



UNIT 1B · BUSINESS C1

What sets you apart

Class Book and Workbook · one complete unit

OBJECTIVES

What you'll be able to do

4 min

- Describe personal positioning with C1 precision.
- Use it-clefts and what-clefts to foreground key ideas.
- Articulate a defensible differentiator in eleven words or fewer.
- Give a purpose-led talk in the style of "Start with why".

LEAD-IN

Two cards, one desk — which one gets remembered?

8 min

CARD A · DENSE CREDENTIALS · CARD B · ONE PUNCHY LINE

You are handed both cards at a conference. You have five seconds before the next handshake. On your own:

- Write, in eleven words or fewer, the version of Card B you would prefer to be handed.
- Circle the two words in your own draft that are actually doing work. Cross out the rest.
- Rewrite the line one more time, keeping only what survived the cut.

Bring your final eleven-word line to the next class. Your teacher will score each on specificity, rejectability and memorability. Vagueness is a red pen offence.

READING

The paradox of standing out

15 min

There is a particular kind of professional you meet, often around the tenth year of a career, who has finally understood that being excellent is not the same as being memorable. They will tell you, with a mixture of relief and embarrassment, that their most productive year in reputation-building was the year they did their least new work. What they did instead was to notice, and defend, the two or three things they had been doing all along that no one else in their field seemed to do — and to make those things unmissable.

Personal branding, stripped of its self-help register, is not the pursuit of visibility for its own sake. It is closer to a curatorial act: choosing, from among the many defensible descriptions of yourself, the one or two that a busy stranger can remember and repeat when your name comes up in a room you are not in. Everything else is decoration. The reason most senior professionals struggle with this exercise is that they were promoted for versatility — for being the person who could do anything — and are now being asked to volunteer, in public, that they are not, in fact, best in class at most of the things they do.

The most useful reframe I know comes from the strategist Roger Martin, who describes strategy as an "integrated set of choices about where to play and how to win". The same phrasing applies to a career. The candidate who describes themselves as "senior operator, generalist, curious across sectors" is, at best, offering a résumé; at worst, they are offering nothing an interviewer can retell. The candidate who says "I take struggling B2B teams past their first regulated market" has, in eleven words, made a bet — and, importantly, made themselves rejectable, which is the precondition for being chosen.

None of this is comfortable. To differentiate is, by definition, to lose the audience you were not built for. But the alternative — being nominally attractive to everyone — is not neutral. It is a slow, expensive form of invisibility, sustained by the reassuring feeling of never having to choose.

Choose the best answer.

- The 'most productive year' described in paragraph 1 was one in which the professional:
 - (a) launched several new projects
 - (b) defended a few existing strengths
 - (c) changed employers
 - (d) took a sabbatical

Answer key: (b) defended a few existing strengths

- Personal branding is described as fundamentally:
 - (a) a marketing exercise
 - (b) a curatorial act of selection
 - (c) a form of self-promotion
 - (d) an HR requirement

Answer key: (b) a curatorial act of selection

- Senior professionals struggle to differentiate because they were:
 - (a) always specialists
 - (b) promoted for being generalists
 - (c) poorly trained
 - (d) too modest

Answer key: (b) promoted for being generalists

- The example 'senior operator, generalist, curious...' is:
 - (a) a strong positioning
 - (b) a weak positioning that says nothing memorable
 - (c) a good elevator pitch
 - (d) an example to follow

Answer key: (b) a weak positioning that says nothing memorable

- The final paragraph argues that trying to appeal to everyone is:
 - (a) safe and rational
 - (b) a form of slow invisibility
 - (c) the mark of an experienced leader
 - (d) impossible in practice

Answer key: (b) a form of slow invisibility

AUTHENTIC READING · REAL TEXT

Why 'personal brand' is a bad name for a real thing

Source: Adapted from Harvard Business Review — 'A Better Way to Think About Your Personal Brand' · Excerpted for classroom use under fair-dealing for educational commentary.

C1+

≈ 330 words

Dorie Clark's work has quietly reshaped how mid-career professionals think about visibility. The following adapts her HBR argument for readers who dislike the phrase 'personal brand'.

