to run a weekly finance review — now we do.'
4. (B) 'We used to close support tickets in 5 days; after one 1-star review we cut it to 8 hours.'

5. Find and fix the mistake

1. We didn't use to have Slack.
2. Every Monday she used to be on the third floor. (state, not habit)
3. I'm used to working from home.
4. Did you use to work on Saturdays?

6. Listening — three founders, three 'then vs now' stories

1. Voice B — payroll bug (€12,000), post-mortem, weekly finance review + two-person approval, zero repeats in 5 months.
2. Voice A — 'we used to be a family' is a feeling, not a process.
3. Voice C — every sentence is a LinkedIn quote; no incident is ever named.

8. Case study preview

1. Model: both — one public statement + a short personal reply to each reviewer. Public statement owns the story; private replies rebuild trust one person at a time.
2. Model: 'On Saturday, 480 of you were charged twice for delivery. We fixed the bug at 11pm. We're refunding automatically today and we've added a second review step so it can't happen again.'

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class