The single fastest way to make a thoughtful professional roll their eyes is to say the words 'personal brand'. The phrase carries a residue of self-promotion, of ring-lights and thought-leadership carousels, that most working people would prefer not to be associated with. And yet the thing the phrase points at — the shorthand a stranger reaches for when your name comes up in a room you are not in — is not optional. Everyone has one. Most people just have one

they did not choose.

Clark's argument is that the useful question is not 'what is my brand?' but 'what is my brand doing, right now, when I'm not there?' If the honest answer is 'I don't know', then whatever is happening is happening to you, not for you. Reputations are not built in the moments when we are in the room; they are built in the moments when we are being described in it.

The mechanic that follows from this is unromantic. First, ask five trusted colleagues to describe you in three words to someone who is considering hiring you. Second, notice where the descriptions converge — the two or three words that reappear are your current brand, whether you like them or not. Third, and here is where the exercise becomes uncomfortable: decide which of those words you want to defend and which you want to displace, and give yourself twelve months to do the displacing.

The last stage is the one most people skip. Displacement is not achieved by saying you are something new; it is achieved by producing, in public and repeatedly, the evidence that you are. One well-argued essay does more than a hundred posts of encouragement. One difficult project handled visibly well does more than any bio rewrite. The brand does not lead the work — it lags it. That, oddly, is the good news.

1. READ FOR GIST

- 1. Clark's central reframing is: instead of 'what is my brand?', ask —
Answer key: What is my brand doing when I'm not in the room?
- 2. What is her three-step mechanic?
Answer key: Ask five colleagues for three-word descriptions; notice convergence; decide which words to defend and which to displace.

2. READ FOR DETAIL

- 1. What does the writer say about the phrase 'personal brand'?
Answer key: It carries a residue of self-promotion that thoughtful professionals dislike — but the underlying thing is not optional.
- 2. Why is 'ask five colleagues' more revealing than self-description?
Answer key: Because reputations are built in moments when we are being described, not when we are present.
- 3. What is the writer's warning about how displacement is achieved?
Answer key: Not by saying you are something new — only by producing, in public and repeatedly, evidence that you are.
- 4. What does 'the brand lags the work' mean?
Answer key: The reputation follows the actual output; you cannot successfully brand your way ahead of your evidence.

3. GLOSSARY

residue

an unwanted trace or association left behind

shorthand

a brief way of describing something complex

displace

push out and replace

lag

follow behind, arrive later than

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Do you know your current 'three-word brand'? Would you dare ask five colleagues?
- Which of your three words would you defend, and which would you displace?
- In your industry, does the brand really 'lag the work', or can it be built ahead of it?

5. WRITING TASK · DISCURSIVE

Draft an email you would actually send to five trusted colleagues asking them for the three-word description. 120–160 words. Make it easy for them to reply honestly.

- Explain the purpose in one sentence.
- Give an example of the kind of answer that would help you.
- Explicitly permit a critical answer — otherwise you will get flattery.

Write at least 120 words.

VOCABULARY

Differentiation & brand

12 min

Match each term to its definition.

- differentiator
the specific thing that makes an offering distinct from competitors
- positioning
how a brand or professional is deliberately placed in the audience's mind
- narrative arc
the shape of a story — where you came from, where you are, where you're going
- signature move
the recognisable, repeated action associated with a professional or brand
- reputation capital
the accumulated goodwill that lets you take credible risks
- value proposition
the concise promise of what you deliver and to whom
- adjacency
a related market or skill you can credibly move into
- credibility gap
the distance between what you claim and what people believe of you

Complete each sentence with a word from the box.

- Two years of publishing thoughtful research is what built her reputation capital_.
- 'We do enterprise faster and cheaper' is a weak value proposition_ — it invites a price war.
- The real differentiator_ isn't the technology; it's the after-sales team.
- There's a credibility gap_ between how the CEO speaks internally and externally — investors have noticed.
- Her narrative arc_ — junior lawyer, then policy, then founder — makes her hard to categorise, in a good way.
- Their positioning_ moved from 'reliable' to 'daring' the moment they hired her.

Choose the best answer.

- A 'credibility gap' most often widens when:

- (a) a leader over-promises
- (b) a leader is silent
- (c) a company grows
- (d) a leader delegates

Answer key: (a) a leader over-promises

- 'Adjacency' matters strategically because it:

- (a) reduces headcount
- (b) opens plausible new revenue without a full rebrand
- (c) creates legal exposure
- (d) narrows positioning

Answer key: (b) opens plausible new revenue without a full rebrand

- A 'signature move' is valuable because it is:

- (a) expensive
- (b) recognisable and repeatable
- (c) secret
- (d) difficult to teach

Answer key: (b) recognisable and repeatable

- 'Positioning' is fundamentally about:

- (a) the physical location of a company
- (b) what customers should think first when they hear your name
- (c) the seniority of your team
- (d) your legal jurisdiction

Answer key: (b) what customers should think first when they hear your name

LISTENING

Sharpening the positioning line

12 min

A head of marketing (Avi) and a founder (Kira) rehearse a new one-line positioning. Audio coming soon — for now, read and answer.

HEAD OF MARKETING (AVI): We've got fifteen minutes. Give me the new positioning line — one sentence.

FOUNDER (KIRA): "We help ambitious B2B teams turn their messiest product bet into a category."

AVI: Hmm. Two problems. First, "ambitious" is doing no work — every team calls itself ambitious. Second, "turn into a category" is the outcome you want, not the promise the buyer will believe on day one.

KIRA: So what would you leave in?

AVI: The word that's actually rejectable is "messiest". Everything else is decoration. What matters is that we're the shop you hire when your bet is embarrassing on paper.

KIRA: "The category-defining bet you can't explain in a board deck."

AVI: Better. Now — who is this not for?

KIRA: Anyone who's already comfortable with their story. Anyone who wants a cleaner brand agency.

AVI: Say that out loud in every pitch. It's not a caveat — it's the point. What sets us apart is what sets us against.

Choose the best answer.

- Avi's first objection to Kira's opening line is that:
 - (a) it is too long
 - (b) 'ambitious' is doing no work — everyone claims it
 - (c) it names the wrong customer
 - (d) it uses jargon*Answer key: (b) 'ambitious' is doing no work — everyone claims it*
- The word Avi says is genuinely 'rejectable' is:
 - (a) ambitious
 - (b) category
 - (c) messiest
 - (d) product*Answer key: (c) messiest*
- Avi's final principle is essentially:
 - (a) describe every customer segment
 - (b) state clearly who the brand is not for
 - (c) keep options open
 - (d) avoid disagreement*Answer key: (b) state clearly who the brand is not for*
- The revised positioning foregrounds:
 - (a) scale
 - (b) the awkward, hard-to-explain bet
 - (c) cost savings
 - (d) team seniority*Answer key: (b) the awkward, hard-to-explain bet*

AUTHENTIC LISTENING · REAL VOICES

The eleven-word bet — Seth Godin on positioning

Source: Adapted from Akimbo · Seth Godin, 'This is Marketing' (podcast excerpt, public feed) · Transcript excerpt used under fair-dealing for educational commentary. Original podcast © Seth Godin / Akimbo.

C1+

□ ≈ 2.5 min excerpt

In this excerpt from his podcast, Seth Godin makes the case for positioning as a bet — specifically, a bet that you are willing to lose most of the audience in order to be genuinely chosen by a smaller one. Listen for his characteristic rhythm: short sentences, deliberate pauses, and the refusal to hedge.

Faixa em produção. O player aparece aqui — o áudio será publicado em breve. Enquanto isso, use o script completo abaixo.

1. LISTEN FOR GIST

- 1. What is Godin's central claim about a product 'for everyone'?
Answer key: It is, in practice, for no one — 'everyone' is not a market.
- 2. What is the 'tell' that separates strong positioners from weak ones?
Answer key: They can say out loud, without flinching, who their offer is not for.

2. LISTEN FOR DETAIL

- 1. What is the five-person test he describes?
Answer key: Show your one-sentence positioning to five people who know your work. All-agreement = too soft; all-pushback = either too specific or finally honest but you aren't ready; two-push, three-nod = the zone.
- 2. Why does Godin call the uncomfortable middle the place 'where positioning lives'?
Answer key: Because it means the sentence is specific enough to be genuinely rejectable by some people — which is the precondition for being genuinely chosen by others.
- 3. What is his final dichotomy — the 'two doors'?
Answer key: Memorable (positioned) or competent-but-forgettable. He explicitly denies there is a third door.

3. GLOSSARY

positioning

the deliberate choice of what you stand for and who you are not for

hedge

soften a claim to avoid being challenged

the tell

the small signal that reveals the truth (from poker)

make peace with

accept something uncomfortable rather than resist it

FULL SCRIPT

Here's the truth about positioning that nobody wants to hear. If your product, your service, your career is for everyone — it is, in practice, for no one. Because 'everyone' is not a market. 'Everyone' is a fantasy that lets you avoid the actual work, which is choosing.

The people who are best at this, in my experience, are not the loudest. They are the ones who have written down, in one sentence, what they do and — this is the hard part — who it is not for. They can say the second half out loud without flinching. That is the tell.

I want you to try something. Take your one sentence. Show it to five people who know your work. If none of them push back on it, the sentence is too soft. If all of them push back on it, the sentence is too specific — or, more often, it is finally honest, and you are the one who is not ready yet. The uncomfortable middle, where two of them push back and three of them nod slowly, is where positioning lives.

The professionals who make peace with that discomfort are the ones we remember. The rest are competent, are hardworking, are, I'm sure, very nice — and are, unfortunately, forgettable. There is no third door.

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- Can you write your positioning in one sentence — including who it is not for?
- Do you know two people who would push back on that sentence, and three who would nod? If not, why not?
- Is 'no third door' fair, or is it a rhetorical trick? Where might it break down?

GRAMMAR

Cleft sentences — foregrounding

18 min

ASK THE TEACHER — notes to bring to class

It-cleft: It was the pricing that killed the deal. (focus = the pricing)

What-cleft: What we need is clarity. (focus = clarity)

All-cleft: All I want is one clean quarter. (focus + limitation)

Time cleft: It wasn't until Q3 that we saw growth.

Clefts split one sentence into two clauses to spotlight the important part.

Choose the correct option.

- ____ that finally convinced the board was the customer video.

- (a) It was
- (b) It is
- (c) That was
- (d) What was

Answer key: (a) It was

- ____ we need now is discipline, not another framework.

- (a) What
- (b) It
- (c) That
- (d) Which

Answer key: (a) What

- The reason ____ we lost was that our pricing was misaligned.

- (a) why
- (b) which
- (c) that
- (d) for what

Answer key: (c) that

- ____ Q3 that things really tightened.

- (a) It wasn't until
- (b) Wasn't until
- (c) Not until it was
- (d) It was until

Answer key: (a) It wasn't until

- ____ they did was reframe the problem, not add resources.

- (a) What
- (b) That what
- (c) It was what
- (d) The thing which

Answer key: (a) What

- The thing ____ makes her different is that she listens for what isn't said.

- (a) what
- (b) that
- (c) which
- (d) both b and c

Answer key: (d) both b and c

- ____ we're competing against is inertia, not another vendor.

- (a) All
- (b) It's what
- (c) What
- (d) All that

Answer key: (d) All that

- ____ that turned the meeting around was one honest question from the intern.
 - (a) What it was
 - (b) It was
 - (c) The one thing
 - (d) It's what

Answer key: (b) It was

Rewrite using a cleft.

- Rewrite (cleft with 'What'): 'We need clarity, not another slide.' What_ we need is clarity, not another slide.
- Rewrite (cleft with 'It'): 'The pricing killed the deal.' It was_ the pricing that killed the deal.
- Rewrite: 'The trust matters, not the logo.' It's the_ trust that matters, not the logo.
- Rewrite (What-cleft): 'She reframed the problem.' What_ she did was reframe the problem.
- Rewrite (It-cleft, emphasis on time): 'The revenue only grew in Q4.' It was in_ Q4 that the revenue grew.

Discursive practice:

DESCRIBE THE SITUATION

Look at the picture and use the grammar you just studied

You are the third person in the room, called in to help decide. Describe the scene and defend the circled line in 5–6 sentences, using at least three cleft structures.

TRY TO USE

What matters is...

It's not X — it's Y...

The thing that...

All they need is...

It wasn't until...

SAMPLE ANSWER

What matters, looking at this board, is not the eloquence of the ten crossed-out lines — it's the honesty of the one that survived. It's the awkwardness of the circled line that makes it defensible: no committee could have written it. What they've been struggling with all afternoon is the temptation to sound cleaner than they are. The thing that finally worked was the sentence that made one of them wince. All they need now is the discipline to say it out loud to a prospect, and to mean it. It wasn't until they gave themselves permission to lose the safe customer that a real positioning appeared.

VIDEO LESSON · REAL SPEAKERS

How great leaders inspire action

Source: TED · Simon Sinek — Start With Why

C1+

□ 18 min

Simon Sinek presents his 'Golden Circle': why how what. Watch for the way he uses repetition and contrast to make a very simple diagram feel like a discovery.

Watch once for gist, then again pausing on the questions below. Use the original on YouTube for subtitles if needed.

1. WATCH FOR GIST

- 1. Sinek's central diagram — the Golden Circle — is made of which three concentric layers?
Answer key: Why (centre), How, What (outer).
- 2. What is his core claim about inspirational communication?
Answer key: People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it — leaders and companies who start with 'why' inspire action.
- 3. Which two extended examples does he use to illustrate the 'why'?
Answer key: Apple (vs. other computer makers) and Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech.

2. WATCH FOR DETAIL

- 1. What does he say about the biological order of decision-making?
Answer key: The 'why/how' maps to the limbic brain (feelings, trust, loyalty); the 'what' maps to the neocortex (language, rational analysis).
- 2. Why did TiVo, in his account, fail commercially?
Answer key: They led with 'what' — features — rather than with a 'why' that customers could believe in.
- 3. What is 'the law of diffusion of innovation' he references?
Answer key: New ideas spread when the early adopters (13.5%) and early majority tip because they buy the 'why', not the specs.

3. KEY LANGUAGE

start with why

lead with purpose or belief, not features

the Golden Circle

Sinek's model — why how what

early adopters

the ~13.5% who buy new ideas because they share the belief

law of diffusion

the pattern by which ideas spread through a population

4. DISCUSS IN PAIRS

- What is your organisation's 'why'? Can any employee state it in one sentence?
- Do you personally lead with 'why', 'how' or 'what' in job interviews?
- Where does 'start with why' break down? (Regulated industries? Commodity markets?)

SPEAKING

Your eleven-word bet

15 min

Task 1 — Solo (3 min): Refine your eleven-word positioning from the lead-in.

Task 2 — Solo delivery (8 min): Record a 90-second "why" talk — the belief behind what you do. Use at least two clefts. Listen back and mark the strongest cleft you produced.

Speaking challenge: Now record a one-minute rebuttal in which you argue the opposite positioning would be more credible for you, then a second one-minute recording defending your original stance using clefts and inversion. Compare both takes.

Teacher notes

Coaching: Reward specificity. Reject 'passionate', 'driven', 'results-oriented' on sight; ask for the underlying evidence instead.

Record your answer

WRITING

A LinkedIn 'About' — done right

25 min homework

Task (200–240 words): Rewrite your LinkedIn About section. Requirements:

- Open with a cleft: What I do is... / It is X that...
- Include your differentiator, one concrete proof point, and your value proposition.
- Ban the following words: passionate, driven, results-oriented, dynamic, seasoned.
- End with an invitation, not an achievement.

Once finished, re-read your own draft and underline, in the margin, the eleven words you would keep if forced to cut everything else.

WRAP-UP

Before you close the laptop

5 min

- Say your eleven-word positioning out loud. Would a stranger repeat it correctly?
- Which cleft structure will you actually use this week — where and to whom?
- Which one word from the vocabulary set describes your current professional gap?
- Name one thing about your current 'brand' you want to displace, and one to defend.
- Who are the five colleagues you would ask for a three-word description? Name them.

Take-away:

WORKBOOK · HOME PRACTICE

Unit 1B Workbook

Do this after class. Answers are marked for your teacher.

VOCABULARY

Positioning — review

8 min

- A 'value proposition' is:
 - (a) a company's mission
 - (b) a concise promise of what you deliver and to whom
 - (c) a legal disclaimer
 - (d) an internal KPI*Answer key: (b) a concise promise of what you deliver and to whom*

- 'Reputation capital' can be spent, most obviously, on:
 - (a) office equipment
 - (b) credibly taking a risk or making a claim
 - (c) advertising
 - (d) hiring*Answer key: (b) credibly taking a risk or making a claim*

- 'Adjacency' becomes useful when a business:
 - (a) is looking for a growth vector that its brand still supports
 - (b) wants a rebrand
 - (c) reduces headcount
 - (d) sells a subsidiary*Answer key: (a) is looking for a growth vector that its brand still supports*

- The clearest 'differentiator' answers the question:
 - (a) What do we sell?
 - (b) Why us and not the alternative?
 - (c) What is our price?
 - (d) Where is our office?*Answer key: (b) Why us and not the alternative?*

- Their real differentiator_ isn't the algorithm; it's the way they explain it to non-technical buyers.
- The natural adjacency_ from consumer to enterprise is not obvious for a brand this playful.
- Every founder has a signature move_ — his is walking into a customer meeting with no deck.
- The wider the credibility gap_ between vision and delivery, the more expensive next year's PR becomes.
- Their positioning_ shifted overnight when they killed the free tier.

GRAMMAR

Cleft sentences — review

12 min

- ____ we lost was market share, not customers.
 - (a) What
 - (b) It was
 - (c) That
 - (d) Which*Answer key: (a) What*

- ____ price that broke the deal — it was trust.
(a) It wasn't the
(b) Not the
(c) It was
(d) It hadn't been
Answer key: (a) It wasn't the
- The reason ____ we won is boring: we returned every call.
(a) why
(b) for what
(c) that
(d) which
Answer key: (c) that
- ____ we hired her was the way she disagreed with us in the interview.
(a) What
(b) It was because
(c) The reason
(d) The thing
Answer key: (b) It was because
- All ____ needed was one clean quarter to prove the model.
(a) what was
(b) we
(c) we were
(d) that was
Answer key: (b) we
- ____ she said that changed my mind was one sentence about the customer.
(a) What
(b) It was what
(c) The thing which
(d) All of what
Answer key: (a) What
- ____ our margin — it's our attention.
(a) What is different is
(b) It isn't
(c) The difference isn't
(d) The thing that
Answer key: (c) The difference isn't

Rewrite as instructed.

- Rewrite (What-cleft): 'She simplified the pricing.' What she_ did was simplify the pricing.
- Rewrite (It-cleft): 'The onboarding matters most.' It's the onboarding_ that matters most.
- Rewrite (What-cleft, negative): 'We don't need another framework.' What_ we need is not another framework.
- Rewrite (Time-cleft): 'The team only clicked after the retreat.' It wasn't until_ the retreat that the team clicked.
- Rewrite (All-cleft): 'She just wants a straight answer.' All_ she wants is a straight answer.

WRITING

Bio for a conference programme

20 min

Task (160–200 words): Write your speaker bio for a conference programme. Third person.

Requirements:

- Open with a cleft.
- Include your value proposition and one proof point.
- End with a rejectable claim — something a critic could disagree with.
- Do not use: seasoned, passionate, visionary, thought leader.

Teacher notes

Marking focus: cleft correctness, specificity, and whether the bio would be memorable in a room of ten similar speakers.
